

# Glorifying the 'undeserving'

Often, in India, the wrong kind of people have been put on a pedestal

India has a lot going for her – a large, growing domestic economy, a young population, a growing entrepreneurial class, and an aspiring and increasingly wealthy middle class. There are numerous success stories of Indian billionaires and of Indian executives who are now running large global corporations. In many ways, India has arrived on the global stage, and our successes span the entire gamut of activities across diverse fields. While the loss of confidence in the India story over the last couple of years is our own doing, I am optimistic that, over the medium- to long-term, we will restore confidence and be back to a more respectable growth trajectory.

There is a lot we have achieved as a country in the last two decades that deserves celebration and recognition, but we need to make sure we celebrate the right kind of success stories and people. The end result, while important, should not be the sole criterion for recognition – the means adopted to get to the end goal are critical. Herein lies my concern that very often, we glorify the wrong kind of people in our country – those that have adopted illegal/unethical ways of achieving success, those that have demonstrated moral values that should be a cause for embarrassment and those that have exploited their power for self interest to the detriment of the nation/society at large. We should set high standards of behaviour for ourselves and, as a nation, aspire to be respected for our code of conduct, business practices and societal values.

The glorification of the 'undeserving' has serious consequences. As a society, we are creating the wrong role models for the next generation, and potentially perpetuating the very problems that need to get fixed. We need to have the courage, as a society, to call a spade a spade and enforce adequate peer pressure and societal pressure to encourage and reward the right behaviour and values. We should be naming and shaming some of the people who happen to be icons in India in different fields, for their wrong deeds and incorrect practices, but the fear of the famous and powerful in our country prevents that from happening. This is true across business, professions, the arts, and sports. The rule of law and the consistent application of law irrespective of the person involved are important to restore confidence in our judiciary and law and order machinery.

Various professions that have a professional code of conduct need to be more stringent in



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enforcing their code of conduct. It would be interesting, for instance, to get data from the bar council, the medical council, the institute of chartered accountants of India and other professional bodies on the number of people, whose licences have been cancelled over the past decade, for malpractices and violations of professional ethics and code of conduct. The data, most likely, will indicate that the numbers will be small and not commensurate with the practices being followed in these professions.

The media, for all the positives it has brought to Indian society, is also used by the famous, powerful but 'undeserving', to either build a certain profile and gain legitimacy, or to figure out ways to prevent dissemination of damaging information. Given the power of media in influencing public debate and opinion, media could play an important role in influencing and moulding the younger generation and civil society to set higher standards and demand accountability.

When we look at the evolution of our society over the last two decades, what strikes me is the extent of deterioration of our value system and our movement towards a market society rather than a market economy. There cannot be a price for everything and core values should be preserved at any cost. As a society, we have systematically destroyed our institutions and routinely 'sold' positions of importance in delivering public services including in the police, judiciary, financial institutions, government organisations and public service enterprises. The damage this has caused will be difficult to fix for a long time to come. Our civilian awards have also been diluted and politics and lobbying take precedence over an objective assessment of contribution to the nation.

We need to do some serious introspection and arrest the deterioration in our societal values and moral fabric of our nation. We need to recognise and reward the right kind of behaviour and it is high time that, as a society, we stand up for the right code of conduct, and send a strong message to the next generation about the right role models they should emulate. The demonstration effect is powerful and we should focus on celebrating the successes of the right kind of people. As a nation, we will never deliver on our potential unless we have the right role models that will inspire a generation to take us to the next level.

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