



The World Social Forum January 2004 Mumbai, India.

Dust, drums, slogans, songs, posters, chants, colours, people. Masses of people, estimated to be in the area of 100,000 participants, many from different nations, different accents, languages and ideas. But all covered in the same dust and cloaked in the same hope.

The Vision and Hope of a Better World.

This is what you witnessed when you entered the NESCO ground in Goregaon East, Mumbai, and the venue of the Fourth World Social Forum (WSF). The WSF is a response to the World Trade Organization (WTO). It was the first meeting outside Porto Alegre, Brazil, the first in Asia and India. The Forum offered space for expression, for exchange, for discussion, for disagreement, for debate and for celebration.

The six-days highlighted the need for urgent action, beginning with a global anti-war march and a movement against the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and anti-capitalist beliefs. The concluding sentiment clearly emphasised the need to move in the direction of 'Another World', based on peoples' rights to dignity, equality, employment, diversity and resources. The Forum that attracted participants from 132 countries closed with cultural performances and messages of solidarity from across the world.

While the WSF made no formal declaration, nothing could beat the opening ceremony as tens of thousands sat listening to speakers like Arundhati Roy and several of the dignitaries at the Forum. Arundhati Roy, Indian novelist who won the 1997 Booker Prize for "The God of Small Things," and activist was critical of US foreign policy. Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel prize winner, Chairman of Clinton's Council of Economic Advisors and ex-chief economist of the World Bank, outlined the case for a more humane and regulated capitalism on the same platform as the Indian Marxist economist Prathap Patnaik, who argued that capitalism can't be reformed. .

Other eminent speakers ranged from Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi of Iran, former UNHCR commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson, and Pakistani activist Asma Jehangir.

Members of the Mumbai Resistance met across the highway to discuss many of the same issues but under a different banner, while challenging the exclusionary nature of the WSF.

Other parallel events were the Land Rights Movement and the international networks of peasant organizations, agricultural workers and indigenous communities. From Dalits to disabled rights advocates, from south Korean socialists to South African AIDS activists. Pakistani anti-nuclear activists, landless workers to Bombay slum dwellers, queer rights activists to child labour abolishers. Anti Coca Cola campaigners to cotton farmers, and Tibetan Monks. Events that were all spokes in the wheel of A BETTER WORLD.

The WSF was overwhelming. It had it all: films, plays, street theatre, songs, music, dance, books, workshops, seminars, rallies and resounding slogans – **‘Down with Capitalism’, ‘Up with Socialism’. ‘Down with Imperialism’**. The anti-war message was loud – the anti-Bush sentiment even stronger. A popular poster read **‘When Bush comes to Shove – Resist’**. Resonating for me was **‘Down with Patriarchy and the Caste System’** particularly given we were in India. Women were loud and strong with their determination unwavering.

It was billed as the mother of all anti-globalisation meetings. Speaker after speaker talked at length on the evils of privatisation being imposed by multilateral organisations, especially on the less developed and underdeveloped countries. The US was the obvious target of speakers and participants alleged that the US-driven privatisation and liberalisation policies through multilateral agencies such as the World Bank and the IMF were not only harmful but also selective in nature.

Such a gathering challenges all involved, but particularly in a city like Mumbai. Mumbai is an Indian port city of almost 20 million with approximately 7 million people sleeping on the streets. Extreme levels of poverty are all around you, and participants saw it right outside the Forum venue. In many ways this made the Forum seem more real, more urgent and more critical.

If democracy lives in India you could feel it in the vibrant culture of resistance and the pulse of the WSF. Some march or the other was constantly going on with rallies of people with ideas, with histories, with stories, with sufferings and with visions. There were no concrete outcomes or formal declarations passed – but many at the Forum were saying that there were hundreds of outcomes each day. In the forum papers you saw slogans such as – the uniting of struggles, the building of bridges, the strengthening of solidarity, the shaping of new alliances and coalitions and relationships. These they say are all outcomes – intangible perhaps but nonetheless valuable outcomes.

The event was seen as a resounding success because of the number and diversity of its participants. They shouted themselves hoarse, they beat drums, carried placards, candles and banners: **all in the hope that another world is possible.**

I can still hear the chants, taste the dust and feel the passion and power of the 100,000 people who attended.

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