

## Wealth and its Social Worth

### Consumers in the Land of Gandhi

About fifteen years ago, the Indian government started to make a turnaround in its view of what India's development path would be. For decades, import substitution was an important goal around which the planned economy was structured. Since the eighties, the government has gradually abandoned the earlier state perspective that was led by an ideal of self-reliance. State controls on production were lifted and India was opened to foreign investors, which together made for a considerable increase in the availability of consumer goods on the Indian market. More or less simultaneously, there has been fast spread of exposure to commercial television. Numerous channels now bring to Indian homes images of luxurious lifestyles that emphasise consumption. The availability of the new consumer goods, combined with the exposure to satellite television, has contributed to changes in lifestyle among those in Indian society who have taken it on most: members of the urban middle class, who are most extensively exposed to mass media, and who have the disposable income needed to engage in the consumption that forms part of the lifestyle the media presents to them. The Indian middle class has been the focus of considerable media attention, since the early nineties, when the liberalization policies initiated in the eighties, became more pronounced. This class, usually estimated at 100 to 350 million people, depending on the criteria employed, suddenly became an entity worthy of observation and debate. Discussion has specifically focused on the middle class potential and behaviour as market for consumer goods.<sup>1</sup> Little attention has been paid to the significance of the boom in consumption beyond the directly visible effect of goods and rupees changing hands.

Hereafter, I want to show how members of the middle class experience and debate their own engagement with this consumption. I conducted fieldwork for this article in Baroda, a city of somewhat over 1.000.000 inhabitants in the state of Gujarat. Informants were from diverse caste and regional backgrounds and all were from families with one or more members having a college education and a steady white-collar job: bureaucrats and other state personnel, professionals, small and medium entrepreneurs such as shopkeepers and small industrialists. Informants were men and women

between 17 and 60. My one year of fieldwork, consisting of interviewing and participant observation, took place in 1996 and 1997.

Before setting out for fieldwork, I had plans of doing a neighbourhood study, becoming something of a member of the local community, and spending many hours sitting with all and sundry and observing local social life. This had to be abandoned because, by and large, middle class life in Baroda does not include much of a social life of this sort. Naturally, I could not become part of something that does not exist. This goes especially for people living in 'societies', as the many newly built housing estates are called. Informants had to be sought through diverse channels, and from all over the city. Among them were whole families and married couples, but sometimes within families only one or two members would have enough sympathy, interest, trust and time to become informants. With around thirty individuals, relations extended over many months, and their life and stories form the core of my ethnographic material. With around fifty persons, contacts could consist of only a few meetings. In addition, assistants carried out a survey among local youths. I also gathered information from popular vernacular newspapers and magazines that participate in local discourses on modernity.

Upward mobility and a strong increase in consumption have been a common experience for the people around whom this study revolves. Many in this group have assumed a level of consumption comparable to that of the Dutch middle class in the sixties. With that, this middle class is one that is considerably privileged in India. The economic development of their region, which is part of the so-called 'golden corridor' of Gujarat, has benefited many in this city who now live a life more prosperous than ever before.

Moving around in Baroda, one comes across dozens of 'societies', recently developed housing estates each consisting of dozens of similarly built row houses. A standard middle-class residence is made of brick and neatly plastered, with two, three or more rooms and a separate kitchen with 'standing platform', indoor plumbing and a space outside for washing clothes and utensils. Much money has also found its way into home decoration and appliances, vehicles, clothing and recreation. Generally, these families own at least one scooter. Colour TVs and refrigerators are common. Washing machines and home telephone connections are not a rarity any more either, nor are geysers, mixers and other kitchen appliances. Eating out has become very popular. Dozens of restaurants cater to middle-class tastes, that include Chinese food, South-Indian and Punjabi dishes, pizzas and Indian fast-foods like vegetarian burgers. Readymade foods, snacks and new cosmetics similarly have found their place in the market.

Dozens of beauty parlours have come into existence, helping women attain the well-groomed look that has become somewhat of a standard in this class. Daytrips to different sites around Baroda and picnics are popular as outings.

To the Baroda middle class, modernity stands for the advent of wealth and a lifestyle defined by consumption, not just of goods that have entered the Indian market in recent years as a consequence of liberalization policies, but of all goods - especially those goods that used to be out of the reach of the parents and grandparents of today's middle class. Many feel they have entered a new era, with a way of life thoroughly different from that of even their own youth. The experience is not just economic; it also has cultural, and more specifically, moral implications. Though many have embraced the new wealth and the consumption that made it possible, the experience is problematic because the established morality argues against consumption. Simply stated, consumption embodies moral depravity.

In the first section of this article I will show how consumption has been accepted and embraced as important for personal satisfaction and prestige. Following that, I will explain the ways in which consumption stands for moral degeneracy and the place this sense of moral degeneracy has in people's conception of their own society.

### **Consumption as a part of life**

Consumption has come to be associated with the present so much that members of the middle class often see modern goods as necessities indispensable for living the life of today. Many middle-class couples feel that a single income is not enough to provide for an adequate existence. Dinesh, an engineer, explains why:

It is to some extent necessary, that husband and wife both work. This era of TV has started in our country. Two-wheelers, TV, refrigerator, were not available to all people. Now they are buying. Necessities have started to increase. Formerly TV was a luxury, now it is essential. It was beyond the reach of common people, then. It started with the Asian Games, in 1982. Then all the TV stations. If both are working it's better. Because of the money. You need 15000 (about 750 guilders, mvw) a month. Not for luxuries. I don't have a car.

Before the advent of 'this era', as it is spoken of in common parlance, life was 'simple'. The range of goods present in the lives of earlier generations was limited, and desires were in tune with that reality. Now, the presence of wealth and a much wider array of goods has made for a new standard

in consumptive aspirations. 'Simple life' is the idiom used to contrast this condition with the lower level of consumption of the past, and it is associated with the absence of the luxuries middle-class Indians aspire to today. It also conveys the absence of the desire to channel one's income into matters as frivolous as these. Now, goods that were out of the reach of local people earlier have come to be seen as requirements to live a satisfying life.

Hema is a mother of two young children. Like her husband, she has a full time job. A servant comes to wash the clothes and dishes daily, and clean the floors. Otherwise, the task of taking care of the family falls on Usha. I asked her what she would prefer, staying at home or working:

A four-hour workday would be all right but now I can't give proper care to household work, and not enough attention to the children. I also can't play the harmonium, which is my hobby. I would prefer to stay at home, but because we want to enjoy some comforts and luxury, we have to go. Now we can afford to send our children to a hobby centre, to dance class, and we can buy luxuries for the house. There's no limit to desire, and we want satisfaction. The cost of living has so much increased that both have to go.

When people say that the cost of living has increased, they have in mind the steady increases in the price of daily necessities like edible oil and grains but also the standard of living that they perceive as suitable and normal. In the words of Gunvant, a retired post office employee:

If we have money, we are happy; if we don't, we are unhappy. That is the nature of Indian reality. That is why mr and mrs both go out to work. Otherwise we can not pull our life. Time is such. Prices have increased so much. If people want to live in this era, the standard of living is so high. Earlier, the cost of living was very low. Now, life has become luxurious. Egoistic mentality. One person has a TV. I should also have one. This is the mentality of Gujarat. Very selfish...

Once, talking to my landlord Dharmesh, I brought up a duality people often mentioned to me: 'old thinking' and 'new thinking'. He explained to me what is meant by this duality by taking the example of the people living next door. This family of three generations is rife with conflicts, as we could all be witness of on an almost daily basis. According to Dharmesh, the conflict between this 'old thinking' and 'new thinking' comes out in the conflicts between Rakesh and Purnima, who are in their seventies, and their son and his wife and teenage son:

Rakesh and Purnima are of 'old thinking'. Their son Jitesh, his wife and their son are of 'new thinking', or 'of this era'. For example, concerning things bought for

the house. Some things are bought that aren't really necessary. But other people have it in their house, so they should also have them, Jitesh and his wife and son will feel. Like a refrigerator. In summer, one puts ice in the water. But it's not really necessary. However, it gets noticed if you don't have it, in such a situation. Rakesh would think 'in my time we didn't have it and it was all right'. But Jitesh would want it. And then there is a dispute. In the end, it is Jitesh who decides. Because he has the salary. In Rakesh's hand there is nothing. Or, Rakesh may want to eat *bhakri*.<sup>2</sup> He doesn't like bread. Nowadays there is bread, then there wasn't. So, there will be a dispute. Or, clothes. Rakesh will think: clothes are necessary because one has to have something to wear. It's not necessary to buy new things all the time according to fashion. This is the difference between 'oldies' and 'new'.

In local understanding, those who are of 'old thinking' - that is, previous generations and the elderly of today - made do with whatever they had and aspired to no more. Now, ambitions to upward economic mobility and the adjustment of one's life to that are taken as the new norm.

### Status through consumption

Many in the local middle class perceive the widespread upward mobility - combined with the advent of new styles of consumption - as the defining characteristic of modernity. Being part of this development - finding opportunities for upward mobility, and consuming the fruits of it - is highly desirable, and in this sense modernity enhances status. A person who is able to successfully consume the new goods that have entered the Indian market gets stamped as modern: successful in the modern world. For this middle class, one qualifies as modern if one owns a car and goes out to eat in expensive restaurants, has one's house equipped with modern appliances, and wears fashionable clothing.

Middle-class status demands a level of consumption in tune with the times, and the increased expectations that upward mobility and new consumer styles have brought. When Dharmesh explained to me that one reason Jitesh wants to have a refrigerator is that guests notice it if they don't get ice in their water when they come to visit his house, he touched upon a sensitive point. The 'noticing' is a matter of devaluation. An important reason goods like refrigerators have become 'requirements' is the fact that the maintenance of status among peers requires them.

Chandrakant, a man in his early forties, has experienced considerable upward mobility. His father was an uneducated man who made a living extracting oil from peanuts and other oilseed. Seeing the educated rise to

status, his father strove to educate his children so that they may attain this status. Now, Chandrakant is an engineer working at a power station and living in one of the better middle-class housing estates in Baroda. Speaking of his own upward mobility, he shows us that it is of considerable importance for his sense of self-worth to maintain his status among those who are part of his social world now and that he adjusts his ambitions accordingly:

First we lived on the east side of the city. We came into this neighbourhood in 1990. This area is more posh, it gives a little status, living in this society.<sup>3</sup> In that other neighbourhood, it is lower middle class and middle class. So you adjust to that, your growth. You compare yourself to them. If you are a little better there, you're satisfied. If you come here, you compare with others having more money. Children see how others are living, what they're having. When my son was three, he talked about other people having a car and that we should also have one. They see it all: lavish house, telephone, air-conditioning, car, scooty. We feel that our children should not have an inferiority complex. So as soon as we could afford a car, we bought one. With a ten-year company loan...

In that other area we did not have many expenses because the standard of living was not high. But the standard of living should be on a par with others. So after we came to live here, I started a side-business. Representation of companies. 2-3 hours a day. The social circle is decided by income. The lower income are in another part of this neighbourhood. Their circle will be different. A person in this area does not have friends in that area.

One's consumption should be on a par with that of the neighbours. In a sense, the middle class forms a social world of its own. The people with whom one spends one's daily routine life are not relatives, or members of one's caste, or migrants from the same ancestral village or region, but the colleagues at the office, and the neighbours in the housing estates especially created to cater to middle-class housing desires.<sup>4</sup> With their commonality in socio-economic condition, members of the middle class share residential space, work, education, consumption and leisure. The people who share one's socio-economic condition, and with whom one spends one's daily life, like neighbours and colleagues, form a community one desires to prove one's worth to. Though relations with neighbours and colleagues may be superficial in an emotional sense, and devoid of the meaning attached to relations with relatives, people are sensitive to loss of prestige also in the face of these and adjust their consumptive behaviour to the requirements at hand. In the words of Kamlesh, a university student:

This competition is mostly with neighbours, because they'll have these things, and these will see them buying something. People in the middle class come from



villages, they may have relations in the village they come from. For those people in that village, these people are too high. They don't compare themselves with them. The people in the middle class already take those people for granted. With similar people they compete. In my house it is like that too. My father is a professor. Relatives are teachers, or work in a bank. We don't see them as competition.

We should note here that the status-giving wealth that these people speak of is not the status that patronage provides. The nurturing of clientele can still provide one with status, but in the understanding of the middle class the possession of the symbols of economic success themselves have come to provide prestige now. Plus, we should note that what we are speaking of is the prestige among independent equals rather than the status of the big man in control of his social inferiors.

Kirit, a bureaucrat of around fifty is one of the wealthiest persons in the housing estate where he lives. All the houses in this neighbourhood are firmly middle class, but some are somewhat larger than the others and are owned by people with higher incomes. Kirit shows us something of the meaning he attaches to these differences:

Out of the 230 families in this neighbourhood, 150 have cars. In our meetings, only those 150 who are well to do, who have money status, only those are asked to reside. No poor person, like those in the cheapest houses here, will be asked. In politics, 30 years ago, tickets were given to those who were educated, aged, social workers. But now those who have muscle power, who can draw more voters, or who have more money power, get the tickets.

And Pankaj, a teacher in the local university:

If I have a car, people will honour me, invite me for social gatherings... In a house, one son earns more than the other. Can afford to buy a car. Another has just a moped or scooter. Seemingly, you don't find any difference in the parents' outlook with their sons. But sometime, somehow, this comes up. That son, even when junior in the family, is given importance.

Simply possessing things provides one with status. We can note from the way Pankaj and Kirit spoke of this condition that there is an uneasiness with it. There is no question that a material contest exists, but Pankaj and Kirit do judge bad of it.

The Gujarati verb *sudharvu*, which can roughly be translated to 'to improve', or 'to move to a better condition', is used to refer to modernizations of different sorts: the electrification of villages, the abandonment of social customs that have come to be considered undesirable, like dowry, or the confinement of women to the home. However, it is now also used tauntingly to refer to people who engage in conspicuous consumption, especially those who have recently experienced upward mobility and are eager to express their new success through emulation of an upper class lifestyle, which includes possession of expensive modern goods, use of the English language and fashionable clothing. It seems that a term that used to be employed to describe and positively evaluate social reform and economic development, has now come to refer, in a not-so-positive or even directly negative sense, to a new form of 'development' that is about the exhibition of personal economic success.

Jitesh's father Rakesh, one of 'old thinking' as we may recall, ridiculed the fashion-craze of today in conversation with me. To substantiate his point, he stressed the vanity and irrationality involved and the silly lust for prestige which is behind it: 'Nowadays people want to show off wealth: they wear a 2000-5000 rupee sari but in the house they have nothing.' Though the elderly may be most strong in their dissociation from modern consumer culture, its devaluation is fairly common among others too. The common desire to consume modern, expensive goods is often described as a 'craze' leading to irresponsible lending and spending. We may also think here of the popular image of the 'five-star hotel', that island of luxury in the Indian landscape that is often invoked by those who talk about consumer aspirations and want to qualify these desires as excessive and out-of-place, which is similar to the view taken of the middle-class dream of living in luxury. Harshad is a man in his forties who feels he comes across many who try to be 'modern' and live that dream:

In routine life, they try to be show business people. For example in eating style, living style, social functions. They like to be showy people. They are not, actually. For example, in living style, even if they cannot afford they bring cream, shampoo, lipstick, this and that. That is an elementary example. And always make such show when others are in contact with them. Show we are living at such a level. Do not like to be with limited needs. They will always show they cannot go to an ordinary restaurant. Will go to a superior restaurant. Believe they can wear only a 900-1000 rupee dress. Even if they cannot afford, they want to be showy people. Would also compromise on the front of needs, also borrow money.



Trusha is a woman of around fifty. Her family is well-to-do and Trusha lives a relatively luxurious life, even for middle-class standards. But Trusha also took position against conspicuous consumption:

Earlier, if a person had money, he would still live simply. Now, even if there is no money... they have this attitude that they can't do without three-five vegetables. I used to have neighbours in Bombay, they take a tiny bit of two vegetables, like, a 100 grams, and prepare that. So that they can pride themselves on being able to say that they are having two vegetables. Eating is just like taking *prasad*.

*Prasad* is the small quantity of food one eats after it has been sanctified by ritual presentation to god and accordingly is full of meaning. According to Trusha, the small quantities of vegetable her neighbours eat are similarly yet inappropriately filled with meaning.

One can qualify statements like those of Trusha, Harshad and Rakesh as expressions of rivalry between claimants to consumer superiority, but we should also note the reference to an ideology that qualifies the pursuit of status through consumption as illegitimate.

Pramod and Ila are a couple in their forties. They both have jobs at a bank and lead a comfortable existence that includes a presentable well-equipped home, a car, motorcycle, scooter and even a foreign holiday now and then. Yet they dissociate themselves from the social value their society ascribes to these signs of success:

Pramod: We were an underdeveloped country. Now we are a developing country. Since the last ten years, status is coming up: car, TV.

Ila: A car, bungalow, a lot of money. If you have a lot of money, then your status is high. Whether you have good children, a good wife, credit in the society, is secondary.

Pramod: Earlier, money was important, but it was spent on gold and land, not on luxury items.

Ila: Now, one should have a washing machine, a refrigerator, motorcycles, a nice house, decorations.

'You are supposed to be modern', is an idea that people often expressed, in one way or the other, in their conversations with me. This idea is not just an evaluation of reality. It is also, and maybe more importantly, an expression of the distance felt to be there between morality and the demands made on those who want to take part in the goings-on of present society.

Neha is a college teacher in her forties. Taking this distance between morality and modern reality as a starting point she dissociated herself from the mores of modern society through her explanation of what people mean when they talk of this pressure to be 'modern':

Your conscience bites you. You believe in ideals, a certain way of living but the society in which you live is modern. You have to change so many things. Customs, manners, dress, your language has to be more sophisticated, polished. You believe in the ideals of religion but those who believe in modern, will talk of film, pop music, hotels, driving in a car, drinking champagne, taking *non-veg*<sup>5</sup>, being a member of a club even. If you are religious, you don't want to, but for show you have to. You wear a mask. Two faces. Because other family members live in that way, and the liberty of believing in these ideals is not given. There is pressure of others... Appearance, talk, customs, hi/hello, play the cards in the clubs, visit kitty party. They call this modern. Talking about fashion, beauty, figures of beautiful girls, miss world. These are the topics of the fashionable and modern world.

Are, as Neha suggests, people being forced by an evil society to live an immoral lifestyle? And has Ila really compromised on her principles by enjoying her wealth? Or should we interpret their statements differently? We can discuss this issue by looking at Neha's statements a bit more closely. Neha is a middle-aged mother, married to a university professor. Hardly can one imagine that she is referring here to a situation she has to face in her own daily life. Not that we should take her statements as necessarily referring to Neha herself, even though Gujaratis often narrate examples taking themselves as hypothetical cases. However, Neha's statements are grossly exaggerated even if they are meant to refer to others more likely to engage with this 'modern' lifestyle. How should we understand her story then? Neha did not want to present me with a reality, but with a value judgement, therewith presenting herself as one on the right side of a divide between good and evil. Neha expressed by her exposition her thorough allegiance to what she saw as the good principles. The story and the exaggeration served that purpose.

The two main roads to status are morality and the 'modern' path of wealth and consumption. In this dyad, morality stands uncontested as the superior and more legitimate one. Almost always, people expressly show their loyalty to morality, while at the same time acknowledging that the reality of society is a different one. 'Money talks', my friend Hema stressed, criticizing what she had seen so many times:

Many families are given respect because of their money, even though their behaviour is rough and they have a bad reputation. Like, in the Ganesh festival<sup>6</sup>, some made a big contribution, and were then called to do *aarti*. People know in which way the money came, but still they are given the chance to do *aarti*.

Hema and her daughter Sejal resent having to deal with this reality. A primary target of their anger about it is Atul, son of Hema's husband's elder brother, whom they consider a lowly cheater. Atul and Hema's husband Pramod used to run a business together. A few years ago, Pramod died, and Hema and her family feel Atul then cheated them of their rightful share of the common property. In the past, Hema's family was well to do. Hema even drove a car for ten years, which is a rarity, even now. At present, Hema and her family are no more than middle class; Hema even had to sell her jewellery to pay for her son's education. When it comes to economic success, Hema and her family are now losing out to their relatives. In conversations with me they tried to keep up their sense of dignity by posing against Atul's wealth, their own self-proclaimed strength: moral uprightness, which demands to be placed above vulgar material success. As Hema expressed it in her talks with me, 'Atul and his family have more money than we do, but we are more respected than they are because my husband was a good and intelligent man.' Hema and Sejal's central argument in their common denouncement of this despised relative was the illegitimacy and voidness of Atul's claims to status. In the words of Sejal:

He and that family always stress that they have certain material possessions, like a car, a big house, a big office and they feel they should connect with those who also have those things, and act like those who haven't, can't be good. Nobody around them respects them, because they know what he's like. When my father was there, when he went on the street, people would say, 'he is a good man'. Nobody says that of Atul.

Kiran is a widow of around fifty, who lives with her two daughters in a small tenement in a middle-class neighbourhood. In the past, Kiran and her husband used to run a catering business, cooking daily for people unable to take their meals at home. They didn't do very badly, but, as Kiran said, 'he didn't have much business sense' and the family never did as well economically as relatives, who grew to be wealthy. At present, the family has to make do with the income the eldest daughter brings in working as a receptionist at a large company. Kiran is often full of anger at her economic condition, which is much poorer than she would find proper, and the way others rub it in her face. Desirous of being recognized as an equal by people more successful than herself, she resents the demands made by

the middle-class world in which she has grown up and which is still what surrounds her:

Why should society tell me what I should do? As long as I comply, I am a nice lady. But as soon as I do something new, or marry at this age, I am not nice. A cheap lady... If I take up cooking for people, people will start to look down on me. Will stop inviting me. As I am not of their level. It is not a prestige job. But they don't think what they would do if they were in my position. Now they have a good income because their husband is earning well.

Kiran has a tough time keeping up with middle-class standards, never mind how much she considers the world of the middle class as her own. Having it hard, she resents having to live in a society where economic position is decisive for prestige. Kiran feels the world is harsh for denying her the status that money gives but also for the fact that this is the reality of the world: it's money that matters not what kind of person you are.

For a while I lived with Kiran as a tenant and in that period, I had my birthday party at her house. Kiran saw that my visitors treated me with respect and afterwards let me know how she felt about it: 'the only reason people give you respect is because you have money'. She said it in a way as if she thought she was telling me something I didn't know: unlike us, you are respected, but don't think you deserve it.

Kiran knows that, more than anything else, it's money that gives prestige. Like Kiran, many others also criticized the dominance of wealth over other status giving traits. 'Literate or illiterate, if you have money they will invite you.' 'If you have money, you're cultured.' Never mind whether you are culturally refined or a roughneck - being rich is enough to get people attracted to you. 'Money is everything' is a statement commonly made, on the one hand matter-of-factly but also bitterly. Money will not only buy you pleasure, security, and bureaucrats to do your 'work' such as speeding up the processing of your files, or getting you admitted into the desired course in college but also social recognition. In the words of Chandrakant:

Money is the primary thing. It is the measure of success in life. Fifty years before it was not like that. Respect in the society, virtues, qualities, also gave position. Now, 50% is money... My own values are also changing. There is a saying: 'if you lose money, you lose nothing. If you lose your health, you lose something. If you lose your character, you lose everything.' I am not so sure about believing that now.

Many see this condition as specific to modern life. Ashok, a man in his forties, is an astrologer and a father of teenage children. He attempts to keep himself and his family away from the consumption of modern goods but feels society has left morality for the sake of consumption and the prestige of possessions:

A person is considered low if he doesn't have all the luxuries. Fast life<sup>7</sup> has been accepted. My daughter bought *Maggi* instant noodles, for rs 5.50. If this *Maggi* had been prepared at home it would have cost rs 0.50. With the acceptance of machinery, costs have gone up and people have gone on the wrong side. A sort of show-off has come in the life. That person is doing it, why not I. They have compromised, because they live in today's society. Like sofa-set, TV.

Ashok feels people have opted for compromise, what Gujaratis call *samadhan*: the dropping of something held dearly for the sake of a resolution between opposites. In this case, the compromise concerns moral principles that are dropped for the sake of living in today's society.

### Consumption at odds with morality

What is that morality about? Why are wealth and consumption at odds with being a good person? There are several dimensions to this matter, which we will turn to now. Morality and developments that impinge on that are a continuous topic of discussion among people, not just in private contexts, but also in the local media, such as newspapers and magazines. The following article shows us something of the popular understanding of the way modern life relates to morality. It appeared in *Naya Marg*, a Gujarati magazine, in 1995. The author discusses *Vishala*, an expensive restaurant near the city of Ahmedabad. Stylized in the form of a village, with floor seating and live 'traditional' entertainment, this restaurant caters to a wealthy clientele. The article is an open letter to a visitor of *Vishala*:

I know you very well. When you left your village and came to the city you pushed and shoved to make your way into a bus. Taking your half-filled cups of tea and your *bidis*<sup>8</sup>, you felt you enjoyed all the luxuries of the world. But one day a bicycle got into your hands, and after that, soon a moped, then a scooter and now you drive a *Contessa*.<sup>9</sup> Suddenly you have become rich. From an eight-by-eight foot room you got to live in a luxurious bungalow. You used to fancy the footpath queen but now you need a call-girl. You couldn't afford to send your first child to kindergarten, but now that same child studies in an English-medium school, and you have hired two teachers as tutors. You used to get satisfaction from listening to songs playing on others' radios, but now a TV and VCR have

found a place in your house. The ordinary *bidi* doesn't intoxicate you now so you take foreign cigarettes, along with foreign liquor.

Like me, you know that to be rich in this era is not a matter of old morals or inheritance. To become rich quickly, so many roads are open. From country *bidis*, cigarettes, medicines, liquor, chemicals, groceries, perfumes, books, real estate, jewellery, iron, cement, to drugs and sometimes firearms... a magical world moves around you. You stretch your arms and everything comes to you. You stretch your hand towards the maintainers of the law and they become yours. And you roam among all this meaningless, fake prosperity. Your getting money doesn't make you intelligent - that's what I feel sorry for. But you don't know that, and that's why others can take their chance to loot you, like you loot them. You have forgotten about your village in Saurashtra.<sup>10</sup> It has been quite some time since you went there. The bond between you and that village has been broken, even though the values of that village are in your blood.

There are some who have seen village life only on television, in the cinema, in stories heard by the roadside, in novels and poems, or from the mouths of folk singers. For such rich men, *Vishala* restaurant has been established. Here, they can be entertained and offered the experience of Saurashtra. Proudly you tell others: 'we went to *Vishala*...' You know it well, that to maintain your image in the face of the new society that has come up, you must carry the mark of having been there. It's not just entertainment that you get there. By going there, you also show others how much you love villages...

You know very well that this village, *Vishala*, is a fabricated one, and the money you pay for your plate of food there could feed a family for fifteen days in that Saurashtra village you left behind...

The last time you went to Saurashtra you took me with you. In one house, we had the same delicacy we had at *Vishala*. In that house, we couldn't hear that music we heard at *Vishala* - but we could hear the sitar of the heart. Nobody there had dressed up, but we could see clear radiant faces - without masks... At *Vishala*, the softness of the hands serving us was artificial, but there, true love was in people's hearts...

When we left, you did not put even a hundredth of what we paid at *Vishala* into the hand of that little girl. You did not tenderly put your hand on her head. My eyes watered then, but the girl still smiled. I don't say that you are stingy. It's just that you have lost the heartbeat of life. Your life is artificial... You can talk of villages in your sitting room, and when you get bored you go to a place like *Vishala*.

It's good that there are some clever people who can take advantage of your foolishness, and that too with a hope that the real village might grow in you, and you return... But no, I don't have any hope like that because you have suddenly become rich, and you will use the village only for power, property or sentimental talk...<sup>11</sup>

Whether visitors indeed come to eat at *Vishala* to prove their love of the village to the world is uncertain, but the ideas expressed in this letter connect with common sentiments found among city dwellers about the love



and sense of oneness among people in the village, which they as urbanites have to do without. The author turned his *Vishala* visitor into a heartless, unscrupulous opportunist who has made the city, its despicable mores and its artificial forms of happiness its own and has discarded and forgotten about the humaneness and true love that can be found among villagers. The addressee is accused of having immoral traits of many sorts, but one message that the author of this letter conveys is that the adopting of modern consumer culture goes hand in hand with the withdrawal of love for one's fellow man. The pursuit of gratification of material desires corrupts and is a major form of this moral depravation is a loss of humanness.

The new rich, those who have benefited most from the opportunities for upward economic mobility in recent years, are sometimes judged by those around as unable to 'digest' their newly found riches. This does not primarily amount to a lack of cultural refinement as such but more to an unawareness of the impropriety of uninhibited conspicuous consumption. Many among the middle class see the new rich as parvenus, who resort to such an inferior method of establishing superiority as 'showing off', having to do without the civilization of the established upper class that makes for a more subdued enjoyment of wealth.

The new rich, and the cultural development they sublime, represent also a shallow and meaningless sociality. A word used to qualify a life centred around consumption and wealth is 'artificial'. An 'artificial' life is a life not built around meaningful relationships, but interactions based on shallow pretence and show-off of material success. Materialism is held to conflict with true emotional life and empathy. In the words of Suresh, a retired journalist:

The general feeling is that people have become insensitive. The economic condition has changed. Improvement. This is psychology. You improve your economic condition, thus you get a materialistic attitude. And your material improvement is related to your becoming more money-conscious. And then you become less sensitive to human problems. *Aap apni kaam karo, dusre ki chinta chhodo*: you do your work, leave others' worries alone. This attitude is increasing because of material improvement. And they believe that that attitude will help their improvement.

It is common for those in the middle class to point a finger at the upper class as morally depraved. However, this depravity is only a strong version of a depravity many in the middle class feel is part of their own lives as well. According to this understanding, the consumer culture that is very much part of middle-class life diverts people's attention from family bonds and care for the needs of others and leads to a selfish hedonism.

The contradiction between consumer culture and established moral ideals comes out most clearly in the rifts between adolescents and their parents. One regularly finds elderly parents living separate from their sons, even though they may have their homes in the city itself. People see this situation as something that has only recently come to be considered as 'normal' or rather as a phenomenon that recently has become so widespread that it is now useless to try and agitate against it, notwithstanding its objectionableness. Somehow, the idea exists among people in the midst of this, that the spread of present consumer culture and the pursuit of wealth it demands, has gone hand in hand with the collapse of loyalty of children to their parents.

A few years ago, the popular vernacular newspaper *Sandesh* started a weekly page, 'Falling Leaves', that caters to the interests of the elderly. This page gives space to locals to address issues of special concern to the aged and social marginalization of the old by today's young is a regular topic of discussion. In the two excerpts below we see something of this sentiment:

Modern man has gone mad after materialistic pleasures. In search of peace he goes to the clubs, arranges picnics and parties. But he whose inner self is not at peace, is not satisfied, and will never get satisfaction anywhere. Materialistic pleasures and *Zee TV*<sup>12</sup> are destroying the texture of the feelings and sentiments of the joint family. And so, a modern young man wishes to separate from his parents the instant he marries. In olden times, ashrams were there for the purpose of philosophy, but now, ashrams for old people are opening up everywhere in the cities. In those days, parents could bring up seven children in their single room in their village. Now, none of these seven children can, or wants to, take care of the same parents. That is the wonder of time. What kind of era is this?<sup>13</sup>

When old couples and old friends get together at a temple they talk to each other about the flaws of their sons, daughters-in-law and grandchildren. This very much increases the gap between the old generation and the new. Whenever the occasion arises, they complain that in their time, there were no such buildings, there was no TV, phone, washing machines, flour mills, expensive clothes, this fashion, these outings, entertainment, restaurants. We never went out to eat. We went on foot everywhere, but today's youngsters won't do without a scooter. Mothers-in-law often complain that their daughters-in-law don't cover their heads with their sari, don't even want to wear a sari, and waste money on clothes, lipstick and talcum powder, and don't want to work - that's why a help is kept. 'The daughter-in-law goes out on Saturdays and Sundays. We are alone and have to eat at home. They don't take us out and don't listen to our advice... How much longer do we have to live like this? We can't stand it any more. It would be better if god took us'. Such complaints are made by the elderly. But they should behave according to the new era otherwise the distance between the old genera-

tion and the new one will increase. The old times are gone. What is the use of remembering it now? The youngsters will behave according to the new times. Of course it's their big mistake if they don't care for you at all, don't listen to you at all, don't take your advice when they should. But the elderly should understand that every generation enjoys different facilities, fashions and new entertainment. Why? Because there is more money nowadays. In olden times, there wasn't much money around. Whatever was there, was well used. Today's money is used for entertainment and outings. As long as they are young, they will enjoy...<sup>14</sup>

'Young people forget their culture and their family', youngsters as well as parents told me regularly. What they referred to was the perceived decline of children's obedience to, and regard for, their parents and an accompanying shift of young people's interest in the direction of consumption and pleasure. Parents of adolescents commonly complain about the pressure their children exert on them to give in to demands of goods like brand name clothing, mopeds, motorcycles and other goods that have a place in the desired lifestyle of adolescents. The young are accused of being a consumption-oriented lot, neglecting duties for the sake of enjoyment. Much of the talk about a 'generation gap' among parents and adolescent children evolves around this issue.

Neelam is a young woman who dissociated herself from what she felt to be the moral degeneracy of her own age-group:

People forget their original culture and forget their father and mother after marriage. They harass them, don't like to live together, send them to live in an ashram. There is a generation gap. They cannot bear the nature of old people. Like, taking them to the temple, to them it's a waste of time. Do your work yourself, they say. They cannot respect their parents. 75% are like that. It's due to modern comforts. My father didn't know about mixers, juicers, TV, refrigerator. Even in tenth grade I didn't know. Now, a three year old child knows. The standard of living is high, the income is high. From childhood, people are habituated to comforts. These things I want, want and want. So they oppose their parents.

In Baroda there are two ashrams set up especially to care for the elderly. Together they house no more than sixty persons. Thus, contrary to Neelam's claims, very few elderly parents spend their final days in these homes. However, the point is not whether what Neelam said is true or not. With her statements she connects with a general sentiment that the young today have - due to what is understood as 'westernization' - the tendency to neglect their parents. By expressing this opinion, Neelam presents herself as being loyal to a morality that holds as sacred the duties between generations in a family.

Taking into account the common qualification of 'westernization' as moral degeneration, it is understandable that people would not agree with being called 'westernized', even though many are ready to place that tag on others around.

## **Simplicity**

Sonal is a woman in her mid-thirties. She and her husband live modestly with the income he draws from his job with the municipality, but due to her husband's work and social circle, Sonal comes across many who are well to do. Often when Sonal talked to me about these acquaintances she discussed them almost solely in terms of their possession of luxury consumer goods. She would say things like: 'These people are very rich. Their bedspread cost 5000, and they have two cars' or 'they're very rich, four cars, scooty, sunny' or 'They're very rich. Air-conditioning.'

Once, while visiting Sonal's uncle, we discussed her wedding. Sonal claimed, in the discussion, that her wedding had been a simple one and that that was how she had wanted it to be. Memories of that wedding then came up and Sonal's uncle mentioned that the wedding had included a dinner at a good restaurant in the city. 'Air-conditioned', Sonal then commented. The uncle made Sonal's claim to simplicity an issue of debate: according to him, Sonal's wedding could not pass as simple. Simple weddings do not include fancy dinners in expensive restaurants. Sonal disagreed and kept on defending her wedding as simple even after we had left her uncle's house. 'My husband had to give that dinner because of his superiors, they had done a lot for him; plus, it was only for ten or fifteen people.'

Sonal is not immune to the shine of luxury: she is impressed with wealth and emphasized that the restaurant at which she celebrated her wedding was air-conditioned. Yet, she also stressed her wedding's simplicity. With this, she was interpreting and defending her way of doing things in terms of an established moral ideal: simplicity.

To typify a person as good, people sometimes use terms which at the same time qualify a person as non-modern. One of these terms is 'simple'. People who live simply, organize their life in a sober, dignified manner, live frugally, and do not seek enjoyment and status through consumption. The qualification 'simple' is associated with established morality and a non-engagement with a modern lifestyle that is, among other things, associated with consumption for the sake of enjoyment. Established morality criticizes 'wasteful' expenditures like going to movies, eating out

and expensive clothes. As was said before, one of the most important complaints people have about today's youth concerns this matter.

It's not that poverty is esteemed. The status of wealth is beyond debate and I have not come across middle-class families that consciously abstain from consumption in order to stick to ideals of simplicity. By speaking highly of simplicity one expresses one's loyalty to morality. The speakers mostly don't seek to adhere to this morality in daily life. One could say, that its practice is placed outside of society. And outside of society does not just mean that there is no one who tries to live up to this ideal. Its practice does have a place: with those persons who place themselves outside of normal life.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Gandhiji as he is still referred with reverence, is admired as the sublime practitioner of the ideal of simplicity. Gandhi is commonly seen as a model of moral uprightness, and it often happened that people I spoke with reduced this uprightness to the simple living we are discussing at present. Even though Gandhian ideals of austerity are hardly appealing to today's youth, one can still safely say that Gandhi is commonly recognized as an ideal figure. Gandhi's simplicity is regularly referred to as an ideal state, even by those who have no inclination whatsoever to reach that state themselves. Gandhi's ideals, such as simple living, are often seen as having no real place in the daily lives of mere commons. Gandhi's place is that of a sacred figure who, for his holiness, can only be marginal to daily life.

Those who do show, in their actions, to live out ideals like those of Gandhi make the great claim of having risen above the uneasy mediocrity of routine life. Aspirants to this position are subjected to popular scrutiny and judgement and even ridicule; ideals are often seen as standing in the way of survival in the dirty world. Some proverbs show something of the lowly evaluation of common man's adherence to ideals like abstinence from material goods or sexual pleasure: 'I couldn't get it, therefore I became Mahatma Gandhi' (*na malyu to Mahatma Gandhi*) and 'If you can get a woman, have sex with her, otherwise live like Mahatma Gandhi' (*mali to mari levi, na mali to Mahatma Gandhi*).

Among the living souls who claim for themselves moral superiority, there is one category that stands out: Hindu saints. Some of them are highly popular as public figures and are regarded by many as moral guides. One of the most popular in Gujarat is Morari Bapu, a *kathakar*, giver of discourses on Tulsidas' Ramcaritmanas. Morari Bapu is a Gujarati who left his job as a teacher in a primary school in the sixties to take up giving *kathas*. Since then, he has grown to become a man of great fame and popularity in Gujarat<sup>15</sup> and is widely admired for his oratorical talents

and sweetness of voice. Though Morari Bapu's discourses are a form of moral instruction, the *kathas* which are presented in beautifully decorated settings and include poetry, music, singing and jokes are experienced as being not only of religious and moral benefit but as entertaining as well. When Morari Bapu visits Baroda to give one of his public discourses which consist of sessions lasting several hours given during a series of days, hundreds of thousands come to attend.

Paragons of virtue like saints are constantly subjected to popular scrutiny. Practically all those among whom I did my work held strong opinions about Morari Bapu and a handful of others with similar position and were ever ready to display these. The opinions voiced were often framed with reference to a single matter: the divergence between these figures' preaching and practice, specifically regarding the enjoyment of sex and material pleasures.

It is commonly understood that moral superiority is often a matter of posturing. Moral mediocrity is felt to be the reality, not only for common people but also for many of those (though not all) who are seen to place themselves above the moral perversity of the everyday. I would like to suggest here that what is important is that apparently people feel so strongly about this matter that it becomes a topic of discussion and indignation in spite of the fact that this moral depravity is taken as the norm.

Morari Bapu, though he has the status of a guru in the eyes of many, is married with children, and he does not initiate disciples. Still, Morari Bapu, as a religious leader, is expected to abstain from worldly pleasures. In recent years, Morari Bapu has been discredited for divergence from the ideal of simple living, which he himself also preaches as desirable. The issue that disturbed the image of Morari Bapu was the wedding of his daughter, which was widely seen as far too luxurious, considering Morari Bapu's position as a man of religion. This matter made for much discussion among the local population. Sceptics saw their distrust confirmed and followers turned disappointed or defensive about a figure they esteemed and even loved. Sanjiv, a middle aged doctor and devotee of Morari Bapu, struggled with it:

In his daughter's wedding he spent rs 1.100.000. People started asking, from where did he get this money, if he used to be a teacher? Even a middle-class person can't spend 50.000. What if he's a man of god? But he didn't want to give an explanation. This was a crucial moment in Morari Bapu's life... Even I myself could not digest it. I was not happy. His house is air-conditioned too.

And quoting his guru's line of defense:



Bapu says: If my son's friends have a Hero-Honda motorcycle, he should also have one. Don't call me a *sadhu*. I am having sex with my wife too.

Morari Bapu claims, in his defence, to be a householder like all others and that therefore he is entitled to enjoy the same pleasures others seek. 'I am a retired teacher', he is said to have emphasised in his defence. Pramod Pandya, a local journalist, discussed the matter with me and defended Morari Bapu bringing forward the lines of defence others also came out with:

The presents given at that wedding were given out of love by followers from abroad. It was not demanded. Bapu says: I am not one who has left everything. If a *sadhu* does something wrong, like demanding air-conditioning, or specifically asking for *chapati* or rice, that will invite much more criticism. A *sadhu* has to sit on the floor, and mix his food to take away the taste and drink ordinary water. If I make those requests, it's all right, because I am in the social atmosphere, family.

Abstinence from material pleasures and sex cannot be expected from those who live in society. It is left to *sadhus* - their role is to live the ideals man cannot be expected to practise. Morari Bapu's argument is in line with this: I am not a *sadhu*, so don't expect me to act like one.

## Final words

Discussions about socio-political developments in India in recent years have often been articulated in terms of crisis.<sup>16</sup> Instability of governance, shifting and dubious political goals, and the appearance of new groups demanding power are some of the issues this discussion revolves around. Discussions of 'consumerist' tendencies among the middle class in the English-language media in India similarly are framed in terms of crisis, and can be said to connect with this perceived crisis in politics. The crisis is a matter of morality, and the discussion addresses the issue of the political role of the middle class. Journalist Praful Bidwai, for example, observes that 'If there is one single issue on which there is unanimity amongst the otherwise badly divided intelligentsia of this country, it is the profound nature of the moral crisis of contemporary Indian society.'<sup>17</sup> According to Bidwai, the dying out of the generations brought up with Gandhian morality combined with the consumption boom have placed the top 20% of the population under the spell of a morality that holds that 'whatever gives the individual maximum material pleasure is the moral good'.

Rajni Kothari similarly connects the abandoning of old political ideals like socialism and the accompanying marginalization of the poor on the development agenda of the Indian state and the Indian elite with the advent of consumer culture, related to a 'homogenized techno-culture inspired by the dream of economic development and its offer of consumerist lifestyles'. According to Kothari, the consumer culture of the middle class works against all that stands in its way, including redistribution of resources and opportunities.<sup>18</sup> Pavan Varma, author of a recent book-long assault on the lack of social commitment of the Indian middle class, thinks so too. Speaking of the effects of the liberalization policies on the middle class' attitude towards consumption, he claims:

Material wants were suddenly severed from any notion of guilt. In a sense, it was the collective exorcism from the nation's psyche of the 'repressive and life-denying nature of Gandhi's idealism'<sup>19</sup>, an exultant, exuberant escape from his emphasis on an austerity that could not be ignored but was inherently unemulatable. Liberalization provided the opportunity to make a break from the attitudes and thinking of the past, the moment to bring out in the open desires long held back, and to say: 'Now, at last, we can do what we had always wanted to do, without a sense of guilt, and, indeed, claim public approval for it'.<sup>20</sup>

Many examples could be added of journalists and other observers accusing the middle class of not engaging itself with the public good.<sup>21</sup> In this view, the middle class is in the grip of a moral crisis due to the advent of consumer culture; this moral crisis consists of an abandoning of Gandhian and Nehruvian ideals that advocate national self-reliance and commitment to a form of development that includes the poor and disadvantaged. Solidarity with the poor, these authors state, is incompatible with the present middle class' orientation towards personal economic success and consumption.

This morality may be a matter-of-course for these socially committed authors, who publish for an elite English-speaking audience for whom the official ideals of social development may be part of their upbringing. Local vernacular media who have the Baroda middle class as their audience never discuss the 'moral crisis' which they too observe. Nor does that audience itself relate to its own moral crisis in the way these authors do.

Rajni Kothari, Praful Bidwai, Pavan Varma and others who see the middle class as self-absorbed and careless about the misery of the poor do have a point. Generally, I found among the Baroda middle class a total absence of concern for the poor or poverty as an economic and political challenge to the nation. Members of the Baroda middle class hardly take note of the

poverty they see around them as a moral problem and so they would also not take it as one that is related to their own consumptive behaviour. The middle class that has come up simply does not connect with the ideals that appear to come so natural to these authors.

Materialism is morally problematic to this class, but in a manner different from what the aforementioned authors express. The moral problem of materialism lies not in the abandonment of commitment to national development and the poor, but in what materialism does to personal relations and the illegitimacy of materialism as a path to social recognition.

It is obvious that this morality has little to do with the reality of everyday practices. The good principles are not for people of this world. Prestige is achieved by displays of wealth, notwithstanding the fact that this path to status is morally tainted. The abandonment of morality for the sake of the joys of consumption is accepted as a reality. The ideology of simplicity has a place only outside of normal life. But this does not mean that moral ideals are placed outside of one's life altogether. In people's understanding and debate of their own social and cultural condition an awareness of the immoral aspects of materialism are ever present.

As we have seen, people often express their loyalty to the morality that reality is so much at odds with and place that immoral reality outside of themselves and in 'society'. Can we then qualify these expressions as signs of hypocrisy? Gujaratis regularly do. Showing loyalty to morality is, in a way, a matter of maintenance of respectability. As it is, individual desires often clash with respectability. People explain their conformity, in different aspects of life, as triggered by their desire to 'live in society' (*samajma rahevu*). As a consequence of the conscious practice of adjusting behaviour to the expected rewards for reputation, social life becomes something of an arena characterized by make believe. In general, my informants are highly aware that people present certain images of themselves 'in society' to attain respect and prestige. Many see social life as a stage where each plays his or her part, convincingly or not. The tension between discourse and action and the difference between the conformity social life demands and real emotions and desires is something they themselves are only too aware of.<sup>22</sup> It is a common understanding that the good is often a matter of theatre that covers a corrupted reality.

We can ask here what are we discussing then but inconsequential pledges of loyalty that have no relation to real life whatsoever? Can we conclude that people just parrot the desired expressions of morality and happily do as they please otherwise or just fool themselves into thinking they are the good amidst evil? That would be the most cynical of all interpretations. It would also be a bit facile, though of course that does not

mean we need to discard it as a possibility. However, there are reasons to think that the references to morality are meaningful beyond shows of respectability.

To begin with, we can look at W.H. Morris-Jones' *Government and Politics of India*. In this book, the author distinguishes and describes what he calls the three 'languages of politics': modern, traditional and saintly. The language of modern politics belongs to the modern state institutions and 'speaks of policies and interests, programmes and plans. It expresses itself in arguments and representations, discussions and demonstrations, deliberations and decisions' (p. 53). The language of traditional politics then concerns the world of caste and village communities, with political, social and cultural traits qualitatively very different from the world of modern politics. The third language of politics is the saintly one, which is at the margin when we speak of the everyday political practices. As an example Morris-Jones discussed the saintly figure of Vinoba Bhave, who toured India on foot, calling out to landowners to donate land which he could in turn give to landless labourers. Saintly politics, Morris-Jones states, is important as a language of comment rather than of description or actual behaviour, and states that the indirect effects of Bhave's activities were more important than direct results. Saintly politics, like that of Bhave, influence the standards people use for judging the performance of politicians:

In men's minds there is an idea of disinterested selflessness by contrast with which almost all conduct can seem very shabby. Such a standard is not of course applied continuously or to the exclusion of other standards. However, it does contribute to several very prevalent attitudes to be found in Indian political life: to a certain withholding of full approval to even the most popular leaders; to a stronger feeling of distrust of and even disgust with persons and institutions of authority; finally, to profoundly violent and desperate moods of cynicism and frustration. This is not to make 'saintly' politics a sole cause of these sentiments; only to say that it can add, as it were, a certain bitterness and 'edge' to them'.<sup>23</sup>

We can debate whether the causal relation Morris-Jones sees is really there. However, the point made is of importance to an understanding of the place of moral ideals in Indian society in general, even if politics itself is now no longer seen as a realm where morality has any place at all, not even a saintly one in the margin.

People in the Baroda middle class consistently discuss their own life and society with reference to morality, compared with which, indeed, 'almost all conduct can seem very shabby'. People's references to morality when speaking of consumer culture and its depravity are so consistent and natural that it would be far-fetched to condemn them as theatrics. And

even locals, by making this point of theatrics, deny their own statement of morality as void by their own ferocity in expressing it. The bitterness and cynicism Morris-Jones speaks of, are a reality for the middle class of today also and one that could not exist without an awareness that life and society should be better, and could be better if only people were.

The local vernacular media, too, constantly carry discussions of moral issues. Moral instruction is highly popular. Not just glamorous and entertaining discourses by Hindu saints attract audience, also dozens of neighbourhood groups in which ordinary local folk spread teachings of the *Bhagvad Gita* attract thousands of people every week.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps the issue of importance is not the discrepancy between discourse and action, but the bitterness of a constant awareness of the distance between ideal and reality, intensified by the appearance of a model of life that glorifies the consumption that established morality abhors.

## Notes

1. See *Far Eastern Economic Review* January 14, 1993, February 2, 1995, March 17, 1995; *India Today* April 15, 1995; *Business Today* iss. 4, 1996; *Fortune*, iss. 5, 1997.
2. A type of roti-like homemade bread.
3. A 'society' is a housing estate.
4. Officially, developers who build and sell these houses are bound by law to keep the housing accessible to lower income groups. However, there are several ways to bypass these laws and in reality much of the housing ends up in the hands of people with higher incomes.
5. Meat and eggs.
6. *Ganesh Chaturthi* is a yearly festival in which neighbourhood groups arrange for a Ganesh shrine to be erected at a central place in the neighbourhood. *Aarti* is the name of the morning and evening ceremony performed at shrines during the ten-day period in which it stands.
7. 'Fast life' is an idiom used to describe today's pursuit of economic success and consumption.
8. Country-made cigarettes.
9. An upmarket car.
10. A region in the western part of Gujarat.
11. *Naya Marg*, March 16, 1995.
12. *Zee TV* is one of the most successful privately owned TV stations in India.
13. *Sandesh*, July 11, 1996.
14. *Sandesh*, September 9, 1996.
15. Lutgendorf (1991) reports that Morari Bapu has also reached considerable fame outside of Gujarat.
16. See for example R. Kothari 1989; A. Kohli 1990; U. Baxi & B. Parekh 1995; S. Saberwal 1996.
17. Bidwai, P., 'Morality and Our Elite. I. Acquisitive Hedonism to the Fore'. *Times of India*, August 21, 1984; 'II. Hedonism and the Elite's Moral Crisis'. *Times of India*, August 22, 1984.
18. R. Kothari, 1991, p. 557.
19. A. Celly, *The Times of India*, May 26, 1996.
20. A. Varma, 1998, p. 175.
21. See *Sunday*, February 26, 1995: 'Breaking the Social Contract. The Middle Class' Love Affair with its Own

Enrichment Endangers Indian Society'; *Times of India*, June 17, 1995: 'Middle class Matrix. Upmarket Greed, Down-market Deprivations'; *The Hindu*, November 5, 1995, 'Comfortably Numb'. 22. In the Gujarati language there are a number of terms that deal with the difference between people's appearance and reality. *Dekhav karvu* is used to denounce behaviour judged as insincere or 'show off'. *Bhapko* can be used to denounce expenditure of money for the sake of prestige as unbecoming in case it is felt that the doer cannot really afford it. *Dhong* may be used to qualify insincere shows of goodness that serves one's own interest - *sadhus* are often seen as specialists in this type of hypocrisy. *Luchchu* and *garaja* can be used to describe the handling of relations with ulterior motives. As a proverb goes:

*Garaje gadane baap kahevo*: calling a donkey 'father' if it serves your purpose. *Dambh* is hypocrisy. *Mindho* can be called a shrewd and quiet cunner from whom one doesn't expect evil. We can also mention here an ironic term used to qualify the place of religion in daily life as rather inconsequential: *saghvadio dharma* qualifies people's devotion towards religious teachings as insincere. 'Facilitating' *dharma* is what people are said to engage in - a *dharma* one can cast aside when personal interest is at odds with it.

23. W.H. Morris-Jones 1964, p. 59-60.

24. I am referring here to *Swadhyaya* groups, conducted under the auspices of Pandurang Shastri Athavale. He is a figure with guru-like qualities who has attained a popularity in Gujarat that equals that of Morari Bapu.

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