



## Why charity doesn't matter

Rakesh Krishnan – 12/18/12

---

Last month I got an email from Chris Ancil of the BBC, asking me if I would be interested in joining a live discussion on the BBC World Service. "I was wanting to get your reaction to the decision to end UK aid to India," wrote Ancil. The email arrived at 3.45am New Zealand time on a Saturday, a few hours before the deadline. I don't normally log-in on Saturday mornings, so listeners around the world were spared my rant.

The BBC had zeroed-in on the right person to comment on the subject. I'm opposed to aid - any form of it. To me aid means misinformed charity, continued dependency and a dollop of arrogance. Often, at the other end there are strings attached.

Do you know where you are giving?

A couple of weeks ago, a central Auckland school held a fundraiser. The school gives to the needy not only in New Zealand, but also in other countries. However, sometimes money given with the best of intentions can - and does - end up in the wrong places. Out of the several hundred dollars the school collected, a good chunk went to a child in India that the school had sponsored through World Vision, a charity organisation.

Perhaps the school is not aware of it, but World Vision has an agenda. Here's what Valerie Tarico writes about World Vision in the Huffington Post: "World Vision is an Evangelical Christian organisation with a mission that includes serving as a witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ."

On its website World Vision claims they "do not proselytise or work with those who insist on proselytism", but they hasten to add: "At the same time, World Vision shares the Church's commitment to disciple followers of Jesus Christ who bear witness to the Gospel by life, deed, word and sign, with the goal of encouraging people to respond to the Gospel. We do this through the life of service that we lead, the deeds of Christian love we perform, the words that we share about our faith and the signs of prayers answered as we visibly and concretely improve the lives of others."

Anyone with an IQ above 90 will know the sentence "the goal of encouraging people to respond to the Gospel" means "we will trade our money for your soul".

As Tarico explains, "People in disaster zones and small children, the two primary populations served by World Vision, are both particularly vulnerable, and because of this they are particularly vulnerable to influence.....Consider the plight of Hindu parents who have a choice between a bare local school or a Christian school that provides paper, pencils, and books. All over the world, vast differences in power and resources say to desperate people: Christians have what you need; Jesus is the answer. The World Vision mission, in its own understated way, acknowledges this."

I agree that religion is a personal choice and everyone should have the option to switch to, or flit between, religions and ideologies. Around the world, an increasing number of people -- like me -- have turned atheist because we find absolutely no use for religion. Because religion divides, and it divides deeply. Faith may give some comfort to some people, but given that billions have been killed in the name of religion (and the gods don't do anything about it but actively encourage murder) I see no place for them. But converting uneducated and desperate people is wrong. It is a simply a harvest of souls.

Stirring up things

World Vision is playing a dangerous game. India's caste cauldron is complex but it is - and has always been - dynamic. Caste equations change, and communities move up and down the social ladder in step with the rise and fall in their economic status.

World Vision, by converting the Hindus at the bottom of the pyramid, is sowing the seeds of future social discord. India's lower and middle caste groups - to which I humbly belong - have become increasingly wealthier and powerful since independence in 1947. In fact, India's constitution was written by an untouchable (unlike the American constitution which was written by slave owners like George Washington, who retained their slaves because slavery was abolished only in name).

The Hindus converted by the likes of World Vision experience none of the benefits that social gentrification bestows.

Religious conversions cause convulsions across India because the newly converted people look at their former co-religionists as oppressors and enemies. The link is broken with the larger society and they become willing tools of foreign organisations. Islamic terrorism in India springs from this detachment to India and loyalty to the global Muslim cause. In the country's wild east, Maoist guerrillas funded by American evangelist churches, have unleashed a reign a terror and extortion.

Anybody who donates to a charity in India should pause to ponder - will my

money contribute to someone's welfare or will it cause trouble?

### Fleecing the public

Of course, World Vision's view is different as they are possessed by a messianic zeal to convert India. Often you'll see their ads on New Zealand TV, exhorting you to donate freely for buying school desks for children in India. In fact, there was a spurt in the number of such ads after the movie *Slumdog Millionaire* became a hit in New Zealand. (I call it the *Slumdog Windfall* - after the release of the movie, it has been easier for charities to make you part with your money because you are now convinced that India is such a rotten place and needs charity money.)

Donations are being solicited under the banner of the '40 Hour Famine', giving the impression to the lay public that there is a permanent famine in India. World Vision New Zealand CEO, Lisa Cescon, said in 2008: "It's extraordinary that even in a recession when family budgets are tight, Kiwis reached deep into their pockets and acknowledged the worse plight of others in places they'll probably never, ever go. This will help make a huge difference in World Vision projects in Malawi, Honduras, Cambodia, India, Bangladesh and Vanuatu - to name a few."

Look at the irony. Firstly, India has been bracketed with countries way down on the development totem pole. I'm not being snobbish here but while these countries can't even feed themselves, India is preparing a manned moon mission in 2015-17. This year it offered \$10 billion to bail out Greece, Portugal and Ireland.

Secondly, the people of New Zealand, a \$153 billion economy, are being asked to contribute to a \$5314 billion economy - the world's third largest. This is wrong. Local money should support local causes - in Mangere, Manurewa and Christchurch.

Earlier this year, I wrote a story on a fashion designer from Christchurch. A former supermodel, she was bitter about the fact that in her geriatric years, she had lost her home in the earthquake and now was living from superannuation cheque to superannuation cheque. Why doesn't she get some money? The first rule of charity is - it begins at home.

### Storm over the Typhoon

On January 31, 2012, France beat Britain to supply 126 fighter jets to the Indian Air Force - for a cool \$13 billion. The size of the deal could balloon to \$24 billion if India decides to buy more planes. Considering the worsening security situation in the northern hemisphere and the inflationary - and murky - nature of defence deals, that looks like a foregone conclusion.

So how did the losing side react? Within hours of their Typhoon jet going down,

the chatter on British news websites turned into a crescendo. While the right wing media talked about India's "ingratitude" and demanded that India rethink its decision, it was the reaction of the so-called liberals that was an eye-opener. The Labour Party's Barry Gardiner, a self-styled friend of India, called for "downgrading" of India-UK trade relations.

However, through all that fire and brimstone, some sections of the press talked sense. "This sounds like something out of Alice in Wonderland," Britain's Daily Mail editorialised. "A cash-strapped Western country, forced to slash its police budget by 20 per cent, close libraries, sack soldiers and get rid of its aircraft carriers and Harrier jump jets, is giving money to an emerging Asian superpower. And the superpower does not even want the cash on the grounds that handouts damage its image."

The Daily Mail was, of course, referring to a mini scandal over Britain's aid to India. According to a leaked memo, a senior Indian diplomat had proposed "not to avail of any further British assistance with effect from April 1, 2011" because of the "negative publicity of Indian poverty promoted by Britain's Department for International Development (DFID)".

In fact, the Indian finance minister had said last August: "We do not require the aid. It is a peanut in our total developmental expenditure."

And this was the scandal - London requested Delhi to keep taking the money because cancelling the programme would cause "grave political embarrassment" to Britain.

Wait, just how much money is involved here? A huge £280 million in annual aid that the Indians should be grateful for. Just to keep things in perspective, that amount is approximately what India's top cricketer Sachin Tendulkar makes from his endorsements. Or barely a sixth of what Mukesh Ambani, the richest man in India, spent on his new home in Mumbai. (It's not something I'm proud of but I use that for comparison, and to show how much liquid cash is sloshing around back there).

As Tory MP Douglas Carswell said, "This is concrete proof that Britain's aid programme is run in the interests of Whitehall officials and the DFID machine. The fact is that India's economy is growing much faster than our own. We should be encouraging free trade with them and trying to learn from them rather than handing out patronising lectures."

So was this aid free of an agenda? You bet it wasn't. In a rare moment of candour, Britain's Development Secretary Andrew Mitchell left no room for ambiguity. In December 2011, he said aid to India was "also about seeking to sell Typhoon jets".

## Black hole of charity

So where does your contribution go? Estimates are that up to 70 per cent of all aid money goes into paying salaries and perks of aid disbursement officials. Perhaps the rest goes into their travel. Who knows, given their sense of entitlement, they probably fly business class, while suckers like you and me are herded into cattle class.

I was a sucker, well almost. My colleagues used to call me the world's fastest Indian for having got seven speeding tickets in a span of two years. (I have since slowed down several kph.) One morning, during my speeding days, I was rushing off to work to send a fax to - of all places - a charity. Because I had promised to fax the automatic payment form early in the morning, and then had to rush off to a meeting, I didn't spot this cop behind me. Seconds later, I was down \$150 for running a red light.

Whatever the reason, reality dawned on me that I wasn't wealthy enough to donate \$3000 dollars over a period of five years. And truly I can't afford it - I'm only a newspaper reporter. I decided I would not fax my bank details to the charity.

And guess what, the head of the charity, who had friended me on Facebook, and was being such a nice guy, suddenly unfriended me. Well, good riddance and I can now afford at least 28 more speeding tickets.

## Why India doesn't need aid

India is the second largest investor in Britain after the US; in the past six years Indian companies have bought steel giant Corus (formerly British Steel), Land Rover, Jaguar, and has donated millions of dollars to Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Indian auto giant Mahindra has made an offer for the legendary carmaker Lotus.

Across the Atlantic, outsourcing has gone full circle as Indian firms look to the United States for cheap labour. Daily Mail reports the phenomenon, which could become more widespread in the coming years, is partly due to Indian workers demanding higher wages and higher living standards.

In May 2009 when the Mumbai stock market went north, it created 143 billionaires in three minutes of trading. That's right, three minutes. And that was during a global recession. Think of the thousands of others who became millionaires and near-millionaires.

What is happening in India (and China) is economic gentrification on a scale that's unprecedented in human history. Private companies are creating jobs in such huge numbers that each year over 40 million people are being lifted into the

middle class. It is taking a long time to eradicate poverty because it was created over a long period. Poverty in India is the result of centuries of oppressive Turkish and European rule. So outsiders should not even begin to preach (no pun intended).

### How to change lives

I won't try and put lipstick on a pig. There are poor people in India, and because everything is on a bigger scale over there, there are also a large number of desperately poor people. But it's not aid or charity that will change their lives. Look at Africa - decades of charity work by missionaries and World bank funded projects have barely made a dent in the poverty in that continent.

On the hand, Chinese, Indian and Russian companies are transforming the face of Africa. In Congo, considered a basket case for long, Russia's Renaissance Group is building gleaming new malls and lavish residential suburbs. Where today thousands of hectares of new glass-and-steel edifices stand, last year there was nothing.

Moral of the story - it is hard work and free enterprise, rather than charity, that make people and countries rich.

### Down the hole

However, if you are easily parted with your money and still want to send it to India, take note that corruption at every level will ensure only 5 per cent of your money will percolate to the villages where it is needed.

Read this extract from a paper prepared by professor Shyam J. Kamath of California State University for the CATO Institute: "Foreign aid to India has been an unmitigated disaster. It has acted as both a catalyst and an encouragement for the politicisation of the Indian economy. It has also encouraged corruption, rent seeking, and graft. Foreign aid has been - and continues to be - predicated on an outdated and false theory of development economics that assumes that only capital and access to technology are needed for economic development."

### Parting shot

One thing I admire about Britain is its diplomacy. I think because of three centuries of conquest and international dealings, the country has this vast reservoir of knowledge and experience that London is able to draw upon.

Today, the empire is gone but British diplomats punch above their weight. Their diplomacy is so well calibrated they know what to do when and how. When the opposition to aid became vocal in India, they wisely withdrew their pounds.

Perhaps New Zealand should take a cue for Britain.

Rakesh Krishnan's articles have been used as reference at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey; the Centre for Research on Globalization, Canada; Wikipedia; and as part of the curriculum at the Anthropology Department of the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. His work has been published by the Centre for Land Warfare Studies, New Delhi; Oped News, Pennsylvania; and Rossiyskaya Gazeta Group, Moscow, among others.