

## The FABINDIA Model: Gandhi Lives

There is a company called FABINDIA that collects and markets the handicrafts of rural Indians. It's not the Indian version of Cost Plus World Market. The owners of the company believe in this handicraft form of manufacturing. They recognize that they are enabling a certain way of life to survive. They accept that the urban-drone model is not the only path of development for a society--which old societal patterns do not necessarily have to disappear as a culture modernizes. FABINDIA was founded, ironically, by an American--a buyer from the Macy's chain, John Bissell. That he, and subsequently his son, could keep a view that departs from the spirit of the age is admirable. Most of the time entrepreneurs lack a social conscience. Of late many seem to have installed one in the form of environmental consciousness, but this has adhered so closely to the herd-mind that it hardly counts as innovative thinking. On the other hand, those who recognize something in extant folkways worth preserving can be painfully ignorant of the world's realities. They can act; or rather react, as if economic dimensions don't exist.

That Bissell and his son have found a synthesis is worthy of note, and perhaps, of emulation. Policy in India is marked by a certain degree of tension generated by a clash between Mohandas Gandhi's ideal of a society built around the rural village and the obvious economic advantages of the emerging urban society. But an either/or mindset has only generated conflict, and if it continues, will probably mean the death of the village. America as a model is too strong in the international consciousness, especially in the minds of policy makers. The U.S. has not evolved far enough past the death of its own small towns and rural enclaves to judge whether a primarily urban society yields the best outcome, yet many the world over are proceeding as if it has. Bissell and co. offer a different vision--of city and village living in symbiosis. One is not "better" or "more economically" viable. They need each other.

Apart from this mindset, the city becomes the ideal. City people are happy enough, but everyone not in the city wants to be in the city. And if policy is geared toward the city, such is a logical response. Who wants to stay on a sinking ship? But if it were recognized that the village were a viable, even a necessary entity, and policy were crafted accordingly, the village could be seen as a place to stay. If the mindset and policy were sufficiently adjusted, the village might even witness return migration.

In a way, this is a more realistic policy than ever before. The internet, improved logistics, and other such factors of the modern world provide options for the development of a city-village symbiosis not previously possible. Gandhi's vision is not dead.

Reference: - <http://globalcity.blogspot.com/2007/11/fabindia-model-ghandi-lives.html>

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