

Cheap car carries high price for environment, impoverished



BRIAN GOULD

“Worldwide, cars are inextricably linked with social status. The company’s website asks, ‘which celebrity comes to your mind when you see this car?’ After all, who cares if you can’t scrape together enough to feed your family—at least you have a car to drive them around.”

There’s a new car set to hit the streets of India this year, and at \$2500CDN, it’s poised to bring even more pollution and congestion to that country’s already crowded cities. Branded the Tata Nano—an obnoxiously cute name to match the minute size of the car—and targeted at moped owners, it will inevitably result in more drivers and increased automobile dependence.

Back at home, facing the looming prospect of \$1.50-per-litre gas by the end of the year, there are sure to be cries against this new development—but frankly, we don’t have that right.

Sure, India uses more than twice as much energy as Canada, but Canada uses 16.5 times more per capita. Over-population isn’t the problem; it’s over-consumption that’s doing the real damage. India’s consumption would be even lower if it weren’t for the growing upper class consuming competitively with North Americans (growing, of course, at the expense of those less fortunate).

Yes, Tata’s Nano is bad for the environment, but a nation that drives SUVs doesn’t have the right to blame one that primarily drives mopeds for rising gasoline prices, fossil fuel depletion, and global warming—just like the binge eater at the buffet doesn’t get to tell off skinny people when they

want more than a piece of celery.

Congestion will increase, but even the inevitable road building projects and accelerated sprawl aren’t so much the problem as the way in which they’ll pay for all of it. Road tolls would simply be impossible, leaving the burden on the Indian taxpayer, who will suddenly find it more cost-effective to drive as well, which is when the automobile will claim yet another victim nation. Increased energy use combined with increased congestion are also the recipe for increased smog—a problem cities the size of Mumbai, Kolkata, and Dehli can hardly afford.

Overall, this car will be an environmental disaster, but no worse than the one we currently live in. It’s time to look at ourselves for the real source of these environmental problems instead of pointing fingers. What actually worries me the most is the tagline the company is using to promote it: “The People’s Car.” As in: the car of the people. As in: if you want to be part of society, you need a car because that’s what it’s really all about here.

“If I had a four-wheeler, I would have better marriage prospects,” says a villager in Tata’s marketing literature. Whose fault is that perspective? Surely it couldn’t be the western world that has incessantly broadcast automobile

dependence as a cultural value since India was still a colony.

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Three quarters of the Indian population lives on less than 2\$ per day—three quarters. The \$2500 price point suddenly looks a little high. Equally troubling is the cost of gas—60 miles per gallon isn’t enough for the 250 million Indians who couldn’t fill the tank more than once every two months. Call it “The People’s Car” if it helps you sleep at night, but this isn’t going to break down caste barriers—it’s going to create new ones.

It’s true that the Tata Nano represents a safety improvement over a family clinging to a single motorcycle. There’s certainly demand for such a car, but what about those who couldn’t even afford a scooter? Maybe they’re just supposed to suck it up and starve themselves and their families to get one so that they can finally fit in with the rest of “developing” India. After all, if a “People’s Car” is the cost to participate in society, wouldn’t you want one too?

Giving fetus rights threatens right to choose

Threatening the legality abortions won’t protect pregnant women from violence



DEREK WARWICK

attempt by anti-choice groups to grant rights to fetuses so that abortion can be re-criminalized.

The issue with supporting this bill and at the same time claiming abortion rights will remain protected is that granting a fetus rights poses an inherent contradiction.

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By pure logic, you can’t simultaneously grant unborn children the right to life while still allowing women to seek legal abortions. The concern over this bill isn’t unwarranted paranoia: the struggle to gain abortion rights was long and hard, and this bill has the potential to destroy the work of pro-choice activists and cause a regression to the days of back alleys, coat hangers, and needless deaths.

Let there be no doubt about it: perpetrators of violence against pregnant women should receive tougher sentences. However, this shouldn’t be achieved by granting rights to fetuses. Doing so endangers a women’s right to choose and reflects the larger belief that women’s uteri belong to

everyone but themselves.

The real solution to this problem coincides with the goals of the movement to end violence against women. What’s really needed is tougher penalties for these acts and for us as a society to address the larger problem of sexism in general. Sexist ideologies contribute to violence perpetrated against women—and, as a result, pregnant women and their unborn children—and until we deal with this root issue, we can’t hope to reduce the violence that women experience.

Considering that previous attempts at similar bills have been flagged as unconstitutional, it’s unlikely that it will go through. Nevertheless, public support for the bill has been overwhelming. According to a poll commissioned by the pro-life group Life Canada last fall, 72 per cent of Canadians support the proposed law. It isn’t a stretch to assume most of these supporters are Canadians who either recognize that this could result in the re-criminalization of abortion or who simply aren’t aware of the contradiction between the bill and current abortion laws.

Rights are rights. If we are to grant them, we should grant them without exception. If, by some stroke of utter misfortune, this bill were to be passed, it’s true that it wouldn’t result in the re-criminalization of abortion in and of itself. However, it would be naïve to assume that pro-life groups wouldn’t use the law in the future to bring about the end of legal abortion in Canada.

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