

The Great Indian Blackout and Elements of Positivity

Swasti Vardhan Mishra¹

Abstract: Though much criticized, the Indian blackout in July 2012 also possesses another side of a coin: the extent to which the blackout has served on the fronts of unity, cohesiveness, and equality is highly explicit. The currently ill-functioning Indian administration is identified as being at an intersection of a transition, a transition to more administrative efficiency. The ideas proposed in the essay are intended to perpetuate thoughts of optimism and faith through a constructively-framed perspective.

Introduction

My recent preoccupation with the ideas of postmodernism and much contemplated cultural turn in humanities and social science influenced my mind to mull over one of the recent crises the country of India has come across. 620 million people are estimated to have suffered from the greatest blackout the world has seen (30 and 31 July 2012), which has become a topic of much criticism and contestation. Eminent thinkers, analysts, and experts have criticised the act with huge chunk of pessimistic attitude (Bedi & Crilly, 2012; Einhorn & Mehrotra, 2012; Puri, 2012). They have reasoned that such a blackout is detrimental to the growth of a country and its aspiration to become a developed economy.

Business experts worldwide are saying that India cannot be a safe investment destination for at least another decade. They say this not because of the government's attitude to foreign investment but because of India's power situation which renders future industrial enterprise hazardous.... India is in a deep fundamental systemic crisis.... From the early permissive attitude of the past has mushroomed the gigantic horrendous corruption of today. (Puri, 2012, p. 6)

Taking much from the special article by Rajinder Puri on the blackout, my view takes a somewhat antithetical path toward that interpretation, and I intend to focus on the positive elements that this event has entailed. The contemplation that follows will emphasize the latent ideas of society and human solidarity, and must not be viewed as denigrating any other idea. The idea that such an event delivers positive effects on social fronts is not rooted in the gamut of development studies or economics, which tend to be the foundation of a large array of published and unpublished views. As indicated above, these views interpret the blackout based on economics and development studies, which cling to the idea that such an event is deleterious for economic growth and development. My ideas can be assumed as a transgression from the same and at times also opposing.

¹ Swasti Vardhan Mishra is a Research Associate in the Indic Knowledge Operations Network. He is a Geographer by training. Mishra has written number of papers on Human Geography issues and of late, he has started reading the milieu after drawing ideas from the disciplines of Urban sociology and Urban Anthropology.

swastivardhanmishra@gmail.com



The blackout, according to my perception, has ignited such endangered qualities of the human race as, to name a few, brotherhood, bonding, altruism and egalitarianism. Though utmost micro in occurrence and influence, I would like to focus on three of such positive qualities, which this chaos crystallized during my personal observations. My objective in this essay is to make the point that there is something beyond economic prosperity and the negative aspects of any event. To foster attention to the prosperity of human values, values of cohesiveness, and observing the positive aspect of any event is the rationale behind this essay. The three positive qualities during and from the blackout that I focus on here are altruism, social amalgamation, and egalitarianism.

Altruism

Firstly, from the onset of the blackout, altruism flourished. The onward journey to home after a day's labouring brought me to a disaster-like situation; a flood of homeward going people were flocking on roads and railway stations and the bustling and chaos spread at an unusual level. Nevertheless, the chaos illuminated something positive in it: people helping each other out with solutions, the routine tussle among different groups metamorphosed into each asking others the rationale behind the blackout and probing about its rectification. This technical failure invoked the feeling of oneness, the feeling of same genesis, the feeling of prioritizing others' vulnerability despite being vulnerable. This feeling of attachment to one another, though of short duration, infused me with optimistic thoughts about human cohesiveness. Puri's emphasis on corruption of Indian bureaucracy and Indian mind is a lived fact and has also become a cliché to a large extent. Notwithstanding, the idea of solidarity as reflected here traverses a path, much strayed from our routinely lived life, where we fight over being a Brahmin or a Dalit or a Hindu or a Muslim.

Social Amalgamation

Secondly, I saw heightened social amalgamation. On a community level of observation there erupted a day of festival; paradoxically speaking, a festival of dark. The modernised approach of caging oneself in one's apartment at the onset of day's end reflected itself in the localities of my city. The streets, which hitherto glorified themselves with mere presence of lamp posts, remained congested on the day. The crowded galis² and age-wise segregation of community residents was conspicuous and quite different from the religiously motivated festival we usually delve into. The adda³ sessions consisted of myriad topics: the piled up topics of curiosity and apprehensions about the blackout, the dwindling economy of the country, and the worsening condition of the Indian cricket team. At least, I could not differentiate the corrupt and the people who are axed by the corrupt among the cheerful crowd disregarding and unperturbed by the lightlessness. Coming to the finest example of human gregariousness, I saw family, which I experienced as more inspiring: the offspring of the family, irrespective of age, were clustered and tied to their parents, to their siblings, who otherwise would have remained hooked to a plethora of human inventions like televisions, personal computers and other such gadgets. I believe the greatest of all human hazards is loneliness, much more painful than any human physiological disorder. The event of lightlessness helped in curbing this loneliness, albeit momentarily.

² Galis: A short narrow street in Indian habitations.

³ Adda: A communal get together.

Egalitarianism

Thirdly, a boundary-breaking egalitarianism was imposed on us. India is home to a large number of homeless and squatter people. Nighttime aerial photographs of the country highlight, without ambiguity, the clusters of the light and the dark. Schemes like Gramin Vidyutikaran Yojana⁴ have definitely borne fruits but have not yet wiped out the rural-urban divide. Besides, there exists a second shade of inequality which is intra-urban in character: the lightlessness situation of squatters and homeless beings. The idea of inequality and social justice is eclectic and pluralistic in nature; being highlighted in works ranging from theories of socialism to action network theory. The thoughts may seem cynical and dystopian but it is another form of representing the notion of equality, an idea that will retrofit the bigger domain of forms of *Equality*. For a couple of hours the stark differentiation between spatiality of the light and the dark among different human habitations got wiped out. A squatter valued as much as a palatial abode: the difference vanished. The thought may sound radical but must be seen as an eruption of anguish and pain to live an everyday life of disparities and prejudices and are definitely based on the ideas of social justice and equality.

My Conclusions

I agree to the problems cited by the bench of experts and thinkers rooted in economic growth and development grounds; in fact I second it. But when observed from a much bigger horizon, India is developing by jumping along a transition which I must name as *transition of administrative efficiency*, a transition from worst governance to that of the best. The failure of the North-Grid⁵ (the reason behind the blackout) must not be exemplified as India's failed instances rather the positive aspect must be dug out. In spite of having such diverse, if I am not wrong, *the* most diverse physical terrain, India successfully installed a nationwide grid which functions flawlessly. Isn't it an angle of rejoicing? Yes, it is true, that it is the resident Indian who moves up to the highest chair of Indian polity and it is this same Indian who gets corrupted, a much-criticised reality. And perhaps for that very reason, the idea of belongingness and a resultant sense of accountability must be inculcated and sustained among the Indian mass population—much before sustaining a growth of 9%⁶. Prior to any development step, what must be modified is the human consciousness, the consciousness of belonging to a same hearth, the consciousness of solidarity and sharing of shoulders.

In the given political economic milieu of India, it is imperative to visualise a situation in its entirety rather than magnifying the gaps: the gaps between what goal India, as an economy or as

⁴ Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana (RGGVY) was launched in April 2005 by merging all ongoing schemes. The RGGVY aims at: Electrifying all villages and habitations as per new definition, providing access to electricity to all rural households and providing electricity Connection to Below Poverty Line (BPL) families free of charge. (<http://rggvvy.gov.in/rggvvy/rggvvyportal/index.html>)

⁵ Indian power system is divided into five regional sectors: Northern, Eastern, Western, North Eastern and Southern region

⁶ The Eleventh Plan aims at achieving a radical transformation in this aspect of our development. It sets a target for 9% growth in the five year period 2007–08 to 2011–12 with acceleration during the period to reach 10% by the end of the Plan. (Eleventh Five year plan, India)

a nation-state, must achieve and what it actually has achieved. India is definitely lagging behind vis-à-vis the goal set; however, the way she has handled the 1.2 billion-plus population through efficient governance and multiple flagship programmes is highly commendable. The gaps can be bridged once we are habituated with identifying the elements of positivity. I offer this essay, with the help of an optimistic thought over an event that is detrimental to our economic growth, to reflect the idea that the unconformities are not the only achievement India sustained. We must try to internalize the fact that every coin has two sides, which despite being contrasting, give an holistic view of any event.

References

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