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Forcing “Good” and the Legitimation of Informal Power

Philanthrocapitalism and Artistic Nationalism among the Indian Business Elites

Tereza Kuldova

Abstract

Until recently, India’s wealthy were held in contempt and perceived with suspicion both by the general public and the media; newspaper articles about the greedy rich and their excesses proliferated. However, following the global financial crisis of 2008, magazines like *Forbes India* began aggressively pushing the idea of the generous and caring Indian business elites, a “force of good”; annual events such as the Forbes sponsored *Philanthropy Awards* and art and fashion galas for a good cause became popular and the notion of philanthrocapitalism was embraced by the elite. It is argued here that behind this development is a particular convergence of underlying legitimation crises, the first within the realm of business and the second within the realm of fashion and the arts. These then force the two realms into collaboration in a pursuit of the common goal of social legitimacy, accumulation of symbolic capital and (re)production of the power mystique of the elite. The article is grounded in extensive ethnographic fieldwork among the North Indian business and fashion elite, from 2008–2013.

Keywords: India, elite, fashion, art, symbolic capital, philanthropy, business

In 2003, a journalist covering an elite fashion show at the Hyatt Regency, the famous five star hotel in New Delhi, proudly proclaimed that “Om Shanti, a charity event by designers and artists, represents a new chapter in the trend of creating luxury products for the wealthy with the aim of making life comfortable for the less privileged” (Tankha 2003). Back then, such high-profile events – where fashion designers present collections created in collaboration with famous artists and donate a percentage of their income to NGOs – were still rela-

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tively rare.¹ It was only at the beginning of the 2000s that the exploitative luxury fashion industry began more consciously to attempt to transform its image from wasteful and elitist towards benevolent, charitable and socially aware. Around the same time, the FDCI (Fashion Design Council of India), the chief organisation of the Indian fashion fraternity, also began displaying its benevolence and morality through annual mega-sales of *prêt-à-porter* lines of popular Indian designers, with five per cent of the proceeds distributed to selected charities and NGOs. However, it was only after the financial crisis of 2008 that the industry fully embraced the “ethical sell” as its visible identity, with designers running NGOs alongside their businesses, “raising awareness” during their fashion shows and sharing their benevolent actions through profit-oriented “clicktivism” on social media (White 2010). Suddenly, the business of luxury fashion was redefined as “ethical fashion”. But it was never clear where this ethicality was concretely located. It could refer to anything from a clean working environment, care for female workers, and organic cotton to *ahimsa* (“non-violent”) silk (the silkworm is not killed). Today, the gated elite circles (Waldrop 2004, Kuldova 2016c, Kuldova 2017b) overflow with VIP charitable art and fashion galas sponsored by the multiply localised transnational business elites.

I shall argue here that behind this current wave of donations among the Indian business elites – within the particular social field where elite philanthropy merges with “artistic nationalism” (Ciotti 2012, Kuldova 2013a, 2013b) – is an underlying convergence of three particular legitimisation crises, coupled with a fear of a breakdown in the established social order (Berger et al. 1998). While Indian philanthropy has historically been significantly influenced by the ways in which philanthropy has been conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom, and is thus part of a transnational movement (Kapoor 2016, Hay / Muller 2014, Cantegreil et al. 2013, Sundar 2013, Kalra 2013, Harvey et al. 2011, Nowell 2004), there are still particularities specific to the context that set it apart. This is also clearly visible in the legitimisation crises to which it presents itself as a solution. The first legitimisation crisis pertains to the status and disproportionate power of the transnational business elite, a problem that was exacerbated by the financial crisis of 2008. The second legitimisation crisis relates to the position of the elite vis-à-vis the impoverished Other and the elitist desire to perpetuate strict divisions of class. The third legitimisation crisis is specific to the Indian fashion industry and concerns the socio-economic position of the fashion designer within Indian society. Philanthropy in art and artistic education increasingly serves as a “safe remedy” for these legitimisation

1 In contrast, Indian fashion marketed to the “socially aware” middle-classes had a much longer tradition of “fair clothing”, as shown by the iconic case of Fabindia, which spurred among other things the revival of *khadi*, the material symbol of artistic and artisanal nationalism par excellence, now increasingly embraced even by high-end luxury fashion designers (see Radhika Singh, *The Fabric of Our Lives: The Story of Fabindia*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2010).

crises; it provides the elite with moral credibility, authority, symbolic and cultural capital, while reproducing rather than unsettling social hierarchies and inequalities, thus effectively keeping the poor in their place. In other words, philanthropy is and has been throughout its history, “practical and advantageous to the elite” (Dinello 1998: 111).

It is through this convergence of legitimation crises, I argue, that a particular elitist social field comes alive together with its specific form of symbolic (Bourdieu 1984) and cultural capital (Ostrower 1998), framed by the “philanthrocapitalist” business model (Bishop / Green 2008). These legitimation crises converge as they bring together different elite actors in a shared struggle for legitimacy, a legitimacy of their wealth and informal social power. In order to show how this takes place, I first discuss the role of benevolent giving among the Indian business elite, then consider the aforementioned legitimation crises and finally show how they work together in shaping the elite business sphere. The force of the joint struggles for legitimation will finally be shown in the examples of Satish Modi’s ventures, the Art for India foundation (est. 2010) and the International Institute for Fine Arts in Modinagar, NCR² (est. 2000).

Benevolence, the Indian business elite and the crisis of legitimacy

India has a solid tradition of charities, religious giving, NGOs and civil society organisations and a long history of the business community engaging in strategic philanthropy. Gifting (Parry 1986), whether selfless, anonymous and strategic (honour-oriented), or as a form of *noblesse oblige*, has been integral to India for many centuries, incorporated in the scriptures of its main religions, politico-economic structures and systems of patronage, prestige and respectability (Appadurai / Breckenridge 1976). And yet, there is something new about this reinvigorated and boastful trend of contemporary elitist philanthropy that acts in a world of increasing socio-economic inequalities aggravated by neo-liberal reforms. Even though prominent families of industrialists have always been involved in charity and benevolent giving, the current engagement with philanthropy has reached new proportions, dynamics and organisational structures. The Indian business elite circles have embraced philanthropy and corporate social responsibility (CSR) with renewed enthusiasm, particularly following the financial crisis of 2008. This was not only a financial crisis but also a worldwide crisis of the reputation and legitimacy of the business community at large, to which they undeniably belong. The business community was accused of irresponsible financial speculation, worldwide exploitation of

2 NCR refers to the National Capital Region, a metropolitan area surrounding New Delhi.

cheap labour and environmental destruction. Back then the media were filled with anger against business, and old critiques resurfaced, as shown in an opinion piece by B. V. Krishnamurthy (2008), entitled “The Price of Greed”:

Five thousand years ago, our scriptures emphasized that greed spells doom. That’s precisely what we are witnessing today. Managers of these companies could do no wrong. Buffered by fancy salaries, variable incentive schemes, and a host of perks, they turned speculators – with disastrous consequences. [...] Who is to be held accountable for the mess we find ourselves in?

The same accusation was levelled against the Indian business elite circles; Indian millionaires were labelled as greedy and immoral. A range of critiques of neoliberal capitalism emerged, arguing that it systematically fails the majority of the world’s population. Amidst these critiques, the elites feared the rage of the poor and delegitimation of their own power. Capitalism was experiencing a global legitimization crisis (Sawaya 2008). Only morality could improve the image of business and of capitalism and encourage the population to doubt those who had become capitalism’s public critics. Morality had to be reinserted into the market. Only through morality could the business elite acquire an appearance of legitimacy and capitalism be rendered good, a “capitalism with a human face” (Kothari 1986, Žižek 2009), capable of fixing its own evils.

When I returned to India in 2011 after a previous fieldwork visit in 2008, millionaires were no longer represented in the popular media as greedy and self-obsessed, but instead as selfless and good (this is not to say that the population would necessarily share this view). To my astonishment, they had become the only thinkable saviours of a country with millions in poverty. Suddenly, these new national heroes were the proclaimed hope of India’s progress and transformation into a high-tech nation. In 2009, *Forbes India* established annual Philanthropy Awards and began pushing the idea of business as a “force of good”, consequently joined by organisations such as Dasra.³ At the same time, “celebrity humanitarianism” (Kapoor 2013) had been enjoying increasing popularity in the media, simultaneously turning powerful billionaires into celebrities of their own. And the boom of individual and corporate philanthropy shows no signs of slowing; on the contrary, the “philanthropic funding from private individuals recorded a sixfold increase in recent years: approximately INR 36,000 crore in 2016, up from approximately INR 6,000 crore in 2011” (India Philanthropy Report 2017).

This shift in perception of the millionaires was a result of media campaigns and lobbying to improve the image of business following the financial crisis. The crisis, however, also reactivated old Indian social critiques of business.

3 Dasra (est. 2000, transl. “enlightened giving” or “remover of bad faith”) is one of the leading organisations in strategic philanthropy in India. It works with Indian and international donors and organises the annual Dasra Philanthropy Forum, in locations such as New York, London and Stanford, as well as the annual Dasra Philanthropy Week in India.

The political role of the Indian business elite has, as Kochanek pointed out, been inhibited by “its lack of ideological legitimacy [...] in a society that traditionally tended to view the profit motive and private gain as inherently anti-social. Indian communists, socialists, Gandhians and sections of the intelligentsia have persistently portrayed industrialists as rapacious exploiters who might be grudgingly tolerated but whose motives and actions are always suspect” (Kochanek 1987: 1281). Precisely because the crisis re-activated such old critiques of the business class, philanthropy – a fairly traditional solution to problems of legitimacy – offered itself as a solution. Only this time, it had to be recast anew, while building on familiar tropes and avoiding past pitfalls.

Already in the pre-colonial era, wealthy merchants were accused of patronising deities and gifting only for their own benefit, instead of gifting selflessly, as the Hindu scriptural ideal would command. In the colonial era, philanthropy became a way of complying with the ideals and developmental policies of the British, a way of acquiring power and political influence in the public sphere, as exemplified by the famous industrialist Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy (Palsetia 2005). India has always had its philanthropic heroes, such as Jamshedji Tata, Jammalal Bajaj and GD Birla, who were instrumental in the building of modern India and during the freedom struggle. They supported Gandhi and invested their wealth in cultural institutions, colleges, hospitals, museums, public parks and so on (Sundar 2013, Haynes 1987). And yet, despite being prominent and reputable, businesspeople and philanthropists were viewed with suspicion, an opinion that was consequently strengthened by the socialist governments in particular, which at least for a period effectively replaced and denounced business philanthropy through the social welfare system. But they were viewed with suspicion not only under Nehruvian socialist ideology, but also in times preceding it for a simple reason – they could control others through their capital; through benevolence they could implement policies, enforce moralities and keep people dependent. Gifts have been strategically used as a tool to maintain hierarchy (Derrida 1993), something that appears to be a general function of gifts (Parry 1986, Mauss 1990). In a study of Sanatana Dharma Sabha movements between 1915 and 1940, Malavika Kasturi showed how socio-religious gifting formed a crucial socio-political terrain where elites articulated their authority and power, and reinforced hierarchies and relations of patronage, while regulating “the people” and demarcating the deserving from the undeserving (Kasturi 2010).

Following Independence, high taxes replaced donations and philanthropy was discredited by accusations of the misuse of trusts, money laundering, and of interference in the lives of the beneficiaries. However, as the rhetoric of the state’s inefficiency slowly began to take hold in the 1960s, philanthropy began returning to the public stage. In 1970s, laws providing tax exemptions for donations were established, leading to a rise of NGOs. This proliferation of

NGOs has accelerated even further in the post-1990s era of neoliberalisation. At the same time, however, these NGOs, initially critical instruments of civil society, became increasingly swallowed into the governmental and corporate body politic, and in the process were prevented from acting as critical opposition (Kothari 1986).

At the same time, the power of business in politics increased, as did the popularity and quantity of public-private partnerships. During the early 2000s, the worldwide business community began struggling with an erosion of trust and CSR was posited as a remedy (Singla / Sagar 2004). Instead of donating to local and transnational NGOs, which were increasingly criticised for pursuing their own interests and developmental agendas (Escobar 2011), CSR was formulated as a new and more natural way for businesses to weave together ethics with profit. But even prior to the Indian government passing the reworked CSR law in 2014, which obliges corporations to spend two per cent of their last three years' average profits on CSR activities, the Indian business elite was already rediscovering national philanthropic heroes in an attempt to emulate their strategies of acquiring legitimacy through philanthropy and CSR. The pre-Independence idea of the heroic philanthropist had returned, albeit with a new wrapping, this time coinciding with a new wave of Hindu nationalism and artistic nationalism (Kuldova 2014a). Even the young self-made rich began to act as if they were part of this imaginary "legacy", thus artificially staging continuity where there might have been none. To them, philanthropy promised not only legitimacy but also "charismatic authority" (Weber 1985) à la Carnegie.

Throughout history, benevolence has been used as an effective instrument of power, from the benevolence of kingly rulers, of the British over the colonies, to the benevolence of business leaders. Benevolence produces a clear division between the powerful and the powerless (Kuldova 2016c). Philanthropy in business is best understood as a form of staging benevolence, a "world-making process through which already successful entrepreneurs use their power to accumulate more power, extend their social and political influence, and increase their capacity to shape society according to their will" (Harvey et al. 2011: 429). Philanthropy is essential in acquiring symbolic capital, generating trust and improving reputation, thus legitimising the business ventures and strengthening the public image of the CEO, so crucial to contemporary brands across the world – be it Starbucks, Microsoft or WIPRO. It can also formalise informal power through awards and honorary functions circulating within the elite spaces. For the late 19th century Indian business community "philanthropic activities were but part of a large 'portfolio' of symbolic investments that merchants developed in building stable social relationships with members of their community and with their rulers" (Haynes 1987: 340). Gifting played "a critical role in the exercise of political influence", in appeasing "members of the ruling group" and in upholding family prestige and in "maintenance of the

community's social and religious life" (Haynes 1987: 340), as well as in generating reputations of trustworthiness. Moreover, "in return for valued gifts" the donors "shared in the mystique of the imperial power and thus reinforced their local prestige" (Haynes 1987: 341).

Contemporary philanthrocapitalism (Bishop / Green 2008) functions similarly; it, too, constantly seeks to insert itself into political structures and governance. However, there is a key difference between philanthropists and philanthrocapitalists, one that pertains also to the difference between contemporary and past structures of philanthropy – the philanthrocapitalists treat philanthropy as a business and employ managerial strategies of gifting (Edwards 2008; McGoey 2012, 2014, 2015). Moreover, unlike classical philanthropy, which rarely idealised the unjust market system, philanthrocapitalism endorses the idea that so called "human capitalism" can be a force of good and can become inherently philanthropic. The most striking example of this thinking is expressed in the persona of Bill Gates, who "embraced the chance to make his foundation run more like Microsoft" (McGoey 2014: 110) and who knows well that strategic investments in charitable causes may result in increased profit and market expansion. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation was also a direct response to a crisis of legitimacy; throughout the 1990s, Microsoft was pursued by the Justice Department, which in 2000 accused Microsoft of unlawful monopolisation and of crippling competitors, which led to fines from the US and EU and damages to Gates' public image. Gates consequently bought back his public image and legitimacy for the high price of the aforementioned foundation. Today, he is perceived globally as a humanitarian (McGoey 2015). As any other philanthrocapitalist, Gates too claims that because of his success in business, he knows best how to make the world a better place. As Ilan Kapoor has argued, such "construction of celebrity corporate philanthropy helps repudiate corporate capitalism's 'dirty' underside, which is to say that celebrity charity helps stabilize and advance the global neoliberal capitalist order" (Kapoor 2016: 113). The Indian philanthrocapitalists say the same, while promising to relieve the "inefficient" Indian state of all its responsibilities. In the process, governance is depoliticised and the market pushed into invisibility, as are the root causes that create the "need" for philanthropy in the first place (Nickel / Eikenberry 2009).

Overall, elitist philanthropy perceives itself as superior to other forms of giving. Dasra's *India Philanthropy Report 2015* (Company 2015) is revealing in this respect. Without second thoughts, the report divides Indian donors and NGOs into two categories: the sophisticated, a minority consisting of the super-rich and prestigious NGOs; and the unsophisticated, the majority of India's donors and NGOs, who are dubbed "untrustworthy", "non-transparent" and "confused". Only elitist philanthropy, with its claims to business-like structure, transparency, goal-orientation and high-quality market research, is

posited as capable of solving India's problems; it is celebrated as future-oriented and strategic, as opposed to the "unsophisticated" philanthropy of the masses, oriented towards acute needs in the here and now. Hence, elitist philanthropy, while invoking the benefactors of the past, at the same time breaks away from the old-fashioned philanthropy still endorsed by the majority of so-called "unsophisticated" givers, and hence perceives itself as superior. Such reports systematically reinforce the view that only the rich can envision the future; the majority of community and civil society initiatives, which may in fact better know the needs of the beneficiaries, are rendered as lacking any such ability. As a result, the philanthropy sector, constituted in such a manner, systematically reinforces the split between the powerful and knowledgeable and the powerless and at best skilled. In practice, it does the opposite of what it claims to do; it reproduces the power structures rather than disrupting them.

Elite philanthropy is also far more concerned with the mediatised public persona of the donor and his or her political influence (Kapoor 2013) than the majority of charitable giving. In India, this has been a feature of elite business philanthropy since the colonial era, when the honours of the British rulers were sought through strategic giving (Palsetia 2005). However, while this trend reinforces pre-existing hierarchical structures and resembles the methods of "strategic giving" of the business elites of the past (Haynes 1987), there is still something new about it; this has to do with the constraining influence exercised by the transnational business elites over their spending, their obsession with control over donated money (different funding structures), their increasing wealth and their extreme separation from the recipients. Moreover, Indian elitist philanthropy has witnessed a shift with respect to the cultural idea of who is a deserving recipient. It has shifted away from the Indian cultural model in which the poor are not to be blamed for their poverty, towards the American model inspired by social Darwinism, which encourages help only to the strongest among the poor, to those who are able to help themselves, while overall blaming the poor for their poverty (Dinello 1998). Such examples follow below – philanthropy that helps only the talented and able-bodied young students among the poor, those who are perceived as possessing an inherent strength, drive and potential.

Struggles to legitimate one's power are at the core of the current philanthropic endeavours. And even though business elites have wrestled with the same questions throughout history, it could still be argued that they enjoyed, back then, a degree of "traditional authority" (Weber 1985). This traditional authority has become progressively under threat by forces of democratisation, which have opened up the playing field to a larger number of people, traditionally not part of business communities. At the same time, due to rising socio-economic inequality, more and more people are being expelled across the internal boundaries of "society" (Sassen 2014). Hence, a new layer of struggle is

added under these changed conditions, with democratisation, liberalisation and an increased competition over resources, on the one hand, and an increasing concentration of wealth on the other.

Legitimation struggles in the Indian fashion industry and the arts

There is no doubt that gated elitist fashion and art events are important spaces where the elite's cultural and symbolic capital is constructed, acquired and displayed – and that such events serve the legitimation of the elite's superiority and disproportionate power. But before we look more closely at exactly how this happens, let us engage with the pervasive legitimation problem within the fashion and arts industries in India, which is, in some respects, specific to the Indian context. The Indian fashion industry is only 30 years old; the first institutions appeared around 1986, when the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) was established. The Fashion Design Council of India (FDCI) was, however, established only in 1998 and the first fashion show took place in 2000; it was modelled upon similar shows in the Western fashion centres. But it was not only fashion education and fashion weeks that were new to India, it was first and foremost the concept of design itself, with its associated cultural and economic value – a striking problem in a country of exquisite crafts, fabrics, traditional arts and talented artisans.

The first generation of designers, educated in New York, London and elsewhere in the West, struggled with establishing fashion design in India as a respected profession. When in 1975 Rohit Khosla, the heavily mythologised founding father of the Indian fashion fraternity, said that he wanted to become a fashion designer, he was met with laughter: “*Bade hokar darzi banna hai kya?*” (“Do you want to be a tailor when you grow up?”, Khosla / Johnston 1996: 21). In response, Khosla set out to prove that fashion design is something more, that it deserves recognition and that its practitioners should belong to the social elite and upper middle class, as opposed to the country's millions of artisans, who, as the design practitioners claim, do not possess the same imagination, creativity and drive for innovation.⁴ Rohit Khosla, as one of the first in this field, combatted the legitimation crisis by claiming that fashion design is a form of modern art and by creating an authoritative narrative about the difference between craft and fashion, while also separating fashion from costume design in the film industry (Wilkinson-Weber 2013). Others followed and used this formula to claim superiority over the country's craftspeople. In a manner

4 For a detailed account of this particular struggle between craft, traditional art and modern design and art, see Kuldova 2016b.

similar to the elitist philanthropists, they created a distinction between a sophisticated *us* versus an unsophisticated *them*.

And yet, the Indian fashion industry depends fully on the labour of the country's artisans; heritage luxury and "royal chic" are in vogue and they are unthinkable without elaborate craft (Kuldova 2016c, 2013b). Moreover, the artisans, portrayed by marketing as "authentic Indians", infuse the design with an indispensable quality, namely "Indianness". This is also clearly visible in the ways in which the industry has revived the iconic *khadi* and turned it into a luxury fashion statement for the consumption of the rich (Kuldova 2016c, 2014b). The unique selling point of contemporary Indian fashion is Indian "heritage" – anything from hand-woven silk to exquisite embroideries, all wrapped up in images of the flamboyance of royal courts of the bygone eras, stitched for the contemporary business elite, which likes to cast itself as "neo-aristocracy" (Kuldova 2014a, 2016c, 2013b). This business neo-aristocracy also revels in public displays of benevolence, which position them as patrons of arts and Indian culture. The important point here is that crafts have, over the last century, been idealised by the middle classes, India's political leaders, the elites and recently the fashion designers themselves, as the "spirit that is India" (Singh 2009: 13) and as such have become central to the production of contemporary designers; they provide the leverage to Indian design in the international market. This obsession with crafts and neo-royal aesthetics also falls within the trend of "artistic nationalism" (Ciotti 2012).

Nonetheless, in order to legitimise the superior class and power position of the designers, it is necessary to, on the one hand, claim that the artisans are important, while on the other hand argue that without the intervention of designers, the artisans' crafts would never have this role in the first place, or even survive. Within this argumentative logic, it is the designer who benevolently grants certain limited importance to the artisan, an importance that remains intangible for the artisan but translates into financial capital for the designer who articulates it on his or her behalf. In reality, it is the designers who would not exist without the artisans and who are dependent on their labour.

Indian fashion designers employ three core strategies in order to deny this fundamental reality and to legitimise their position. The first strategy is (1) artification, i.e. turning non-art, such as fashion, into art and thereby adding value to one's product (Geczy / Karaminas 2012, Radford 1998, Müller 2000). While artification is a worldwide phenomenon, it presents itself in India with additional urgency, due to the need for designers to distinguish themselves from artisans. Globally, this process manifests itself for instance in the rise of fashion exhibitions curated at prominent art museums (Kuldova 2014b, Pecorari 2014, Melchior / Svensson 2014, Steele 2008) or through an increasing number of designer-artist collaborations and multi-platform events (Kuldova 2015).

The second strategy employed by the fashion designers is (2) claiming legal status as artists. Tarun Tahiliani, a leading contemporary Indian designer, fought a legal battle in the late 2000s for an exemption on his income tax from overseas earnings, claiming to be an artist under section 80RR of the Indian Income Tax Act; Tahiliani argued that designers are artists because unlike craftsmen, their work is about “individual” creativity as opposed to “traditional” and “collective” creativity. In November 2010, the Bombay High Court ruled that designers are artists and thus entitled to the exemption. This ruling not only legally separated designers from craftsmen, but also mirrored the designers’ self-legitimation discourse: designers are afforded individuality, while craftspeople are deprived of it and are represented as a collective incapable of progress (Kuldova 2016b). Moreover, designer creations and labels enjoy intellectual property right protection, which is not afforded to the products of the anonymous artisans. The designer’s privileged position over the craftsman is legally enshrined; the rights are available only to those already privileged, while at the same time legally reinforcing and reproducing their privilege.

The third strategy of legitimising the designer’s position is (3) through charitable actions on behalf of the poor, especially, in this case, on behalf of the impoverished artisans who are patronised by the designers and their NGOs or CSR programmes. As I have argued in my previous work, such NGOs established by designers often in practice reproduce the radical separation between craft and design, reinforcing hierarchies rather than destabilising them, while claiming to act on behalf and for the good of the artisans (Kuldova 2016c, Kuldova 2016a). In reality, there has not been a single artisan turned designer; the two worlds are kept separate. The craftspeople are cast as in constant need of rescue, while not allowed to themselves define what is “good for them”. Paradoxically, the necessity of their upliftment becomes one of the arguments of the designers for the high pricing and value of their goods – after all, they are in the business of “ethical fashion”. The “ethical” designers, much like the business philanthropists, present themselves as benevolent patrons imitating the *noblesse oblige* of the maharajas, princes and Mughal rulers of the past – a principle that “legitimized and sanctified the discrepancy between the benefactor and the beneficiary” (Dinello 1998: 113).

At the core of all these strategies is an attempt at the legitimation of inequality itself; for obvious reasons this is most visible in the struggles of the wealthy elite to legitimise their power vis-à-vis the powerless – be they the “unsophisticated donors” or the “skilled but not knowledgeable” (Venkatesan 2009, Kuldova 2016c) artisans. However, none of these legitimation strategies, no matter how well thought through or executed, would ever work if there were no “contingent reaction of others who provide consensual validation” (Berger et al. 1998: 379) within a particular cultural space; in other words, “legitimation is a collective process”, in which “social reality needs to

be redefined to create legitimacy” (Berger et al. 1998: 380). If social actors desire to acquire legitimacy, in particular of their informal power within society, such as the power to persuade and influence beyond their formal roles appropriate to their position, they need to come together and collectively construct their legitimacy. Such struggles for legitimacy are constitutive to the gated elite spaces in contemporary India, and arguably elsewhere. Here, the business elite fearing delegitimation joins forces with fashion design and art, which are struggling equally for their own legitimacy in a country overflowing with creative practitioners. They meet in the name of a social cause and public good (the support of high culture and art is, after all, a noble goal).

The International Institute of Fine Arts and the Arts for India Foundation

In 2000, Satish Modi, with his wife Abha, established the International Institute of Fine Arts (IIFA)⁵, a private educational institution, in Modinagar, a town around 45 km from New Delhi, a city built by his father, Rai Bahadur Gujarmal Modi (1902–1976), the famous industrialist and philanthropist who established the Modi Group of Industries. The Modi family is one of the country’s oldest and most famous business families. The family fortune began with a sugar mill established in 1933 in Modinagar; by the late 1970s Modinagar became a prominent industrial hub. However, in the late 1980s family infighting began and the business was neglected as the brothers and cousins fought over their industries and property. In 1989, the Modi empire was divided among Gujarmal Modi’s five sons, now all extremely prominent and wealthy businessmen⁶ and the three sons of his step-brother Kedar Nath Modi (for a detailed account of the epic family battle see Majumdar 2014). Following this battle and decline, Modinagar was hit the hardest, as factories were misman-

5 Prior to establishing the IIFA, Satish Modi launched in 1993 India’s first private airline, at the time known as Modiluft, and now known as Spice Jet. According to the IIFA website, “in collaboration with Lenzing, Austria, S. K. Modi is currently setting up the world’s largest Viscose Staple Fibre Plant of 240,000 tons per annum capacity at Patalganga near Mumbai”, while also further diversifying into Real Estate through his company Regent Realty Limited, in London, UK, “to develop an area of 3,000 acres into a new township in the National Capital Region (NCR-Delhi) near Modinagar, in collaboration with Pacific Consultants International (PCI), Japan and Surbana of Singapore. As Chairman of this project, his vision is to establish this new township as a world class Dream City. Satish Modi founded a Football Club in the U.K. in 2013, known as Modi Town Football Club Limited, with its registered office in Harrow, London” (IIFA 2015).

6 For instance, Krishan Kumar Modi owns one of the prominent cigarette manufacturing companies in India, Godfrey Phillips India Ltd.; Bhupendra Kumar Modi is one of the richest people based in Singapore and is the chairman of the Indian conglomerate Spice Global, primarily working in telecoms, and is chairman of Asia Crime Prevention Foundation’s India chapter, while also planning a high-tech hospital in New Delhi. Umesh Kumar Modi is the president and CEO of Umesh Modi Group with a billion-dollar turnover, trading in pharma, cosmetics, iron, steel, sugar, alcohol and other goods; he was awarded the title “Man of the Year” in 1984 from the Ministry of Industries.

aged and some eventually closed down. While sugar mills, weaving mills and distilleries have almost disappeared from Modinagar's landscape, the town is emerging anew, this time as an educational hub with 24 colleges and numerous schools, most established by and named after different members of the Modi family, e. g. Multani Mal Modi College, Dr. K. N. Modi Institute of Engineering and Technology, Dayawati Modi Girls Degree College, Rukmani Modi Girls Inter College and so on. The city's shift from industry and manufacturing to cultural industries, the immaterial economy and education, can be also read as a symptom of the global shift in the economy at large.

With the establishment of the IIFA, Satish Modi followed a family legacy of philanthropic engagement in education, which has become central to his quest for cultural and symbolic capital. And yet, even though conceived and built in the name of the "public good", the institute is fully privatised. The private educational sector has boomed in the last decade and many businesspeople and industrialists have opened colleges and private schools alongside their regular businesses. They both cater to the desire of the aspiring lower middle classes and middle classes for private education (Altbach 2007) and satisfy their own desire for being perceived as owners of large amounts of symbolic and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984). What is interesting about the IIFA is its disproportionate visibility in the attempt to legitimise the socio-economic power of the Modi family – in particular, following the establishment of the Arts for India Foundation in 2010 and the establishment of the Arts for India Week in London in 2014, featuring India's best fashion designers, artists and filmmakers, amidst charity and award galas. According to the official website, Arts for India was presented at the Kensington Palace, London, in October 2010, in Zurich at the Rietberg Museum in September 2011 and in the USA at an event held at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, on 26 April 2012. Arts for India's mission is "to lift disadvantaged young Indian people out of poverty through the provision of education in Art and Creative Design to a global standard" (IIAF 2015). The Arts for India Foundation now also presents the Dayawati Modi Award for Art, Culture and Education (est. 1994), named after the late wife of Gujarmal Modi. The award functions as a way of acquiring symbolic capital and powerful connections: among the winners of the award have been Mother Theresa, the Dalai Lama, Ravi Shankar and Simon Beaufoy.⁷ Satish Modi himself was in 2010 nominated for a Prince of Wales Medal for Arts Philanthropy. Distributing awards and honours, and receiving them in turn from powerful players within the same elite circles, is clearly one of the crucial strategies of acquiring legitimacy and symbolic capital.

⁷ For a full list of award winners see http://www.iifaindia.org/award_dayawati.html (accessed 6 July 2017).

The IIFA currently provides private education, with fees around 60,000 INR per year,⁸ in fashion design, textile design, painting, applied arts, photography, computer graphics and 3D animation, and is planning to launch a Film and Television Institute as well. While the fees are not excessive in comparison to other fashion institutes, the crucial point to note about this institution is that, while possibly the most economically marginal among Modi's businesses, it is symbolically the most central, as it produces cultural and symbolic capital on behalf of the whole business family, while also providing legitimacy to the informal socio-economic power of the family. As such, this economically peripheral venture becomes symbolically indispensable.

The advisory board of the IIFA includes, among others, celebrity fashion designers such as Rohit Bal, Manish Malhotra and Rina Dhaka and distinguished Indian artists such as Arpana Caur and Satish Gujral. The education at such institutes in practice translates into buying one's entry ticket for access to elite circles and a chance to participate in prestigious events – something that the public art colleges are often unable to provide, as they do not necessarily facilitate contact with the wealthy and with industry. At the same time, designers and artists themselves need to participate in the boards and committees of educational institutions in order to claim their value by association with institutions widely held in great esteem; this provides the designers with an opportunity to also present themselves as educators, and more importantly as experts. Conversely, the designers' business sponsors feed off their association with high culture, thus improving their own image. A tightly knit network of elitist spaces and events emerges, distinguished by multiple dependencies among different actors joined together in the process of resolving and addressing their respective legitimization crises.

In the American philanthropic context, Ostrower argued that while cultural capital is important, it does not consist, as Bourdieu would have argued, of the actual tastes and shared aesthetic knowledge of the elites, but rather of “the social organization of elite participation in the arts. Thus, the link that cultural capital theory draws between the arts and cultural cohesion is correct, but occurs through an alternative mechanism” (Ostrower 1998: 43). It is precisely the participation on boards of institutions, in diverse foundations, award committees, gated luxury events, art auctions and art fairs and so on that both sustains eliteness and provides the elite with cultural legitimacy. As Ostrower noted, and I believe this applies also to the Indian case, the “elite's esteem for arts is reflected in the fact that they enjoy contact with artists. Providing such contact is one of the ‘perks’ used to solicit donations” (Ostrower 1998: 46). The fact that this reworked correlation pertaining to cultural capi-

8 The fees at the National Institute of Fashion Technology, the most prestigious fashion institute in India, are around 20,000 INR more, depending on semester. However, the institution has reserved seats for the scheduled castes, and also offers scholarships and financial assistance.

tal is more accurate here is also confirmed by the fact that Indian elite fashion designers struggle every day to “educate” their elite clients in “good taste” (Kuldova 2016c); to the Indian designers the elites appear misbehaved, too flashy, uneducated about crafts and heritage – as part of the designers’ own struggle for legitimacy they claim that their place is in teaching the wealthy how to dress in a classy and tasteful way, instead of mixing and matching clashing status symbols as they please. Both education and charity are crucial for the legitimatory discourses; this brings us to the Arts for India Foundation, an example of how legitimacy and symbolic capital are constructed through capital investments.

The Arts for India Foundation facilitates contact between the rich and famous, in the UK and elsewhere, and the leading celebrity Indian artists, while also giving the wealthy an opportunity to fund the education of an upcoming artist of impoverished background, whom they then can follow as patrons through his or her education and in the end receive some of his or her artworks. This then enables the elite patrons, through such fundraisers, to “derive prestige from the identification with non-profits” (Ostrower 1998: 49). But no matter how economically peripheral this venture is to other businesses owned by Modi family, they never forget to put business and profit first, irrespective of how marginal. Hence, the only twist in this philanthropic story is that the education funded is precisely the one provided by IIFA, owned and run by the same Satish Modi. Instead of giving donations away to external NGOs or charities, Modi funnels the funds raised through his foundation, which operates solely as a fundraiser and organises spectacular events at the Sotheby’s or the Indian Art Week in London, directly into his own IIFA institute. It has been customary that a private educational institution in India reserves a certain number of seats for qualified students of poor background, with either free or minimal tuition. However, in this case the foundation is set up to raise funds for scholarships from private donors at the very institution the philanthropist owns. A member of a family of billionaires controlling vast industries, including tobacco, iron and sugar, receives tuition fees to grant students an education at his very own private institution and that too, through his own philanthropic foundation. This is fundraising for profit dressed up as philanthropy. The point to make here is that what matters is the display of morality that needs to be staged. The intent is to spend money in order to raise money instead of donating that same money directly; only in such a way does spending become visible. This “spectacular spending” (Kapoor 2016) then further contributes to the staging of the business family’s symbolic capital, while at the same time displaying them as owners of cultural capital by promoting the art institution they own.

Precisely here it becomes apparent that what is at stake is the acquisition of legitimacy – for legitimation to take place, public acknowledgement is neces-

sary and for public acknowledgement to occur, the media need to be mobilised, a show needs to be staged, money needs to be spent, awards distributed, champagne consumed, and star designers like Sabyasachi Mukherjee showcased. If money were to go directly to the students – who would ever notice? Moreover, the legitimacy and prestige of all the other elite members, be they from the UK or India, is dependent on displaying their benevolence publically and supporting and promoting initiatives such as Arts for India. This is exactly the result of the aforementioned shift towards philanthrocapitalism, in which philanthropy itself is to be run like any other business and, moreover, with the intent to increase turnover and capture new markets and consumers. This strategy also enables the philanthrocapitalist to control all flows of his or her wealth, which also translates into funnelling it only into non-threatening causes beneficial to his or her own image (such as fashion and art galas and education), while enjoying tax breaks and looking good before the public.

Satish Modi has even bigger plans for the future, namely a new arts university, the largest private Fine Arts University, a part of the “Universe of Arts”, a megalomaniac construction project envisioned on his land in the suburbs of Modinagar. This project should transform Modinagar into the nation’s cultural capital by developing not only the university, but also a performing arts centre and an art museum modelled upon the Tate Modern and the Guggenheim, as well as serving as a rival to the Qatari Museum of Islamic Art. When Satish Modi was based in London, he partnered with the London College of Arts and the Prince’s Drawing School, which sent their teachers to visit India in order to increase the quality of the education, something that in turn becomes part of their own institutional charitable endeavours. The project is also partially funded by the Prince’s Foundation for Building Community (Prince of Wales); more fundraising for the building of the “Universe of Arts” is scheduled for the upcoming years.⁹ This is where the Prince of Wales Medal for Arts Philanthropy, a formal honour – symbolic capital – has become transformed into economic capital. This logic is not new to any Indian businessperson; the fact that cultural and symbolic capital could translate into economic capital is also captured in the Hindi word *abru* with its double meaning of “social reputation” and “economic credit” (Haynes 1987: 343). And yet, the institutionalisation, execution and marketing of this logic have reached new heights in the global struggle for legitimacy and power.

9 See <http://www.iifaindia.org/Universe%20of%20Art.pdf> for the project proposal.

Conclusion

The Arts for India Foundation is wrapped up in the rhetoric of uplifting the marginalised through artistic education; this brings us to the core problem of acquiring social legitimacy for a position of power – namely, the relationship to the poor and the desire for reproduction of the existing social hierarchy. Satish Modi's statement, circulated across web platforms, hints at exactly that: "I feel that real philanthropy is to enable the disadvantaged to earn a decent living". Note that the disadvantaged are not encouraged to dream any bigger than achieving a "decent living". In an interview, Modi stated that "the secret of success lies in the cause. Because what we are doing is, we are taking out underprivileged children, students, from the circle of poverty, giving them free education, and not only that, we are putting a career in front of them, so that really brings them out of the poverty. And you know, poverty leads to all kinds of problems, including human trafficking, because parents can't give dowry, girls are poor, so what are they going to do, the options are very little. So this programme does a lot for them." But then, Satish Modi remarked that the "rich have the money, but the poor have the blessing".¹⁰

While this remark can on the one hand be read as the expression of the specifically Indian cultural attitude towards the poor, where service to the poor is represented as service to God, it at the same time points us to the mutual dependency of the rich and the poor. The rich are dependent on the poor, not only for their wealth, which they have acquired largely by the exploitation of the poor, but also for an appearance of morality and legitimacy, that can be granted to them only by the poor who let themselves be patronised, or are patronised against their will, and thus in the end "bless" the rich. The poor, often imagined as superior in their virtuousness and morality precisely because of their poverty, thus have something that the rich desperately need (Kuldova 2016c, 2017a; Tooley / Dixon 2005; Reich 2005). This may be one of the reasons why they need to be kept exactly where they are precisely by the force of social consensus on the legitimacy of the rich – one significant social force, among others, that prevents the poor from organising themselves and rebelling.

As Silver has argued and as we have seen, the funders' "prevailing interest is to uphold the class system from which they derive the money they give away"; hence they "seek to promote only those social changes that they regard as institutionally safe" (Silver 1998). Moreover, in the legitimisation struggles of both the business philanthropists and the fashion designers, the boundary-making process between themselves and the "low Others" always inherently dominates the legitimisation discourses, even if it is not always directly stated,

10 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYPdnfIFrM> (accessed 5 December 2015).

is not necessarily a matter of intention or is not even necessarily conscious to the elite members or designers. This is an important point, as we are not necessarily dealing here with intentional reproduction of hierarchies and exploitative social structures; there is no doubt that on the individual level philanthropy can and does improve individual lives, but this does not mean that it does not have structural effects that are potentially destructive and do not benefit the public at large. The elite spaces, where morality is displayed and photographed by eager page 3 journalists, and where benevolence and care for the nation's progress and culture are staged for the public gaze, emerge out of the fears of delegitimation in the case of the business elites and out of struggles for legitimacy on the part of the fashion and art practitioners. Yet, at the core of both of these legitimation struggles is the ultimate fear of the lower class Other, who, on the one hand, needs to be acknowledged and can also increase the elite's moral portfolio, but who, on the other hand, also needs to be kept precisely in place. In the end, most elitist philanthropy operates like the Arts for India Foundation, granting the selected few access to the space of the elite, while the whole institution comfortably reproduces eliteness, social hierarchy and exclusivity. As Ilan Kapoor convincingly argued, today's philanthropists operate "in the service of capitalism, tranquilizing its worst manifestations [...] their charity work is integral to the logic of capitalism; it helps regulate the system, calming it down when it runs amok. The irony, of course, is that it is the philanthropists' own business activities that help hyperactivate the system in the first place" (Kapoor 2016: 126).

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