In A City Like Delhi: Sustainability and Spirituality

By

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work that has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

[Signature]

Yamini Narayanan
‘Lead me from non-being to being;
Lead me from darkness to light;
Lead me from death to immortality.’

-Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 3.28
Thesis Abstract

The broad purpose of ‘In A City Like Delhi’ is to make an argument in favour of the positive link between spirituality and sustainability. Sustainability, at its core, requires an ethical commitment, and the thesis proposes that spirituality may be that vital means through which sustainability may be truly animated, in theory and in practice. The thesis is particularly preoccupied with considering the yet fully unrealised competence of spirituality to enrich the understanding and practise of sustainability in the urban space. To this end, it uses a very particular case study to make a modest exploration of such a conceptual association – the city of Delhi.

The concept of sustainability, as articulated in the West, is primarily a secular notion. While international religious and spiritual organisations have taken up the sustainability challenge, the reverse is less true – sustainability planning is rarely conducted in a dialogue with religious or spiritual institutions and resources. In this context the case study of an Indian megacity to examine the relationship between religion, spirituality, secularism and development, is particularly interesting. The thesis explores, as one example of the potential interface, how Hindu spirituality as interpreted by Mahatma Gandhi, may usefully inform a spiritual philosophy to enliven a sustainability consciousness in Delhi.

The theoretical speculations of the thesis are grounded in the local context by seeking the perspectives of twenty primary informants from Delhi who are all associated with various levels of planning and implementing development in the city. I specifically chose my interviewees from secular development backgrounds (rather than religious and spiritual representatives) because this would enrich critical understanding of how spirituality may be viewed within a secular sustainability discourse. I use their views on spirituality, sustainable development, and any affinities between the two notions to balance my own perspective, derived from both my research and my personal experience of the city of my birth. The interviews gave added depth to the environmental, economic and social challenges confronting the city of Delhi, which were already evident in the literature review. Additionally however, the interviews
confirmed the hypothesis that sustainable development and spirituality together could have a productive, coherent and an even inseparable grounding union in Delhi and that spirituality may be vital in facilitating that essential shift in consciousness that a sustainable mindset requires. These findings are crucial to any study or strategy considering comprehensive sustainable development for Delhi.
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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACJ – Asian College of Journalism
AOL – Art of Living
BJP – Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People’s Party)
CNG – Compressed Natural Gas
CPCB – Central Pollution Control Board
CSDS – Centre for the Study of Developing Societies
CSE – Centre for Science and Environment
CSW – Commission on the Status of Women
DDA – Delhi Development Authority
DSDS – Delhi Sustainable Development Summit
EPM – Environment Planning and Management
FIR – First Information Report
FLS – Forward Looking Strategies
GAD – Gender and Development
GNP – Gross National Product
IAAS – Indian Audit and Accounts Service
IAS – Indian Administrative Service
IMF – International Monetary Fund
IUCN – International Union for the Conservation of Nature
LSR – Lady Shri Ram College
MCD – Municipal Corporation of Delhi
MDG – Millennium Development Goals
NCRB – National Crime Records Bureau
NCT – National Capital Territory (of Delhi)
NDDB – National Dairy Development Board
NOIDA – New Okhla Industrial Development Area
NRCP – National River Conservation Plan
PCDF – People Centred Development Forum
RSS – Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteers Organisation)
TERI – Tata Environmental Research Institute
UNCHS – United Nations Centre for Human Settlement
UNDP – United Nations Development Programme
UNEP – United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO – United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNHSP – United Nations Human Settlements Programme
VHP – Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council)
WAD – Women and Development
WASSS – Western Australian State Sustainability Strategy
WDR – World Development Report
WED – Women Environment Development
WFDD – World Faiths Development Dialogue
WHO – World Health Organisation
WID – Women in Development
WQI – Water Quality Index
WWF – World Wide Fund for Nature
1. Introduction

1.1. ‘Our Common Future’?

"India Poised: Our Time is Now!!", announces a huge Delhi Times billboard on the leafy, tree-lined Teen Murti circle. A few yards further down the adjacent Niti Marg, another announcement confirms this, bearing the additional legend: “Delhi: From Walled City\(^2\) to World City”. Within a short few metres, yet another notice hanging prominently off a light pole in the mid-section of Ashoka Road declares: “India Rising: Light of Asia”. The message is loud, clear and not to be forgotten for a moment – India is arriving, nearly there and this celebratory zest is clearly evident in the exuberant spirit of Delhi, which is self-consciously preparing itself as the arrival point, the welcoming stage, and the first act of a global India launching itself as a world power.

Historians and political scholars have often wondered if it would ever be India’s destiny to finally arrive, or if the country would forever remain on the precipice, carrying always the promise and hope of imminent arrival, but never quite getting there (Varma 2004; Cohen 2002; Kissinger 1995). This is an admittedly problematic debate, particularly since consensus on where exactly there is, has its own challenges and questions. India has achieved for itself a spectacular economic growth rate of nearly 10 per cent per annum, making it one of the fastest growing economies in the world (DITR 2006). However, this has come at severe environmental costs such as climate change that has grave implications for communities locally, regionally and internationally (CSE 2007). Environmental planning and regulatory authorities in Delhi, the seat of the central government of India, are unable to respond adequately or keep up with environmental degradation in the region, and this is now progressing more rapidly than

\(^1\) The sub-heading is borrowed from the title of the Brundtland Commission report on sustainable development, Our Common Future: The World Commission on Environment and Development (1987).

\(^2\) Ancient cities often had defensive walls built around them to protect them from potential enemies. Delhi city comprises of both Old Delhi [erstwhile capital of the Mughal Empire] and New Delhi [former capital of British India and current capital of independent India]. Old Delhi was built as a walled city. Besides having this utilitarian value, the walls around the city of Old Delhi also symbolised the status, power and independence of the great Mughal Empire and the kingdom that they ruled (Bhattacharyya 1977). However, the reference here to the city of Delhi, is a metaphor for India’s future, and its transition from a walled, inward-looking disposition to a broader, more global perspective.
economic growth (CSE 2007). New ecological problems are constantly emerging: for example, Delhi hitherto has never had a problem of ozone contamination. It is now predicted to become one of the most severe environmental crises the city will face in the next five years (CSE 2007).

The rapid growth rate of capitalism, previously understood to be one of the most successful development strategies, has not succeeded in rescuing millions of the desperately poor from their entrenched poverty, nor brought greater prosperity to the villages of India (Sen 1999). Instead, mass rural migrations from the vast regional hinterland to cities such as Delhi has only increased, stretching the resources of the city to its limits, and aggravating problems such as water and land pollution, unemployment, illiteracy and inadequate healthcare (Dupont et al 2000). The high levels of stress on urban lifestyles, communities and the local ecology are peaking constantly, leading to a potential collapse of the social, natural and economic resources of the city, and a situation where “greed and violence [are to be] treated as the only values to shape our cultures and our lives” (Shiva 2001, para 16).

Clearly ‘development’ that brings environmental and social misery in its wake is neither sustainable, nor arguably, even development at all. Development is a complex enough endeavour but more so in the face of dramatic and unpredictable environmental changes. For instance, breakthroughs in nuclear power and technology have brought on changes that pose dangerous moral and ethical questions that perhaps require far more sophisticated understanding and visions than the generally rationalist levels of discourses that human beings are engaging with at present. In addition to environmental impacts, many of these transformations also include lightning changes in the creation and use of technology, alterations in family structures etc. The consequent contemporary perspective on values and morality has created, according to Eck and Jain (1986: 3), “a perpetual crisis in consciousness, and the need for the perpetual redefinition of who we are”. A mature and intelligent philosophical approach to planning and implementing development such that it is truly sustainable and meaningful is therefore surely needed.

In this thesis, my broad purpose is to argue that spirituality may contribute to the deepening of that critical philosophical dimension to sustainability, and might assist in
enlivening the concept of sustainable development, both in theory and practice. I choose to investigate this by making a very modest exploration as to whether spirituality may assist in animating sustainability consciousness and practice in the city of Delhi, the capital of India, and my home city. Delhi is arguably India's international city. In Delhi, the visible signs and impacts of India's newfound prosperity and influence as an emerging global power can be most keenly felt, but sustainability also has a profile in the city. In recent times, Delhi has also become the host for a number of international conferences on sustainable development: the World Summit on Ecologically Sustainable Development will be held in Delhi in 2009; the International Sustainable Development Research Summit in 2008, and since 2000, the Delhi Sustainable Development Summit (DSDS) has been an annual feature of the city's conference circuit. However, it is noteworthy for this thesis that the DSDS, for instance, a high profile conference set in a city and a society explicitly engaged with various forms of spirituality, is decidedly secular in its focus on urban planning, environmental pollution etc.

It is therefore timely to investigate the potential for spirituality to become a pragmatic means of animating the notion and practice of sustainable development in the city. A review of the development and sustainable development literature on Delhi reveals a plethora of critical issues that have massive adverse impacts of a social, economic and environmental nature, not just on the city itself, but also on the large adjoining hinterland. I was curious to explore if spirituality indeed could serve in a pragmatic manner within a sustainability framework to effectively addressing these issues.

To inform my speculations on how this might be achieved, I interviewed twenty women from Delhi who are all associated with planning and implementing sustainable development at various levels. While this thesis is not a feminist analysis of spiritually-grounded sustainable development, the reasons for specifically exploring women's perspectives are several. In the last century, women have received academic attention as never before, and this trend is only expected to continue into the new millennium. Feminist perspectives have emerged as an important category of analysis within almost

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3 Cadene (2000) notes that Delhi dominates other Indian cities in organising international conferences, and this makes the city highly visible globally. Cadene (2000) observes that Delhi is the preferred destination for conferences for institutions in countries such as Germany, France, England, the United States and Canada [in that order].
every discipline. There is greater acknowledgement and appreciation of the fact that the informed participation of women in all areas of living and development, are crucial for a peaceful, stable, prosperous and healthy world community (Ahmed 2002).

Additionally, this thesis specifically takes forward a particular call that the perspectives of women, and religion and spirituality, must be considered while studying development. A year before the Brundtland Commission report (1987) on sustainable development was released, Eck and Jain’s study (1986) argued that for an holistic study of social change and development, it is imperative for women’s sake [including those who do not consider themselves spiritual or religious] to study these issues from the perspective of spirituality and religion. In this thesis, I will explore how Hindu spirituality may assist in meaningfully articulating a spiritual philosophy that may enliven the notion of sustainability in the capital of secular, democratic India.

1.2. Elaboration of the Topic

In this thesis, I consider that sustainable development, at its heart, is a moral and an ethical notion, and explore theoretically the possibility that acknowledging and articulating a spiritual dimension to the process may enable a true and meaningful sustainability to occur. While the scientific knowledge and logic to be sustainable exists in abundance, spiritual wisdom and resources may provide the impetus, motivation and inspiration to be sustainable (Rajvanshi 2005). Trigg (1998: 70) points out that science alone has been regarded as the “epitome of human reason” and that in contrast to science, religion and spirituality have been considered to be “the product of anything but reason”. The idea that “what was inaccessible to science could not exist”, the rigid and limiting understandings of rationality, and the politics of language, has caused the impoverishment of religion and spirituality in the public domain, much to the disservice of human happiness (Trigg 1998: 71). Trigg correctly points out (1998: 71): “Science may tell us ‘how’ and religion ‘why’.” I propose that understanding both how and why is important for successful sustainability.

I argue that spirituality is a vital means of engaging with sustainability meaningfully as individuals and as a community. Gardner (2002: 10) stresses that it is vital to
“reintegrate our societal head and heart, to re-establish spirituality as a partner in dialogue with science. This will require the world’s religious traditions to intensify their engagement with environmental and developmental issues.”

He writes (2002: 10):

The effort to build a sustainable world could advance dramatically if spiritual people and religious institutions, on one hand, and advocates of sustainable development, on the other, were to embrace each other’s central concerns...they have complementary strengths. Advocates of sustainability are strongly rooted in science, and have a concrete vision for sustainability. Religious traditions enjoy moral authority and a broad grassroots presence that puts them in a powerful position to shape the worldviews and lifestyles of billions of people.

Even before the notion of sustainable development was popularised by the Brundtland Commission (1987), there was recognition of the need to include the spiritual dimension while planning or addressing any sort of development-related change. Eck and Jain (1986) insist that these issues are so intrinsically fundamental to human existence that they are rarely consciously considered at the level of decision-making. They accept that the view that spirituality is central to human lifestyles might be rejected because people are so engrossed in the daily business of subsistence living, that they might claim that spirituality has no impact on their lives, since “no one thinks about it” (Eck and Jain 1986: 5). It is consequently all the more important to reflect on them. Eck and Jain (1986: 5) in fact, believe that such a worldview is inevitable – it only needs to be explicitly acknowledged:

Change takes place in the context or, in rebellion against a world, which is shaped by a world-view, with its notion of human and divine order. Such a world-view may not be at the forefront of the minds of most people as they think about the political order, social injustice or family planning. Such precisely is its power.

Nearly two decades later, the sheer scale and scope of this “power” is beginning to be acknowledged more clearly. For instance, Kale (2004) argues that issues pertaining to the complexities of global dynamics such as international trade and exchanges should
not be considered without examining the spiritual dimension; he writes (2004: 92):

"Spirituality and globalization affect one another and, together with other environmental forces (such as politics, technology and economics), determine the cultural milieu in which we live." Sustainable development is centrally concerned with each of these issues and more, and hence, exploring the impact of spirituality on sustainability is arguably a useful exercise.

While selecting a site for such an investigation, the ‘city’ was an obvious choice for several important reasons. The Brundtland Commission report (1987) was emphatic about the importance of sustainable city planning. Several other scholars have emphasised that sustainable cities are a vital starting point to ensuring sustainability in the regions and elsewhere (Newman and Kenworthy 1999; Beatley and Manning 1997). However even here, developing cities pose particularly serious sustainability concerns because of the rapid population explosion throughout the developing world. The extreme stress on the natural resources, combined with poverty and deprivation cause much tension and debate on what exactly sustainable development means under the circumstances.

Equally, however, cities are also exciting for another reason. Many studies in recent times have dwelt on the emergence of the spiritual in urban spaces (Davey 2005; Tanner 2004; Sheldrake 2001). Possibly as a response to the new challenges of increasing unsustainability in cities, spirituality has found new expressions and meanings in such sites. Thus, exploring any connections between urban spirituality and urban sustainability may lead to fruitful insights.

I chose the city of Delhi in India as a case study to explore the potential for an affirmative and productive interface between sustainable development and spirituality. Delhi is my home city; however, as explained later in the thesis, it is an important site for such a study in India. Spirituality, religion and tradition are an elemental part of Indian life, and hence, it would be misleading to ignore the spiritual dimension to development in India.

While I am doing nothing more than arguing that it is important to consider the spiritual dimension to sustainable development in the city of Delhi, I nevertheless have hopes
that others, in other sustainability contexts and based on other spiritual traditions, may also investigate the same question. Here, I am encouraged by a brief review of the literature on sustainability as it relates to various spiritual traditions and religions. However, further investigation into the global questions remains a task outside the scope of this thesis, so I will restrict the focus to the city and the spiritual traditions that I was born and raised in, and therefore, understand better.

1.3. Destination Delhi via Perth

It is relevant to devote this section to a brief explanation as to why I chose to write a thesis on Delhi, my birth city and my home, from Perth, Western Australia. Like Brata (1986: 7), I borrow Cavafy’s words as I attempt to describe my country and my people while “standing at a slight angle to the universe.”

I was born and raised in India and, during my school years, I have had the opportunity to live and study in four major Indian metropolitan cities: Delhi, Mumbai [formerly Bombay], Chennai [formerly Madras] and Kolkata [formerly Calcutta]. While I was born and raised Tamilian Hindu, these exposures lead me to begin to understand the rich diversity of Hinduism, and the diverse Indian culture as well the multifarious expressions of other religions throughout the country. I had the opportunity to experience closely my particular class and religious background in an academic manner, during my years at Padma Seshadri Bala Bhavan in Chennai. The approach to education, expressed through Sanskrit prayers, study, meditation and the guru-sishya [teacher and student] relationship is reminiscent of traditional Hinduism. Prior to this, I had already had the advantage of a spiritually based approach to study at the Mother’s International School in Delhi. The school was affiliated to the Aurobindo Ashram and advocated a system of living as taught by Sri Aurobindo and his disciple Mother Mira.

My interest in women’s issues crystallised during my undergraduate years at Lady Shri Ram [LSR] College at Delhi University. LSR believes in a strong feminist ethic and my personal awareness of women’s issues, agendas and reforms expanded greatly with every year. I was an active member of the Women’s Development Cell at LSR and in that time, was closely exposed to strong social, academic, political, cultural and
corporate women figures. Through my involvement with the National Social Service [NSS] in LSR, I was able to understand further the challenges facing child literacy programmes in India, battered women's organisations, and schools for the blind etc.

However, the most significant milestone of my academic and personal evolution was achieved when I studied for my postgraduate degree in Print Journalism at the Asian College of Journalism [ACJ], Chennai. An essential course module of the packed curriculum was 'Covering Deprivation', which essentially sought to equip young reporters to understand and report poverty. The study and field trips to remote and impoverished tribal villages brought home to me the vividness and the unimaginable complexity of development issues in India, and convinced me to take up further studies in the field.

Two reasons specifically brought me to Australia. In June 2002, after I completed my postgraduate course from the ACJ, I arrived in Melbourne and Perth as the first intern of the International Alliance of Women [IAW]. This opportunity exposed me to women's movements across Australia, New Zealand and the United States, as well as IAW's role as a lobbying organisation across the world, including in developing countries. The programme only whetted my appetite for more knowledge and understanding of these movements. However, I was constantly amazed, quite simply stupefied, that the Australian women I worked with – hardworking, kind, caring, warm and generous to me always – genuinely found the situation of Australian women distressing, while I practically thought of Australia as heaven. I truly found it impossible to believe that human lifestyles really could get any better than this. Clearly the development that I would have loved for India wasn't bringing the satisfaction and bliss I was convinced it should, but I still couldn't be wholly persuaded that there could be more.

The second, and perhaps more compelling reason to return to Australia the following year for a PhD was, quite simply, my desire to live in a first world city, and see for myself, what makes it "tick". While I come from an economically, socially and academically privileged background in India, I was very interested to see how living standards and lifestyles would be different in a developed country. Illiterate or educated, rich or poor, male or female, a developing country of a billion people is only all too keenly aware of the vast disparities in wealth, or the scarcity of resources and the
accompanying desperate fight for them. Even the 'privileged' middle and upper classes in India are often privileged only by their own standards.

I certainly wanted 'development' for India and the Indian people, whatever that meant. I was confused and needed some answers. Undoubtedly the masses of Indian people deserved a better physical standard of living. However, I could not ignore the whispers of the Australian women in my head: restless, discontent and anxious. There clearly was something more to development. The desire to fully experience the first world returned, and not surprisingly, Australia kept drifting to mind. I had loved Australia and the Australian people on my first trip. I liked their humour, admired their refusal to get worked up and smiled at the thought of being with them again. Thus convinced, I packed my suitcases and headed for the nearest Western city to India: Perth, Western Australia.

However, it was a single quote by Alan Atkisson, found accidentally during the preliminary, unsure stages of Web-based research into urban sustainability on one of my early research trips back to Delhi that inspired me to investigate spirituality particularly, as a critical missing factor in sustainable development, and as an enabling means in facilitating sustainability. Atkisson (2002) said:

We cannot go on, and we cannot stop. We must transform...the only institutions that have demonstrated continuity over millennia, are religions and spiritual traditions. So, while we must be intensely scientific, our future is also in need of a renewed sense of spirituality and the sacred.

As I stumbled into the bright Delhi sunlight, blinking at the city with new eyes, it seemed to me that it would be interesting, and possibly even necessary, to place Delhi within a framework that explores a conceptual framework where sustainable development may be grounded in spirituality. Religion and spirituality are centrally defining features of the lives of most Indians. However, it seemed that Atkisson was talking about taking a spiritual perspective that was as institutional as it was personal. If it was possible to apply such a perspective to the notion of sustainable development, and have development that was both scientific and spiritual in its approach, then it was well worth investigating the possibilities.
Interesting and important realisations came through and shifts in my own consciousness occurred while writing about a spiritually-entrenched society from arguably one of the most secularly-oriented countries in the world. Mainly, it allowed me to discover for myself personally, the distinction between spirituality and religion. As Tacey (2003) and Griffith (2003) have observed, Australians, for instance, are more willing to be generous to the notion of ‘spirituality’, while they may be quite hostile and suspicious of the concept of institutionalised ‘religion’. I myself had grown up quite impatient and rebellious against several of the ritual demands of traditional Hindu religion, even as it had also been a tremendous source of spiritual nourishment and solace. Understanding this distinction allowed me to locate myself comfortably within a spirituality in religion perspective, as against spirituality as opposed to religion framework. This position will be developed further in the context of locating the thesis itself within a framework of Hindu spirituality.

For the purposes of the thesis, spirituality is not to be confused with any of the following phenomena: spiritism, or the belief in the existence of forms other than matter, such as spirits, ghosts or angels; mesmerism or the trancelike state produced by the spiritual mentor on the subject to control their natural will-power (Singh 1959); spiritualism or the conviction in the possibility of the survival of the human personality, and the communication between the living and the dead; and hypnotism, where the subject is put through a state where awareness is suspended and he or she is vulnerable to the will of the mentor (Chance 2004).

1.4. Scope of Thesis

In order to explore the larger question about the potential of spirituality to animate the notion of sustainable development, I examine as a starting point, the possibilities for such a partnership in the city of Delhi, India. The broad issues on the interface between sustainability and spirituality are very complex; therefore, it is necessary to state explicitly the scope and goals of this thesis.
The case study explores the possibility that spirituality may be an animating mechanism for sustainability in the city of Delhi. I am particularly interested in considering how Hinduism may serve to inform a spiritual philosophy as it relates to sustainability in Delhi city. I choose an urban case study because city sustainability is argued to be critical to the success of almost all other sustainability strategies (Newman and Kenworthy 1999; Beatley and Manning 1997; Yanarella and Levine 1992). Cities, argue these scholars, are huge ecosystems in their own rights that sharply impact surrounding ecosystems. Ensuring the sustainability of the city is a vital strategy to enabling overall sustainability.

It also makes sense to use an Indian city as a case study. The recent forces of social change in India, variously called Westernisation, globalisation, Americanisation, and industrialisation have had their initial and keenest impact on its cities; however, it is also true that traditionally, it has always been the urban areas in India that have been the source of spiritual and religious revival (Raj Gandhi 1983). Hindu reform movements like the Brahma Samaj\(^4\) and the Prarthana Samaj\(^5\) began in cities such as Kolkata and Pune [formerly Poona]. Raj Gandhi writes (1983: 55):

> Paradoxically, Indian cities have always attracted the pundits who can reinterpret the sacred literature, and reformers like Vivekananda who can infuse new life in old scriptures. The revival of the old Sanskritic tradition and the changes of the old traditions have continued simultaneously in Indian cities.

Varma (2001: 19), for example, describes the creativity that characterises Delhi as its greatest “spiritual strength”, and says (2001: 19): “There is an enormous reservoir of spiritual energy among the people of this legendary city to inform our administrative,

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\(^4\) Social reformer and one of India's most renowned feminists Raja Ram Mohun Roy started the Brahma Samaj in Calcutta in 1828. He saw that it would be harmful and futile to ignore the wealth of scientific knowledge that had come to India through European colonisation (Kopf 1979). Roy was also deeply inspired by the ancient philosophical wisdom of Hinduism and sought to reform Hinduism and create a religious renewal based on the scientific temper of the times.

\(^5\) Keshab Chandra Sen started the Prarthana Samaj or the 'Prayer Society' in 1864 in Pune city in the western state of Maharashtra. Sen was inspired by European ideals of rationalism and social reform, and started the movement to purge Hinduism of its superstitions and backward rituals (Sharma and Sharma 2004).
economic and political decisions.” In this thesis, I explore the possibilities for Hindu spirituality to animate sustainable development in Delhi.

Certain caveats also need to be inserted on the subject of spirituality. Spirituality and religion may be understood, interpreted and practised in remarkably varied ways; however, it is logical to surmise that not all notions of spirituality may be useful to complement the notion of sustainability. Additionally, it will be futile and self-defeating to suggest that there is only one notion of spirituality that will serve sustainable development. Spiritually sustainable strategies, like sustainability principles, will have to be localised according to the culture, heritage and customs of the community that they are being designed for. Therefore, my examination of the potential of spirituality to animate sustainability in Delhi, takes Hinduism as an example of how it might be, not a prescription for how it must be.

Thus, the central theme that I will seek to explore is:

**Can spirituality assist in meaningfully and pragmatically interpreting and implementing sustainable development?**

To address this question, I will turn to a very specific site and consider a very specific spiritual philosophy, namely, Delhi city and Hinduism, to examine:

**What is the potential for Hindu spirituality in animating sustainability development in the citizens of Delhi city?**

The ensuing section serves as an overview of the structure of the thesis, and provides a brief summary of the ensuing chapters.

### 1.5. Structure of Thesis

The thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 2 makes a broad argument that the notion of sustainable development as it is commonly understood today is limited in its scope and application without an active acknowledgement of the spiritual dimension. It provides evidence to demonstrate that each of the contextual social, economic and environmental
aspects of sustainability would become more meaningful and benefit from an infusion of the spiritual aspect. It also considers a fourth dimension to enlivening sustainability, and this is particularly important in the context of exploring spirituality as an animating mechanism – the relation of the Self to sustainability.

In order to develop this argument, the chapter traces the emergence of spirituality as a post-secular construct. It is here that I make the distinction between spirituality in religion, as against spirituality as opposed to religion, and explain that in the context of my case study, it is the former that applies. This chapter also provides a definition of spirituality and spiritually sustainable development in the context of the thesis. It acknowledges that religion and spirituality may have its chauvinistic manifestations; however, intelligently chosen interpretations of these can only be to the benefit of sustainability.

Chapter 3 makes a strong case that city sustainability is a centrally important sustainability agenda. It also studies the city as a spiritually vibrant and meaningful space, and argues that cities are thus good sites for examining spirituality and sustainable development. The last part of the chapter justifies the reasons for choosing the city of Delhi as a worthy case study for this thesis, and provides an overview of some of the methodological approaches employed in studying the city and identifying the sustainability issues therein.

Chapter 4 provides an exhaustive overview of Delhi city from the specific twin concerns of urban sustainable development and the city’s spiritual heritage. It traces the history of Delhi’s urbanising efforts since independence in 1947, and broadly provides a sense of Delhi’s sustainability concerns under two categories: on the one hand, the biophysical and environmental aspects, and on the other, the social and political issues. Importantly, I use the concept of the green and brown environmental agendas while considering these issues.

The women I interviewed for my case study raised several of these issues. Chapter 5 contains the primary research of the thesis, in the form of the insights gained from interviewing twenty women involved in development work and planning in Delhi about their perspectives on spirituality and sustainability in the city. The chapter also provides
a justification for specifically choosing women informants, the methodological overview of the approaches employed to select the women interviewed and describes the process of analysis. The structure of this chapter mirrors almost exactly the pattern of the actual interviews, and first explores the women’s views on spirituality, followed by their perspectives on sustainable development. The third section then explores their views on the interface between the two. In the interviews, the women raised a variety of sustainability-related issues in Delhi; however, they unanimously point to the need to generate an individual and a collective sustainable mindset, and agree that spirituality may be a crucial way of achieving this in India.

Chapter 6 carries forward the explorations of Chapters 2 and 3 by reflecting on the arguments that spirituality may meaningfully inform sustainable development in the city of Delhi. First, it argues why considering the spiritual dimension to sustainability is so critical in the context of Delhi and India itself, and in particular, why considering the standpoint of Hindu spirituality may be useful. It also considers the tensions between India’s traditional history and secular present, and demonstrates how secularism in India may actually be sympathetic to notions of the spiritual and the religious. I propose an understanding of spirituality as it relates to sustainable development and as it may be informed by Hindu spirituality for Delhi, as well as understandings of spiritually oriented sustainable development. Lastly, through three examples raised from the themes of Chapters 4 and 5, I demonstrate how spirituality may meaningfully assist in enabling sustainability in Delhi.

Chapter 7 summarises the lessons from the case study and the conclusions of the thesis, and proposes that engaging with sustainable development in the context of spirituality may be a fruitful exercise in other sites as well.
2. Sustainability and Spirituality

2.1. Introduction

In the wake of the devastation wrought by World War II, ‘development’ became the dominant pursuit of most nation states. However, the unfolding of the development agenda has posed fundamental questions about its viability - on the one hand, in terms of its ‘sustainability’ – understood primarily in ecological terms but also increasingly through societal perspectives; and on the other hand, in terms of the implications of development for human spirituality. ‘Development’ presupposed a broadly enlightenment framework based on the secularising of social life; however, religious expressions and the yearning for some deeper spirituality have been enduring.

In this chapter, I will provide a historical overview of sustainable development as it has come to be understood today; however, I will restrict this account to essaying the milestones in development thought since the late 1940s and 50s. Pioneering revolutions in conceptualising economic development started after the two World Wars and following the establishment of the United Nations, to inform a new way of defining and implementing a vision of worldwide development. Broadly, this meant bringing ‘underdeveloped’ and ‘undeveloped’ nations to modern Western standards.

This concept of development, however, had difficulties. It particularly had two major impacts: the first was the unprecedented ecological degradation, and secondly, oddly, despite the best intentions, it did not relieve poverty, and on the contrary, appeared to intensify deprivation. Therefore, to address these concerns, a notion of development emerged that sought to restore the balance between the environment and the economy. This led to a reformulation of the notion of development into specifically, sustainable development.

After tracing the emergence of the concept of sustainable development, I will examine the value of grounding sustainable development in spirituality to enlighten further the understanding and practice of sustainability. Here, I will specifically uncover how
spirituality may reframe the relationship of human beings with nature, the economy, society, and lastly, with the self, in the context of sustainability.

I will then explore my second major theme by tracing the emergence of the notion of spirituality as a post-secular construct. In response to the limitations of a secularist discourse of development, there has been a surge of interest in ‘spirituality’ — much of this is not tied to religious traditions, practices and worldviews, but I believe that such a conceptual framework will be useful in the context of sustainability. In this thesis, I will be exploring the ways in which religiously based spiritualities can engage with and enrich the concept of sustainability. I therefore explore the distinctions and the interface between religion and spirituality, and propose an understanding of spirituality in religion, as against spirituality as opposed to religion, in the specific context of the thesis’ preoccupation, namely, sustainable development. The fifth and final section provides some of the key conclusions of this chapter.

2.2. ‘Development’ and its Challenges: Is Sustainable Development Enough?

The post-war era was a time when development issues and challenges in the newly decolonised countries of Africa, Asia and South America started to receive international attention (Meier 1984). These discourses were primarily economic in their concerns, since they arose out of a pragmatic need to address endemic poverty, hunger and deprivation in underdeveloped countries (Meier 1984). In 1949, American President Harry Truman explicitly named the poorer nations of the world ‘underdeveloped’. In effect, this negated and collapsed the wide cultural, social, natural and political differences between these countries of ‘the South’ and reinforced a worldview that all nations had identical development goals and were headed in the same direction, albeit at different stages and various paces (Banerjee 2003). It also established a relationship of dominance between the centres of ‘the South’ and ‘the North’ [West] in that the West defined notions of modernity and development, and capitalism became the means to achieve such standards of living.

However, during the modernisation period between the 1950s and 1960s (Hansen 1999), the interests of economic growth started to conflict strongly with issues of
environmental protection (Newman 1987). There was a deepening realisation of the impacts of unchecked economic development on the local and global environments. The costs of uncontrolled financial and corporate growth on natural systems were considered at length by authors such as Rachel Carson (‘Silent Spring’: 1963), Paul Ehrlich (‘Population Bomb’: 1971 and ‘Ecoscience: Population, Resources and Environment’: 1977), Barry Commoner (‘The Poverty of Power: Energy and the Economic Crisis’: 1976) and The Club of Rome’s ‘Limits to Growth’ (Meadows 1972). The development paradigm based solely on economic growth was brought into question when it became evident that progress based on the model of Western industrialised economies was not possible for all societies and cultures on this planet (Shiva 1993a). It was also increasingly recognised that the planet could not sustain development based on Western standards for all countries, and neither indeed, could the West itself sustain constant economic growth.

Natural ecosystems received a double blow from both the expansion of a capital model of economic growth, and from the developing nations because of their rapid and entirely unexpected population explosion. Sir Arthur Lewis (1984: 133) admits: “I think the biggest mistake development economists were making in the 1950s was to underestimate the likely growth of population. That the death rate might drop by 10 to 15 points per thousand over the next ten years never entered our heads.”

The clash between economic interests and environmental protection had significant implications for the developing world – Western development experts concluded that it would not be in the ‘global’ interests for the poorer nations to develop to the same standard of living as the West, since the planet appeared to be running out of natural resources to sustain their development (Newman 1987). Hardin (1974) and Pirages and Erlich (1974) formulated the now publicly discredited ‘lifeboat ethic’, which proposed that the planet’s lifeboat did not contain enough resources for all nations’ needs, and proposed that the rich nations should develop regulations which would prevent the poor countries from leaping onto the ‘lifeboat’ and sinking it. Hardin (1974) unhesitatingly held the nations of the South responsible for ecological degradation, acquitting the role

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6 Sir Arthur Lewis (1984) believes that the rapid population explosion of the 1950s and 60s in developing countries is responsible for the rapid urbanisation, as well as for the large rates of urban unemployment in such nations, which brings with it a host of social and environmental problems.
of the North in causing conditions for poverty and population explosion, and ignoring the fact that most of the global resource consumption and waste generation occurred in the North. The countries in ‘the South’ were home to the majority of the world’s poor people, who faced overall basic deprivation – food insecurity, land and water insecurity, inadequate health and nutrition, and little or no access to education.

Further, as Shiva (1993b) notes, these ideas framed the ensuing North-South debate such that the particular interests of the North shaped the dominant discourse on global environmental protection. She writes of the clever linguistic play of the call of Northern environmentalists to ‘Think Globally, Act Locally’ (1993b: 149-150): “The global does not represent the universal human interest, it represents a particular local and parochial interest which has been globalized through the scope of its reach.”

Despite its dominance, the “environmental elitism” of the North spawned a variety of imaginative ecological movements in the countries of the South (Davison 2001: 14). Prominent among these are the Chipko Movement in the Himalayan forests in India, the Green Belt movement in Kenya and the Zapatista movement in Mexico (Davison 2001). These movements were led primarily by the poor and particularly women, who depended directly upon the natural resources for sustaining their subsistence livelihood. The impact of development on women, and the complex gender dimensions that underpin it has been a focus of much feminist work [see Plumwood 1993 etc].

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7 The Chipko movement for instance, was founded in 1973 in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh in the Uttarakhand region [now a state in its own right]. This tribal region was, and continues to be one of the most impoverished in the country. The forest was the only available resource for the poor to sustain the livelihood of the poor tribal groups, and women and children particularly depended on it, since the men generally migrated to the plains in search of work (Weber 1987). In a staunchly united move to protect their forests from deforestation, the women literally wrapped themselves around the trees in the thousands to save the forests from bulldozers. The peaceful mass movement was strongly inspired by Gandhi’s Sarvodaya ideal [elaborated later in the thesis], to care for the environment, and to work with people (Weber 1987). The success of the Chipko movement demonstrated the success of non-violent environmental campaigns, as well as the exploitation of the world’s poor [and the environment] by the nations of the North (Weber 1987).

8 Val Plumwood’s theory (1993) linking the oppression of nature to the oppression of certain social groups, ‘disadvantaged’ on the basis of class, gender and race, is accurately reflected here. Plumwood notes that land, particularly, is used as an agent of exploitation for the purposes of economic development, where it is continued to be viewed through the colonial idea of terra nullius, as a resource “empty of its own purposes or meaning and hence available to be annexed for the purposes of those supposedly identified with reason or intellect, and to be conceived and moulded in relation to these purposes” (Plumwood 1983: 4). Plumwood’s theory of liberation proposes that when the “oppressions of gender, race, class and nature” are reviewed together, the findings could reveal and “shake the conceptual structures of oppression.
In the 1970s, two development planners proposed radical alternatives to existing economic policies [though again they did not centrally address the gender dimension to growth]. Schumacher (1974) suggested in his book *Small is Beautiful* that economics needed to have a moral and ethical basis, and he criticised neo-classical rational economics for being reductionist and narrow. Schumacher also stressed the importance of using small technologies. A year earlier, Herman Daly (1973) had also advocated steady state economics as a replacement to modern economics. Daly suggested that constant economic growth allows issues of distribution and equity to be ignored, and that sufficiency and maturity are implicit in the notion of growth – physical accumulation should allow physical maintenance, and growth in GDP should cease when marginal costs are greater than the benefits.\(^9\) Importantly, Daly (1973) was emphatic that development needed more relevant indicators of human wellbeing.

It is significant to note that the term ‘sustainable development’ was employed for the first time in 1972 in the UN Stockholm Declaration, and subsequently again in the Cocoyoc Declaration on Environment and Development in 1974 (Davison 2001). However, ‘sustainable development’ as a concept, as opposed to its use as a qualifying adjective, was not to gather pace until the 1980s.

At the start of that decade, the Brandt report, or the report of Independent Commission on International Development Issues (1980) acknowledged the link between environmental deterioration and poverty (Tomlinson 2003). The report also ushered in a new phase of the North-South dialogue when it was subsequently criticised for being both careless and arrogant in its use of phrases such as “Third World” and “underdeveloped” to categorise entire nations of Asia and Africa (Tomlinson 2003). In fact, India’s first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru coined the term ‘Third World’ in the

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\(^9\) During this period, three UN conferences on population and development, at Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980) and Nairobi (1985) coincided with the announcement of the UN Decade for Women from 1976 to 1985. The aim of the Decade was to evaluate the status of women of all member countries, and to provide advice and recommendations to the UN, international bodies and the governments of member countries, to improve the living and working standards of their countries (Anand 1992). However, Shiva (1993: 73) points out, because of women’s “enforced but asymmetric participation”, “they bore the costs but were excluded from the benefits”.

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context of the Cold War to describe those nations [such as India], which were neither
capitalist [or First World], nor communist [or Second World] (Trubek and Santos
2006). However, the term grew to have negative connotations associated with poverty
and backwardness, and Peter Worsley, who was responsible for introducing the notion
of the Third World into academic discourse later admitted (1984: 309):

…the nature of the Third World seemed so self-evident in the 1960s that in a book
on The Third World that I published in 1964, I saw no need to define it any more
precisely than it was the world made up of the ex-colonial, newly independent,
non-aligned countries.

By the 1980s, such language was unpacked for its neo-colonial assumptions, in the face
of the complex and disparate impacts of industrialisation and development across those
regions. In 1980, the concept of sustainability was implied in the World Conservation
Strategy, which was funded by the IUCN [International Union for the Conservation of
Nature], the WWF [World Wide Fund for Nature], and the UNEP [United Nations
Environment Programme]. The Strategy defined conservation as a method of preserving
the biosphere for the needs of both present and future generations of human beings
(Redcliff 1987). In Redcliff’s (1987) view, the idea of sustainability was strongly
promoted by the World Conservation Strategy. The Strategy was mainly preoccupied
with three objectives (Redcliff 1987: 20): use of agricultural land for growing crops
rather than raising cattle; “ecologically sound management of crops” and “protection of
watershed forests.” However, the South was not entirely convinced of the purportedly
altruistic intentions of the North. The 1982 UN Conference on Social Development
viewed the emerging environment perspective on development with suspicion, and
labelled it as ‘a Western scheme’ because it was perceived to be top-down in its
approach (Newman 1987). Moreover, the economic and political reasons behind current
unsustainability practices were hardly acknowledged in the Strategy (Redcliff 1987).

This awareness that new forms of behaviour, responsibilities and approaches were
required to implement a healthy, just, equitable and sustainable form of development
was steadily gaining cognisance. In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and
Development, headed by Mrs. Gro Harlem Brundtland, a former Prime Minister of
Norway, marked a significant shift in development thinking. The report concluded that
while development was certainly necessary to achieve basic human needs, it was important to accomplish this with an approach different to previous practices. Significantly, it pointed out the need for wealthy nations to ‘develop’ in a manner that eschewed increasing resource consumption and reduce the adverse impact on the environment (Brundtland Commission 1987).

Such a method of development was named ‘sustainable development’, and the Brundtland Commission defined it as follows in their report *Our Common Future* (1987: 87): “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” This definition of sustainable development calls for simultaneously contending with the dynamics of economic growth, the limited capacity of ecological systems to absorb the impact of human activities, and the need for social equity in the context of generating a stable human condition, under which alone both growth and sustainability of that growth will be possible. The primary recommendations of the Brundtland report (1987) were as follows: to change the quality of economic growth; to meet essential human needs, particularly in developing and underdeveloped nations; to maintain a sustainable rate of population growth; to ensure that both economic and environmental perspectives are equally considered in decision-making; to reform the nature of international economic relationships, and to foster international cooperation between countries.

Over the ensuing twenty years, the concept of sustainable development has met with much criticism, as several scholars believe that the term has become a platitude or a cliché (Drummond and Marsden 1999). While the sustainable development discourse has succeeded in mainstreaming environmental concerns within a political framework to a significant extent, Davison (2001) argues that the outcomes are far from satisfactory.

To explore these concerns further, I went to turn to a series of criticisms of the concept of sustainable development that point towards the ongoing need for the notion to be redefined and developed. The first of these concerns was the weakening of the environmental perspective in sustainable development. As Davison (2001) argues, while the integration of the environment and the economy might have been a “remarkable triumph for the environmental movement”, he believes that the language of sustainable
development has essentially “enabled a fundamental redefinition of these concerns” (Davison 2001: 12). The universalist scope of the notion, and its use to support a variety of agendas has in fact become its Achilles heel (Adams 1993). Davison believes that sustainability’s carrying power comes from the sense of efficiency that it conveys, and he quotes Winner on the myth of the notion of seemingly efficient methodologies (1986: 54, in, Davison 2001: 38):

Because the idea of efficiency attracts a wide consensus, it is sometimes used as a conceptual Trojan horse by those who have more challenging political agendas they hope to smuggle in. But victories won in this way are in other respects great losses. For they affirm in our words and in our methodologies that there are certain human ends that no longer dare to be spoken in public. Lingering in that stuffy Trojan horse too long, even soldiers of virtue eventually suffocate.

Further, Davison (2001) notes that the sustainable development catchphrase is possibly unsustainably flexible. By 1992, he points out that there were over seventy explications of the term ‘sustainable development’. He quotes Norgaard’s observation (1998: 607, in Davison 2001: 12) that when sustainability had started to mean “something different to everyone, the quest for sustainable development is off to a cacophonous start.”

A critical insight into the inherently conflicting nature of sustainable development has come from Drummond and Marsden (1999) who note that sustainable development’s emphasis on intergenerational equity is undoubtedly its unique focus; however, more often than not, it negates contemporaneous intragenerational inequity where the interests of several millions of the present generations are sacrificed in the name of a sustainable future.

Another contradiction was observed even earlier by Michael Redclift (1987) who noted that the notion of economic growth was problematic because while the poor nations of the world arguably needed economic development to raise themselves out of poverty, the idea of sustainable economic growth was questionable. He writes (1987: 56): “The concentration on ‘growth’ has served to obscure the fact that resource depletion and unsustainable development are a direct consequence of growth itself.” According to Redclift (1987), while international trade is justified on the grounds that it brings
desperately needed economic development to poor nations, it also causes the exploitation of environmental resources for short-range advantages. He points out (1987: 57):

Deteriorating terms of trade for poor countries have contributed to the clearing of rain forests to make way for export-led stock raising...the point is that decisions over the use to which natural resources are put are clearly influenced, directly and indirectly, by the trading patterns established by the developed countries.

Nearly two decades later, the same concerns continue to be voiced as James Lovelock (2006) makes a similar case, arguing strongly that it is fundamentally erroneous to believe that any further development can be sustainable at all, without causing severe ecological harm. He writes (2006: 3):

Two hundred years ago, when change was slow or non-existent, we might have had the time to establish sustainable development...but now it is much too late; the damage has already been done. To expect sustainable development or business as usual to be viable policies is like expecting a lung cancer victim to be cured by stopping smoking; both measures deny the existence of the Earth's disease.

Sustainable development, in Lovelock's view, must not only focus on the discontinuation of current unsustainable practices, but also invest deeply in reversing the trends of past unsustainable actions.

The question of technology is arguably critical to making development more sustainable. Davison (2001: 22) notes that if free-market economies and sustainability were to simultaneously occur, then this would depend on the "capacity of economic policy to direct wealth generation into more environmentally efficient technology." The Brundtland Commission report (1987: 8) itself admitted that some of the major challenges to sustainable development were caused by the current condition of "technology and social organization on environmental resources." The Brundtland report (1987: 217-218) suggested a "reorientation of technology", and believes that "technology and social organization can both be managed and improved to make way for a new era of economic growth" (1987: 8). However, in his comment on the
Brundtland report's observations on technology, Davison (2001: 25) notes that the report itself admits that "new" technologies are not intrinsically benign, nor will they have only positive impacts on the environment" (Brundtland Commission 1987: 219).

However as Davison notes (2001: 25): "Exactly what makes these technologies new or reoriented in relation to the history of unsustainable technological development is not clear." Moreover, while debates on environmentally friendly technology generally focus on industrial development, they obscure the fact that food production and agriculture has become an industry in rich nations, and increasingly so in developing countries, which have started to depend directly on energy and resource-intensive technologies in almost every sphere of production (Davison 2001; Brundtland Commission 1987).

The concept of sustainable development has also met with other criticism; prominent among these is the accusation that it does not adequately address the issue of social development. The Western Australian State Sustainability Strategy (WASSS: 2002) points out that the social dimension to the Brundtland definition is perhaps the weakest link, and that the most important need was to gain clarity on how best to consolidate social interests and needs into sustainable development. The WASSS (2002: 25) notes: "Significant attention and progress has been made in resolving the dilemma between environmental protection and development...much less progress has been made on resolving the social aspects of development." This gap needs to be closed, it says, because the society is the fount of ethics and visions for the future (WASSS 2002).\(^\text{10}\)

If ideas about society are a weak link in sustainable development thinking, ideas about women and gender are even weaker. In the discussions and debates I have canvassed to date, little attention has been paid to the gender dimension of development, including economic development. This is despite the extensive feminist scholarship that has also

\(^{10}\) It is important to mention that the incorporation of the social dimension more centrally into the notion of sustainable development, in fact, is derived from a far older debate on the dynamics between industrialisation and its impact on society. As Polanyi (1944: 103) wrote in his book *The Great Transformation*, economists at the time of the Industrial Revolution were generally united in their opinion that "pauperism and progress were inseparable." He argues that that the increasing rise in the numbers of the poor in eighteenth century England, led with some surprise, to the "discovery" of society (Polanyi 1944: 103). "It was", he writes, "in relation to the problem of poverty that people began to explore the meaning of life in a complex society...with the finality of an elemental event, a new set of ideas entered our consciousness" (Polanyi 1944: 85).
critically been interrogating the concept of ‘development’. In the early 20th century, Charlotte Perkins Gilman pioneered the concept of ‘eco-communities’ in her book ‘Herland’, which envisioned a utopian community in a geographical space blessed with few natural resources, but which lived by principles and practices like equity, recycling, clean technology, cooperation, citizen participation and community-lifestyles. Ester Boserup’s path-breaking work on *Women’s Role in Economic Development* (1970) noted that development based on the Western model was exploitative of women, and that capitalism was inherently patriarchal. This led to demands that development be planned in a gender-sensitive manner, such that women’s productive as well as reproductive roles were recognised.\(^{11}\) Subsequent research has urged repetitively the crucial need to consider women’s rights at the centre of development, in both defining the problem, as well as in articulating solutions (Shiva 1993a; Anand 1992).\(^{12}\)

Despite this long-standing complaint from feminist development planners that the gender perspective be centrally incorporated into development, the new sustainability model continues, in general, to ignore this concern. The Brundtland definition of sustainable development, for example, has been criticised because it does not give specific attention to the gender perspective (Shiva 1993a). Braidotti et al (1994) point out for instance, that the two issues of environmental degradation and population explosion, identified by the Brandt report (1980) as the greatest sustainability

\(^{11}\) However, it is important to note that the global women’s movement was neither united nor necessarily just in representing the cause of women worldwide. Feminists differed sharply in their views on the modernisation theory, which depicted traditional societies as authoritarian, conservative and male-dominated, and modern communities as democratic and egalitarian (Kishwar 1999). Third World feminists have since pointed out that this distorts and negates the reality of the lives and achievements of their women (Kishwar 1999). It also suppresses the fact that in most traditional societies, women had more rights prior to European colonisation (Joshi 2005). For instance, traditionally, women in parts of West Africa had more economic and social rights than their men until colonisation (Joshi 2005). In Nigeria, for example, women’s courts judged over social disputes and women determined market prices. Colonial rule demanded changes in agricultural patterns, and this brought about a negative change in the position of Nigerian women. Village economies suffered when men were forced to work in the mines during the colonial period. The position of women changed because when technology was introduced to men, the title deeds started to be made out in their names alone (Joshi 2005).

\(^{12}\) However, in the 1960s, international development continued to view women as beneficiaries of development and was focussed mostly on issues like population policies, family planning and literacy programmes, particularly in developing countries (Anand 1992). Over the next couple of decades, Anand notes (1992), women increasingly came to the realisation that they needed to organise, but separately – their issues merited acknowledgement and attention in their own right – and the women’s movement started to address development from their own perspectives. Boserup’s work was important in facilitating this shift in consciousness.
challenges in the coming decades, both involve women centrally. This is of particular concern for the developing world because as Shiva (1993c) notes, agriculture is possibly the single most critical means of ensuring a livelihood for a majority of the women from these countries, where most of the farmers are women. However, even mainstream sustainability arguments persist in viewing women as an ‘add-on’ to the overall sustainability problem (Braidotti et al 1994).

In this context, feminists have continued to emphasise the importance of gender sensitive planning policies, and draw attention to the issue of women’s rights and roles in the development agenda. In 1994, Cairo hosted the International Conference on Population and Development. Health issues, particularly reproduction, were connected to development, as part of the continued focus on demography. In more recent times, the Millennium Development Goals 2000 include an agenda to “promote gender equality and empower women” (World Bank 2004). The specific aims of this goal include a commitment to “eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and to all levels of education no later than 2015” (World Bank 2004).

With its emphasis on the more holistic concerns of women, feminist ethics may contribute to a richer and more effective form of sustainable development. Several

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13 Bitter debates have arisen, however, between the feminists of the South and the North, because the Northern feminists tend to squarely place the responsibility of population containment on the women of the South and see “sufficient justification for stringent population control measures directed mainly at women in the South” (Braidotti et al 1994: 89).

14 Two popular methods to assist the mainstreaming of gender in policies and institutions are the ‘Gender Impact Assessment’ and ‘gender proofing’ (Hafner-Burton and Pollack 2002). The Council of Europe (1998: 22, in, Hafner-Burton and Pollack 2002: 15) defines gender impact assessment thus: “Gender impact assessment has its roots in the environmental sectors and is a typical example of an existing policy tool being adapted for the use of gender mainstreaming. Gender impact assessment allows for the screening of a given policy proposal, in order to detect and assess its differential impact or effect on women and men, so that these imbalances can be redressed before the proposal is endorsed.” Gender-proofing, on the other hand, explain Hafner-Burton and Pollack (2002: 15), is a method to “identify unintended sexist language or differential effects of policy on women and men.” However, the disadvantages of such a system is it “constitutes an essentially reactive process, in which gender is taken into account before implementation, but after the conceptualization and planning of policy” (Hafner-Burton and Pollack 2002: 15).

15 For the first time, reproduction was considered in the light of giving women the power of making a choice, rather than the previous strategy of merely having fewer children.

16 There is the considerable danger of marginalising women’s issues precisely by seeing them as a ‘special case’ that concern only women and no one else. To this end, Stephen Lewis (2006), in his analysis of how AIDS is significantly a gendered experience in Africa, argues strongly that gender-mainstreaming has in fact, made it even more convenient to view women’s issues as
feminist philosophers have criticised social policies that are gender-neutral because they generally tend to represent values of institutions and practises that are operated by men, and they tend to assume a dichotomy between reason and emotion (DiQuinzio and Young 1997). In seeking to articulate sustainability solutions to problems that particularly affect women, it is important to develop strategies that consider “right action, social justice, and the human good out of the specifically gendered experience” of women (DiQuinzio and Young 1997: vii).17

In recent times, a further criticism of the sustainable development discourse has come from spiritual, religious and faith-based organisations, representative and believers, who argue that the notion of sustainability is incomplete and misguided without actively acknowledging the spiritual dimension to human existence. Tyndale (2005: 83) posits that spiritual and religious organisations have a vital contribution to development through “their insights into transcendental realities and values” so that they may use “their wisdom, inspiration and influence on the fundamental debate about the very nature of the global society we are creating, or should create.” The notion of the sacred in interpreting the meaningfulness of life is slowly but steadily gaining influence in development thought that has generally been largely secular. As Lovelock (2006: 138) writes of his notion of the Earth as Gaia or a living planet:

> Important concepts like God or Gaia are not comprehensible in the limited space of our conscious minds, but they do have meaning in that inner part of our minds that is the seat of intuition…crude they [the sacred texts] may be, but they serve to ignite an instinctive understanding of God and creation that cannot be falsified by rational argument.

Two events in recent times have contributed particularly in mobilising the recognition of the spiritual dimension to sustainable development. The first was the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders at the United Nations in 2000, which sought to clearly establish the link between religion and development.

17 Hafner-Burton and Pollack (2002) caution, however, that there is considerable risk of obscuring diversity in mainstreaming gender.
Subsequently, the ‘World Visions: Dialogue of Civilisations FES 2002’ colloquium in 2002 in Fez, Morocco preoccupied itself with specifically considering a spiritual perspective on development.

In the next section therefore, I explore the possible conceptual relationship between sustainable development and spirituality. I trace the developments that have led to the examination of such an interface at the level of both international development agencies, and faith-based organisations. I argue that spirituality has a vital role to play in strengthening and enriching sustainable development, and indeed should be seen as integral to achieving sustainability, and not merely as an optional add-on. Lastly, I explore the literature that has examined how spirituality may assist in three of the broadly understood dimensions of sustainability, namely, the environment, the economy; and the society. To these categories, I add a fourth, i.e. the self, or the individual consciousness and sustainable development.

2.3. Interpreting Sustainability Through Spirituality

*It takes time, quite a long time, to make a healthy, strong, public opinion which will solve its own problems... the whole problem of social reform, therefore, resolves itself into this: where are those we want to reform? Make them first. Where are the people?

- Swami Vivekananda (1918: 116)*

The Brundtland Commission started a very positive process in articulating a form of development that aimed to make the most judicious use of the planet’s limited resources, for the benefit of both the present and future generations. Enduring and steadfast human associations seem most effectively developed when society is harmonious and cohesive, with a healthy understanding of mutual values and aspirations. Therefore, the immediate question that arises when Vivekananda and Brundtland are considered together is fundamentally spiritual: where lies the motivation to be sustainable? Any society and its people, unless they are, in some way, spiritually well disposed to humankind and the environment, run the risk of becoming overwhelmed by a call for such a complex response such as the Brundtland proposal.
While at first glance, a connection between spirituality and sustainable development seems perhaps far-fetched, a closer examination would reveal that the central concerns of both are almost identical. Issues like social justice, welfare, tolerance and eradication of poverty are subjects that preoccupy both philosophies equally. For instance, faith and development perspectives have both been concerned with ethnic conflicts in Africa (Belshaw et al 2001). Marshall (2005: 51) writes:

Theologians from every religion have grappled with the whys and hows of poverty and misery, and faith institutions, every one, play a role in helping those in need and, in much more varying ways, working to overcome the underlying roots of poverty.  

However, even if the perspectives of religion and spirituality in framing sustainable development have been thus far regarded with suspicion [if not entirely ignored] by development planners internationally, the reverse seems true for religious and spiritual organisations for whom a high degree of participation in social service and development forms an integral part of their religious and spiritual practice. This patchy, troubled and generally unacknowledged relationship may be attributed to several reasons (Marshall 2005: 48-49): entrenched separation of the state and religion; lack of a “basic institutional structure” that allow institutions like development banks to relate to spiritual and religious institutions, and “the vocabulary and approach of spirituality” that may seem “inimical to the technical, hard-nosed approach of development practice.”

As early as 1988, religious organisations were using the language of sustainability, based on the Brundtland definition. For example, the Uniting Church, Synod of Western

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18 For example, the Islamic tradition of eschewing the practise of taking interest on loans is grounded in a social justice framework (Marshall 2005).
19 Marshall (2005) records for instance, that nearly half of the primary health care services in Uganda are provided by faith-based organisations, and in West Africa, Muslim schools provide most of the primary education. She notes that in all of Africa, faith organisations provide almost all of the care, counselling and awareness programmes for the prevention of HIV/AIDS.
20 This development may not necessarily be understood as sustainability; however, international platforms like the WFDD [World Faiths Development Dialogue], the WDR 2006 [World Development Report] and the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders in 2000 explicitly make the positive connection between spirituality and sustainable development.
Australia, in its 1988 ‘Statement to the Nation’ [which was developed further in its 1991 ‘Rights of Nature and Future Generations’] made a reference to sustainable development. They reaffirmed this a decade later (Synod of Western Australia 2001, 4, para 2):

We affirm our belief that the natural world is God’s creation; good in God’s eyes, good in itself, and good in sustaining human life. Recognising the vulnerability of the life and resources of creation, we will work to promote the responsible management, use and occupation of the earth by human societies. We will seek to identify and challenge all structures and attitudes, which perpetuate and compound the destruction of creation.

However, there have been marked cleavages in what might have been strategic partnerships between religious organisations and secular development agencies. Major international development organisations like the World Bank have often come under bitter attack from faith-based organisations for their policies on Third World debt, family planning, structural adjustment regulations, and cost recovery guidelines for services like water, health and education among other things (Marshall 2005). In their turn, the Bank for instance, has traditionally been reluctant to associate itself with a spiritual dimension to development, primarily because of the perceived divide between spirituality and economics, the latter being critical in formulating the Bank’s policies (Marshall 2005). The Bank also focussed on building relationships with governments, and as a result, ignored civil society as a whole (Marshall 2005).

In an attempt to bridge the gap between sustainability and spirituality, the World Faiths Development Dialogue [WFDD] was created in February 1998 to stimulate a discourse on the link between faith, spirituality and sustainability at the levels of national and international development organisations worldwide (WFDD 2003). Such a dialogue was the fruit of collaboration between James D. Wolfensohn\(^{22}\), then President of the World

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\(^{21}\) This attack became particularly strong during Jubilee 2000, a bold international coalition that demanded the cancellation of debt from poor countries. While the major financial institutions attempted to negate the issue by arguing that the intricacy of international debt was not understood, the crusade gained force and captured the imagination and intelligence of both religious and philosophical leaders worldwide (Marshall 2005).

\(^{22}\) In an interview, James Wolfensohn stressed that he was personally sympathetic to the partnership between faith-based organisations and the Bank in addressing development issues,
Bank and George C. Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury. Leaders from nine of the major world religions – Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Taoism, Baha’i, Jainism, Judaism and Sikhism participated. The primary agenda of this conference was the abolition of global poverty. Such a paradigmatically radical way of thinking fuelled much scepticism and debate; Tyndale (2003: 3) observes that institutions generally tend to resist thinking in socio-philosophical terms. She writes (2003: 3): “The danger is that this may lead to a lack of understanding of the need for a holistic view of development, a failure to see that, unless the process of development incorporates all aspects of life, it will remain fragmented, incomplete and therefore unsuccessful.” However, the WFDD also firmly opened the avenue to consider an important alternative approach to development.\(^{23}\) Tyndale (2003: 4) writes:

As the WFDD has pointed out many times in the past, unless due attention is paid to the different ways in which people give meaning to the world and their existence in it, and to the ways in which they order their societies and run their economies, even narrowly focused poverty eradication projects will fail. There are too many examples of how “development” interventions have been unsuccessful or even caused damage, precisely because the culture of the “beneficiaries” has been disregarded.

Marshall (2005) notes that the word ‘dialogue’ in the title is important as it underlines the need for a respectful exchange of ideas between development and spiritual institutions, and also between the different faiths themselves. Importantly, ‘dialogue’ is an important method of nurturing the relationship between faith-based and secular organisations, both of which are interested in sustainable development. ‘Dialogue’ presents the opportunity for conversations with the other, and allows the possibility to

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\(^{23}\) The initial efforts of the WFDD have met with considerable success and approval from development planners, faith institutions and communities globally. There is a myriad of religions, spiritualities and faiths serving communities worldwide, and it is appropriate that an international organisation representing various ideologies and philosophies will take on the challenges of development and poverty in culturally diverse regions of the world. While there are likely to be differences in values among these organisations on certain issues – for example, abortion – there remains strong mutual interests that can knit diverse viewpoints together in an atmosphere of goodwill and by sustaining the focus on the larger cause.
be willing to be convinced. The WFDD has undertaken important global initiatives to increase knowledge and findings about the positive connection between spirituality and development. These include the substantive research on the World Development Report 2000-2002, published by the World Bank, which elaborates a framework for a different approach to development, involving building on the trinity of “opportunity, empowerment and security” (WDR 2006). Another major activity was the UN invitation to organise and lead workshops on poverty, spirituality and development at the Millennium World Peace Summit for Religious and Spiritual Leaders in New York in August 2000.

These are some of the ways in which formal partnerships between spiritual and secular institutions are emerging to jointly address the challenges of sustainability. It is useful, however, to be conceptually clear about how spirituality can meaningfully enlighten the notion and practice of sustainable development. In the next section, I explore this conceptual interface by surveying that literature where similar connections have already been made. As I have demonstrated, sustainability is a richly complex, layered concept; however, for essentially utilitarian purposes of drawing out the connections between the notion of sustainable development and spirituality, I shall examine how spirituality has been proposed as a way of informing the environmental, economic and social aspects of sustainability. I also take the view that meaningful sustainability depends critically on individual resolve and I propose that human beings need a new context in which to understand themselves, and their individual relationship and responses to the sustainability narrative. Therefore, I will follow these sections with another examining how other scholars have suggested that spirituality may deeply inform the self, and why this is important for a ‘sustainable self’ (Crawford 1993).

*Environmental Sustainability and Spirituality*

Two hundred years of modernising industrial development has reinforced the belief that humanity is disconnected from nature, and that it is in fact, superior to it. Yet the progressive ‘mastery’ of natural environments has resulted instead in major ecological imbalances causing depletion of natural resources and water, air and land pollution. Shiva (1993a) demonstrates that this was a result of a development that was solely measured in terms of GNP [gross national product]. This indicator effectively hides the
environmental destruction and the simultaneous creation and enhancement of poverty that is an offshoot of such a form of development. For example, she says, deforestation is justified to promote economic growth, even though it results in a depleted ecosystem, and impoverishment of communities that depend directly on its produce (Shiva 1993a).

Governments and international development agencies have thus far arguably shown a disturbing lack of ability to address environmental disasters through economic, social, political or scientific approaches. What is particularly frightening is their incompetence in dealing with growing corporate terrorism and their mounting colonisation of the environment. The Bhopal gas tragedy of 1984 in India, described as “the worst industrial disaster in the history of the world” illustrates with distressing clarity governments’ ineffectiveness in dealing with corporate malfeasance (Bhopal Disaster 2006). Shiva (1993a) points out that environmental disasters of this scale affect the future generations in ways more deadly and alarming than it does the present generations.

Environmental philosophers have argued for alternative, more morally satisfying and fulfilling ways for human beings to relate to nature (Callicott and Ames 1989). Environmental conservation efforts within the sustainability paradigm similarly need to respond to the current environmental crisis using a variety of creative inputs, including from spiritual sources (Gottlieb 1996). Kaza and Kraft (2000: 5) correctly note, for instance: “Since many ecological problems will not be solved in our lifetimes, commitment must be sustained more by equanimity than anxiety.” In her inspiring call to nature activists against giving in to hopelessness and fear, Joanna Macy (2000: 254)

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24 Forty metric tonnes of methyl isocyanate was released from a Union Carbide pesticide plant, located right in the heart of the capital city of Bhopal in central India, in the early hours of 3rd December 1984. This toxic release killed thousands immediately, and severely maimed up to 600,000 individuals. A report released by the BBC in November 2004 affirms that contamination is still present. It was later established that the U.S.-based Union Carbide had exported “untested, unproven technology to the Indian plant.” Carbide paid only US $470 million for the damages instead of the demanded US $3 billion, and the Indian government demurred from presenting a more powerful case for the extradition of the CEO Warren Anderson, since it did not wish to alienate foreign investors who were becoming important actors within the Indian economy. It was later established that very little of the damages went to the victims of the tragedy and the citizens feel betrayed by both the company as well as the ineffectiveness of the government to stand up for them. The reports of the Indian Council of Medical Research in 1990 reveal high rates of miscarriages, stillbirths, gruesome birth deformities and infant mortality from the pregnant women who were exposed to the gas leak in Bhopal (Bhopal Disaster 2006).
urges the importance of action, and describes such vitality as a "moral imperative, its an awakening to our true nature, a releasing of our gifts."

Increasingly, environmental thinkers also believe that a spiritual view of nature needs to be underpinned with a scientific or a practical view of nature, and have established a strong link between morality and care for the ecology (Palmer 1998; Kinsley 1995). Michael Polanyi (1958, in, Primavesi 1998: 74) in fact proposes that deeper scientific understanding of the universe actually enhances creative ways of relating to nature and the greater cosmos; a deepened understanding completely alters our perception, and makes it impossible to view the world, or ourselves, as we did before.

James Lovelock (1979) uses a framework similar to Polanyi’s theory to promote a sacred awareness as well as a scientific awareness of the notion of the Earth as a living organism, Gaia, named after the ancient Greek earth goddess. Lovelock (2006) admits that Gaia is conceptually difficult to comprehend, particularly for pure scientists; he describes Gaia as a “physiological system because it appears to have the unconscious goal of regulating the climate and the chemistry at a comfortable state for life”. However, he points out that it nevertheless “operates within a set of bounds or constraints” (Lovelock 2006: 26). Lovelock believes that recognising these limits is crucial for an intuitive understanding of the Gaia hypothesis. While Lovelock had not specifically intended that his religious name for a fundamentally scientific theory would widely awaken religious and spiritual consciousness for environmental and earth care, the Gaia concept’s carrying power came precisely from the fact that it developed into a quasi-religious narrative (Primavesi 1998; Lovelock 1995). Likening the Earth Gaia to the mythological Gaia, he says in an interview (1988, in Kinsley 1995: 192):

[The mythic Gaia] was very like most of the early Earth goddesses: at once kind, gentle and nurturing and all the rest of it but, at the same time, a stern and unforgiving bringer of death to all who transgress...and this fits exceedingly well with the scientific picture, actually, which is of a balancing system that is quite ruthless about species that don’t obey the rules. They are just eliminated. And that’s how the system keeps the environment constant, I think. Those who keep the environment fit are fit to survive, and those who don’t are not.
It may be noted that the notion of the Earth as a living being, or as a Mother to all living beings, forms part of ancient spiritual thought, in both Indigenous and Eastern cultures (Kinsley 1995). A verse of the *Atharva Veda* says for instance: “The Earth is the Mother, I am son of the Earth. The rain-giver is my father, may he shower blessings on us” (Chatterjee, n.d.). Lovelock (2006) himself notes that the Earth as Gaia is also represented in the incarnation of Kali, the goddess who destroys harm-doers, but rewards and nurtures the deserving.

Reassuringly, there is a steady rise of individuals beginning to take an increasing interest in the spiritual meaning of the natural environment. Daly (1996: 445) notes the “virtual explosion of public interest and concern about the effects of human life and activity on the planet” and proposes that a spiritual perspective is a helpful way of understanding this. This is because he says with massive numbers of *individuals* taking an interest in preserving the natural environment on an everyday basis, the issue has “clearly taken on a moral relevance”.

Cultural and feminist geographers have attempted for some time to deconstruct the profound impact that natural landscapes have on the human psyche (McDowell 1999; Wright 1966, in Singh 2005). They conclude that some physical landscapes stimulate in human beings an inspiration or an awakening that may eventually lead to their ‘completeness’ (Wright 1966, in Singh 2005). Even from a less spiritual perspective, Macbeth (2000: 23) observes that there is an “underlying utopian ideal” that motivates people to specifically “get closer to nature, trying to reconnect with some idealised view of the ‘primitive’.”

Wilderness or physically demanding geographies may dramatise piety or devotion to the environment. Here, it is relevant to consider Singh’s term (2005: 1) “geopiety”, which she describes as faith in the notion of the geographical as spiritual or geo-spiritual. Geopiety suggests the inter-relationship between land, human and reverence. Singh (2005: 4) writes: “Embedded within the theme of geo-religion is the aspect of geopiety that typically relates to the sense of reverence (pious emotion) evoked by the wonder (or even terror) of the earth in all its diversity.”
Singh (2005) explains how even the most ordinary structure, animal or human contact can be charged with meaning in a specific space and time. This occurrence is similar to a deeply religious experience. Wright (1966, in Singh 2005: 4) refers to the heightened spiritual awareness as a result of geographical stimuli as “georeligion”. He writes (1966: 251-52):

Georeligion is religious awareness…concerning any manifestation of geodiversity. It is religion that has to do with geographic actualities. Geography having to do with religious actualities (that is the geodiversity of religion and associated phenomena) has usually been called “the geography of religion” or more ambiguously, “religious geography”.

Cooper (1998) proposes that a spiritual perspective of the natural environment also allows aesthetic appreciation of nature or “fulfilment of capacities to understand, reflect and appreciate. In a low-key sense of the term, people seek ‘spiritual’ fulfilment in exercising such capacities” or “that in aesthetic appreciation, a person’s ‘spiritual’ aspect is engaged” (1998: 100). Daisetz Suzuki (1973: 363, in Cooper 1998: 111) went so far as to say that, “appreciation of beauty is at bottom religious…without being religious, one cannot detect…what is genuinely beautiful.”

While one might take issue with Suzuki’s claim, it is worth considering Cooper’s (1998) argument that aestheticism, or what may be considered a spiritually stimulated appreciation of natural beauty, may motivate people to preserve and care for the environment in an entirely different way to utilitarian, exploitative or selfish motivations. This also finds some resonance in Thomas Berry’s (1999) theory that the victors of the environmental conflict will determine the quality of the future, some of whom see nature as a commodity, and the others, who consider nature to be community. Viewing nature as community may arguably be linked to seeing the self in the other [which will be further elaborated later], and seeing the self in nature may be an extension of the aesthetic appreciation of nature.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{25} Some scholars find the aesthetic appreciation of nature a shallow basis to rest environmental protection, because beauty is viewed to transient and fragile; they prefer reasons like respect or compassion (Lee 1995, in Cooper 1998). Hume (1965, in Cooper 1998) points out that all human beings may not equally or similarly appreciate natural beauty. He also comments that if aestheticism alone was that important, then plastic plants might easily replace live plants. However, the importance that natural aestheticism receives in several cultures cannot be
More immediately, it is important to consider that peace with the Earth is critical for peace with the self, and therefore, reconciling with the Earth instead of colonising it is a prerequisite for sustainable and peaceful human lives. Ecofeminist Patricia Mishe once famously remarked: "Peace on Earth cannot be realized without peace with Earth" (Lippe-Biesterfeld and van Tijn 2005b: 266). Such a view emphasises the essential interrelatedness. Similarly, Bookchin (1989) criticises the view that civilisation and wilderness are mutually exclusive. He argues (1989: 24), "nearly all ecological problems are social problems" and believes that correctional methods must therefore come from social sources. Erricker (2001b: 113) argues: "Spiritual life is embedded in community." Spiritually may be said to be a naturally available means and medium in society, to animate and make meaningful the notion of environmental sustainability. Several other studies have traced contemporary social and ecological malaise, anguish and helplessness to a lack of connection with the sacred (Tacey 2003; Van Ness 1996).

The world's major religions – Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, Baha'i and others have responded to the growing concern for the environment. At the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1993, the main agenda included addressing appropriately the ecological crisis (Kaza and Kraft 2000). Spiritual leaders who are actively engaged with development argue that a spiritual growth will help restore respect and care for other human beings as well as for the natural environment on the planet Earth (Dalai Lama 2001). However, sustainability also, in its turn, needs to recognise that there is potential for a positive partnership with spiritual and faith-based organisations and representatives in an effort to protect and conserve the environment. As regards environmental sustainability specifically, this means identifying and opening up new forms of interactions with nature that are not based on subjugation and control, but equality and harmony. Lovelock writes (1979: viii):

"We need to love and respect the Earth with the same intensity we give to our families and our tribe...our contract with the Earth is fundamental, for we are a part of it and cannot survive without a healthy planet as our home.

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ignored: for instance, the art of flower arrangement in Japan. Therefore, argues Cooper (1998), while aestheticism certainly cannot replace other models of environmental protection, it deserves consideration while attempting to be "ecologically enlightened" (1998: 100).
Consciously protecting the Earth and its natural resources depends fundamentally on inculcating a spirit of non-violence. In the face of the current global environmental crisis, Mahatma Gandhi’s principles of *ahimsa* or non-violence are very relevant to the notion of environmental conservation. Gandhi was emphatic that the principle of non-violence needs to be equally applied to both human beings and non-human life (Narayanan and Marinova 2006). For instance, his firm stand on vegetarianism assumes new relevance in a world plagued by fundamentalism, hatred, strife and aggression, and puts forth the possibility that vegetarianism and access to plant-based nutritive foods are an important step to spiritually-based sustainable development. Essentially, mutilating the environment for any purpose that serves our greed is antithetical to spiritually-based sustainability. Gandhi (1954: 15) maintained: “Spiritual progress does demand at some stage that we should cease to kill our fellow-creatures for the satisfaction of our bodily wants”.

Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess’s eight principles of deep ecology were inspired by Gandhi’s interpretation of *ahimsa* (Lippe-Biesterfeld and van Tijn 2005). These are (Lippe-Biesterfeld and van Tijn 2005: 212-213): both the human and the non-human have innate value, and the value of non-human lives is not to be determined solely by their usefulness to humans; diversity of natural life is a value in itself; humans do not have any right to risk this diversity, except to the extent that it serves their needs [rather than desires]; the present nature of human relationships with the non-human world is one of exploitation; the flourishing of non-human life requires a decrease in human population; change in basic life conditions require corresponding changes in institutional structures such as economical, technological and ideological [emphasis mine]; “the ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of intrinsic value)...there is will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.” Lastly, Naess says, the intention should be to leave all forms of natural life as undisturbed and unharmed as possible (Lippe-Biesterfeld and van Tijn 2005).

Spirituality and religion have not always been considered to have a compatible relationship with environmental protection; in fact, influential commentators such as Lynn White Jr. (1967) have accused the Judea-Christian tradition of being the root
cause of environmental disasters. However, Witoszek (2006) warns that damning religion and spirituality altogether can only be self-defeating. Instead, the revival of interest in the religious and spiritual worldwide has the potential to revive both the environment and human beings. White (1967) himself believed that if the causes of environmental degradation are religious and spiritual in nature, the solutions must also similarly come from these sources. Mahatma Gandhi, on the other hand, was emphatic about making the positive association between religion and environmental politics, and he prescribed the spirit of Sarvodaya as a principle of eco-spirituality (Singh 2000). The concept of Sarvodaya treats the whole world as one family – Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, and this family included non-human life forms as well.

Much of international politics and global inequality revolves around the unequal distribution and access to natural resources. Gandhi expanded on the notion of ‘vasudhaiva kutumbakam’ from its immediate connotations of equality of all life to promote the principle of trusteeship, or equal rights and responsibilities to all the natural resources of the world (Iyer 1990). The notion of trusteeship would be the foundation of a world built on equal economic wealth distribution, and essentially meant that all of the natural wealth of the world is common property, and all citizens are merely its trustees (Iyer 1990). Hence the wheat of India, the minerals of Australia or the marine resources of Japan are all common property of all the people of the world. Within a sustainability framework, this would put the onus of protection of all environmental resources on all the peoples of the world. Gandhi was also a passionate advocate of swadharma or the Hindu belief that every natural thing has the right to grow and evolve according to its nature (Iyer 1990).

It is the acknowledgement of this natural organic nature of all life that needs to be restored as part of a sustainability consciousness. Thomas Berry, in his book The Great Work (1999) concludes that the wealth of highly sophisticated scientific knowledge of contemporary civilisations has caused human beings to view the universe, natural resources and non-human life forms unemotionally, as ‘objects’. He argues that spiritual

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26 Singh (2000) quotes Lyn White, for instance, who speaks of Christianity as an "anthropocentric religion" and says that "Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt" for its role in creating environmental crises (Singh 2000: 150).

27 Religious and spiritual peace movements are common in countries in some civic or political strife, such as the United States, Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia and several countries of Southern Africa.
knowledge and understanding of nature is essential to establish a meaningful and fulfilling relationship; he is emphatic that this will not occur based on solely scientific knowledge. King (2005) argues that a radical, pragmatic revolution in spiritual consciousness is urgently needed to respond effectively to the behemoth of ecological crisis.

As noted earlier, globally, there is a rise in individual citizens acting on their concern for the appalling state of the natural environment. This reflects a steadily emerging collective consciousness that is ready to take a stand on reversing the destructive trend. King (2005: 2) points out that while currently the planet is admittedly far more vulnerable to destructive human intervention, there is also far greater ecological consciousness of "one planet," and a far stronger collective concern for the environment than ever in history. This emerging oneness of consciousness, she proposes, augurs well for a cooperative discourse on an "ecologically balanced spirituality." The "transformative potential of spirituality" may be used to constructively channel the slowly growing sense for the ecology in spirit, into collective responsibility for the ecology in action (King 2005: 2).

Demonstrating collective responsibility through united understanding and sympathy for the natural environment extends itself to 'giving back' to the ecological systems. Abram (1996) considers the ethic of reciprocal responsibility within the framework of human beings' relation with the natural environment. He believes that there should be "an appropriate flow of nourishment, not just from the landscape to the human inhabitants, but from the human community back to the local earth" (1996: 7). Our current artificial relationship with nature, where we place ourselves outside the boundaries of a free-flowing, respectful and intimate closeness, is the cause of a systematic imbalance that

26 Patrick Holden, director of the Soil Association of the UK points out, for instance, that farming and agriculture may truly become sustainable only if practices are combined with a spiritual awareness of the connection between "the soil and the soul" (Robinson 2004: 1). He argues that if this awareness is dulled by purely reductionist thinking and approaches to farming, this would lead to intensive degradation of the environment through heavy use of chemicals as fertilisers and pest control, genetic food modification etc., which would in turn have adverse impacts on human beings (Robinson 2004). However, an expanded consciousness of both human beings and the land as parts of a greater whole, and an awareness of a more meaningful possibility of existence, would contribute to greater environmental protection. In the context of environmental sustainability, this is an important insight, since truly sustainable development must be supported by both genuine intention, as well as genuine action.
upsets the emotional and physical health of the human community, within itself and within the ecological context that encompasses it.

However, as previously established, environmental protection is inextricably interwoven with issues of economic development. A metamorphosis of attitudes and values is necessary for a transformation from greed-driven economic development, into truly sustainable economic development, which has restraint, sustainable consumption and equitable distribution of wealth as its central principles, and through these ensures protection of natural resources. Therefore, I will consider how a spiritually based approach to economic sustainability might assist in ensuring outcomes that do not compromise principles of environmental protection or social justice.

**Economic Sustainability and Spirituality**

Sfeir-Younis\(^ {29} \) (2001) puts forth five arguments as to why it is imperative for economists to begin considering spirituality while planning economic development. Firstly, individuals and societies are increasingly demanding that such a perspective be considered while developing economic policies, since they are disillusioned with the adverse impacts of existing economic policies, such as rising poverty, a widening gender-divide, ecological degradation, and war and violence. Secondly, he points out that contemporary economists are dealing with challenges that are multidisciplinary in nature, often with ethical and moral nuances. Thirdly, economic policies are not “neutral” to issues like social justice, equity and governance, and therefore, one cannot dismiss the strong influence they exert on these aspects of healthy sustainable development. Fourthly, he points out that civil society — mostly represented by non-governmental organisations, spiritual and religious movements, businesses and academia — has taken a lead in attempting to “humanise” economics: it’s time to refocus again on “human being”, he says, rather than “human knowing”, “human wanting” or “human doing”. Lastly, he emphasises, economics must become “the science of the collective” in a globalised world. This is because, he says, most challenges faced by

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\(^ {29} \) Prof. Alfredo Sfeir-Younis retired as the Senior Advisor to the board of Managing Directors of the World Bank in 2005. Prior to that, Prof. Sfeir-Younis spent nearly twenty-seven years in the World Bank in various capacities. Establishing the link between economics and spirituality is one of his key areas of interest.
individuals have collective and global solutions, brought on by the “experience of interconnectedness” of globalisation.

This brings forth the obvious question: what is spiritually-based sustainable economic development? To answer this, Clark’s definition of spiritual economics is useful. He defines it as “not a discussion of things purely spiritual, but a department of science that considers forms of material wealth that minister to spiritual wants” (Clark 1880: 307). Both pure economics and spiritual economics focus on the concept of abundance, but the principles are markedly different – material abundance is achieved by accumulation; spiritual profit is earned by giving away generously (Clark 1880). In contemporary times, spiritually based sustainable economic growth may be understood as that form of economic progress that takes cognisance of both the physical as well as the mysterious, unknown aspects to living (Berry 1988), and enables both a healthy body and mind through care for nature. Excessive material affluence and consumption, for instance, has no impact on increased human happiness and contentment (Hamilton and Denniss 2004), and has adverse impacts on the environment, and therefore, is not spiritually sustainable economic growth.

However, people do need to be satisfied materially in order for them to be able to advance, and not retard, the spiritual growth of their local and global communities. Mahadevan (1967: 154) writes: “A certain measure of economic security is essential…to keep body and soul together. There is no virtue in poverty.”

Traditional religious texts have pointed out that spiritually sustainable economic growth is not consonant with no economic activity, for this is needed to raise the poor out of inhumane living conditions; however, excess, unsustainable indulgence of the material realm, without justifiable need, is to be avoided.

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30 In the Dhammapada (No. 203), for instance, the Buddha said, “one of the causes of immorality and crimes is poverty [dalidive]…rulers should find ways to raise the economic standard of the people” (Rahula 1978: 33, in Mendis 1994: 198). However, in Dhammapada No. 204, the Buddha also said: “Health is the highest gain, contentment is the greatest wealth” (Mendis 1994: 198). Implicit in this is the view that human welfare must be measured in material and physical terms, as well as spiritual terms. The Hindu texts, the Purusharthas explicitly state that material well-being is vital to enable spiritual well-being, even though complete absorption in material life will lead to misery (Kuppuswamy 1977). Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, statesman and philosopher (2005: 192): “Absorption in the mechanical and material sides of life leads to a
An economy which functions purely on the basis of growth and profit will ultimately produce a society sharply divided by wealth and income, as is already evident. Sfeir-Younis (2001) points out that the pursuit of purely material-based economics has polarised the world into the rich and the poor, and that this gap is becoming alarmingly larger. Gandhi emphasised that most economists made laws and policies for the wealthy, and to them, he would always offer protest (Iyer 1990). He said: “If an economist did not investigate the laws of God and show them how to distribute wealth so that there might not be poverty, he was a most unwelcome intrusion on the Indian soil” (Iyer 1990: 100). If economics was not compatible with principles of social justice and equality, then Gandhi did not consider it ‘true’ economics. He wrote (1921, in Weber 2004: 224):

True economics never militates against the highest ethical standard just as all true ethics, to be worth its name, must at the same time be also good economics…true economics stands for social justice; it promotes the good of all equally, including the weakest, and is indispensable for decent life.

However, modern economic development has capital accumulation as the single most important indicator of success, and such a conception has arguably lead to exploitation of the socially and politically weaker peoples of the planet. Sfeir-Younis said (2001): “Economics, as a major source of diseases and unhappiness must be challenged accordingly. Economic values and economic decisions permeate almost all we do in this global society and, as a consequence, we see major dysfunctionalities at all levels.” The healing of society would occur, he maintains, only when economics and spirituality are reconciled (Sfeir-Younis 2001).

Reconciliation of economics and spirituality may only occur when solely material concepts of progress are discarded in favour of development that supports satisfaction of both physical, as well as self-actualisation needs. Gandhi (Iyer 1990: 97) wrote:

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31 The Bhagwad Gita instructs that the true seeker of spiritual knowledge has to engage with dhyana yoga or meditation to overcome the desire for wealth and pleasure. The Gita explains that such a practise of spiritually sustainable lifestyle must be satatam, or constant (Radhakrishnan 2005: 192).
"That you cannot serve God and Mammon is the economic truth of the highest value”. Sustainable communities require economic justice, as much as economic development. This essentially calls for a society that appreciates and values the labour contribution of all individuals, abled or disabled, male or female, and of any ethnic background. Sfeir-Younis writes (2001), “(w)e are not ‘material beings’ having a spiritual experience, but ‘spiritual beings’ having a material experience”.

However, it has also been put forth that healthy and balanced individuals depend on material and economic inputs to achieve spiritual fulfilment. Clark (1880: 305) wrote:

If men were purely material, physical nourishment would suffice for them; but spiritual natures require spiritual nutriment. If what furnishes this nutriment were a purely immaterial thing, it would, as such, be removed from the domain of wealth, and thus from the field of economic science, but it is not so. It has, in fact, a material basis, and falls within the limits of the economist’s studies.

Thus work, which forms the central means of barter within economics, assumes a higher implication in the value system of spiritual economics. Spangler (1983) comments thus:

To work lies at the heart of being human. It is a gift itself, the gift of being productive, of honing our talents, of expressing our creativity, of enriching the whole of which we are also a part…in a physical economy, we seek work as necessary for survival; in a spiritual economy, work is necessary for growth.

For Mahatma Gandhi, the concept of work within economics was synonymous with self-reliance\textsuperscript{32}, which he deemed necessary for healthy economies, particularly indigenous and local ones (Iyer 1990). Self-reliance leads to self-empowerment by creating development that makes the optimum use of the resources available to the community. Self-reliance builds character, self-esteem and dignity, and removes the cross of dependency. Importantly, it is a powerful strategy against corporate and trade imperialism and slavery, and the subjugation of the developing and under-developed nations by the wealthy countries. Mahatma Gandhi called this form of dignified and

\textsuperscript{32} Based on Gandhi’s views on self-reliance, India is the only democracy in the world that is not a welfare state.
peaceful stand against the various forms of imperialism, 'passive resistance', and this may now be extended to include economic oppression.

Economic exploitation makes the self weak in mind and body; self-reliance strengthens the mind and body. Mahatma Gandhi calls self-reliance *swadeshi*, or 'of one's country'. He explains (Iyer 1990: 371): "In its ultimate and spiritual sense, *swadeshi* stands for the final emancipation of the human soul from its earthly bondage." *Swadeshi* calls for dedicating one's work and services to the interests of one's immediate community, and requires one to discharge one's legitimate duties through fair, and not foul means. As Sfeir-Younis (2001) argues, in order to witness a truly meaningful "transformation of the world", it is imperative to practise economics differently, because it is not possible to practise economics in a "moral, ethical and spiritual vacuum". Gandhi said (Iyer 1990: 366): "*Swadeshi* contains pure economics."

The People Centred Development Forum (PCDF) in 1993 said that it is a monetary economy that breaks the tie between the individual and the place; this tie may be said to have a spiritual aspect, because literature on community development strongly argues that spirituality is a strong foundational ideology that links people and place (Chile and Simpson 2004). The PCDF (1993) write:

> In a non-monetary economy wealth is necessarily stored in things that have intrinsic value. The maintenance of that intrinsic value is integral to the accumulation process. These values, such as the value of productive land, animals, wisdom and human relationship, are commonly inseparable from community and place. Community and place figure centrally in the veneration of these values.\(^{33}\) Most money in our modern society exists only as electronic traces in computers, wires and airwaves. It moves from place to place with the speed of light through the actions of unseen and unknown people. Those who live in the world of money

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\(^{33}\) The *Sarvodaya Shramananda Movement* in Sri Lanka, founded by A.T. Ariyaratne in 1958 draws its principles from the lessons of the Buddha (Chowdhry 2005b). Central to the movement's ethics is the principle of sharing, where the participants share themselves with the needy and the deprived. Shramadana means, "giving of one's time and labour as a gift" (Chowdhry 2005b: 231). The act of *dana* or giving is focussed on the giver, who aims to achieve "self-respect and self-esteem, not to mention a sense of peace" (Chowdhry 2005b: 231)."
soon lose any sense of place or community. They live in what they ingenuously call: ‘the real world’.

Mahatma Gandhi pondered at length the question (Iyer 1990: 94), “does economic progress clash with real progress?” If economic development means accumulation of wealth and profit without limit, then, Gandhi believed, “economic progress...is antagonistic to real progress” (Iyer 1990: 97). This is because, as Herman Daly put it, continual economic growth on a planet with finite resources is an “impossibility theorem” (de Fonseca et al 1993). The UNDP [United Nations Development Programme] has clearly shown that further economic growth is not required for eliminating poverty deprivation; any growth now would only be to augment the wealth of the developed classes. In fact, these reports show that the worst instances of poverty can be addressed through low rates of economic production (de Fonseca et al 1993).

This is a startlingly different insight to that of classical economists who argued that rapid economic growth was the answer to the problem of deprivation. Further, Adam Smith believed that individuals could focus on self-interested participation in market exchange, because through the power of the ‘invisible hand’, society would be able to achieve its maximum potential. This invisible hand has been variously thought to be the business or the government, but Sfeir-Younis (2001) believes that it is the collective human consciousness or conscience. Sfeir-Younis (2001) also recommends that the stress on practising economics with a “human face”, be replaced with an emphasis on the “human soul”. He writes (2001): “It is only spiritual economics and spiritual entrepreneurship that truly embody the being of what humanity is all about.”

Mahatma Gandhi (1949) was consistent in his belief that the right way must be employed to achieve the right ends. Schumacher (1975) similarly argued that for economic development that would genuinely contribute to human happiness, appropriate strategies must be employed. To this end, he argued, economic development must revolve very centrally around the notion of simplicity, and the aim must be to “obtain maximum well-being with a minimum level of consumption” (Schumacher 1975: 57, in Mendis 1998: 200).
It is crucial that the rich classes worldwide, or the colonisers in a new global corporate order, understand clearly the costs of their collusion with unfair economic practices that perpetuate a notion of high living that is analogous to excessive consumption and materialism. The *Purusharthas* or the Hindu prescriptions for a four-fold way to self-actualisation warn for instance, that untrammelled consumption and indulgence of the material realm would put genuine happiness and self-realisation at considerable risk (Kuppuswamy 1977). In a similar vein, Jesus Christ said: “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God” (St. Luke, xvii, 18-23). Mahatma Gandhi called Jesus “the greatest economist of his time” (Iyer 1990: 95).

The problem of addressing the issue of unfettered consumption leads us directly to consider the role of the society in enabling sustainability, and how spirituality might be useful in animating sustainable social development. I propose here that social development may be viewed at two levels: at life of the community, and at the life of the individual, both of which are inextricably linked. I take the view that sustainability theorists and advocates’ interest in the society is generally weaker than the interest of spiritual and faith based organisations. There is, therefore, eminent scope here for spirituality to meaningfully inform sustainability. The following section examines the ways in which this can be done.

**Social Sustainability and Spirituality**

The phenomenal growth of capitalism and the resultant anonymity of the community, has led to concepts of spirituality and spiritual values to be articulated at the highest levels of development dialogues today (WDR 2006; UNESCO 2004; WFDD 2003). The fundamental flaw of several well-intentioned development strategies is that in their preoccupation with detailed economic planning, they seem to lose track of the fact that it is *people* who are being planned for. Murray Bookchin (1992: 203) writes: “The decline of the citizen, more properly his or her dissolution into a being lost in a mass society – the human counterpart of the mass-produced object – is furthered by a burgeoning of structural gigantism that replaces human scale and by a growing bureaucracy that replaces all the organic sinews that held precapitalist society together.” Capitalism concerns itself primarily with the existence of markets. This in turn has
resulted in the near complete alienation of masses of impoverished societies, upon whom, ironically, the wellbeing of economies depend.\textsuperscript{34} Swami Vireswarananda (1983: 115) writes:

\begin{quote}
The condition of the masses, the backbone of all nations, is quite pitiable. They have ceased to be men and have almost come down to the level of beasts. They toil the whole day so that a few may grow rich, they themselves getting only a bare subsistence often insufficient to keep the wolf from the door.
\end{quote}

In response to the mass [consumer-driven] culture, Chile and Simpson (2004: 318) point out that “spirituality dwells within every culture and every geographical community because as people search for meaning, spirituality becomes embedded in their ways of life as it informs their ethics and their desires.” For that reason, they argue that making a strong and explicit link between spirituality and social development is critical to “understanding and addressing some of the contemporary development issues such as globalization, diversity, oppression, social isolation, pattern and distribution of power, the tension between individualism and the collective, competition and collaboration” (Chile and Simpson 2004: 319).

All of these issues arguably and demonstrably relate centrally to sustainable development as well. The Brundtland Commission report (1987) points clearly to the potential of the society to harm both itself and the natural environment through invasive human action and intervention. Therefore, the importance of exploring the connection between social sustainability and spirituality [or the implications of the lack thereof] is important. Indeed, Maurice F. Strong, the Secretary General of the Rio Summit in 1992 said (www.aquaac.org): “Actions that do not flow from our deepest spiritual, ethical, and moral values cannot succeed in building the kind of secure, sustainable, and hopeful future to which Rio pointed and to which we all aspire.”

\textsuperscript{34} Madhu Kishwar, editor, \textit{Manushi}, in her crusade to protect street vendors in Delhi from administrative harassment and police brutality, explains that this impoverished section of the community, which attempt desperately to be self-employed, save the state government a few million crores in terms of saving transport and fuel charges and damage to the natural environment, and they boost the local and the tourist economy through the production of necessary but low-cost goods like brooms and cheap utensils, inexpensive street food, clothes and accessories (Kishwar 2005b).
Spirituality is arguably an essential dimension of human lifestyles, and Erricker and Erricker (2001a) maintain that it would be misleading to study contemporary issues, particularly those regarding social and political change, without critically studying spirituality as it relates to culture and identity. Erricker (2001c: 226) describes the impact on the community of what she terms “everyday spirituality” as follows: “Everyday spirituality is a delicate, dynamic web of relationships which, while appearing fragile enough as to be almost unseen, is nevertheless sufficiently strong enough to support a community.”

Fundamentally, however, Chile and Simpson (2004) argue that spirituality is most useful in the context of social development as a means of understanding and critically examining the causes of abuse and exploitation, and as an inspiration for transformation towards an affirmative, enabling, socially just environment. This is particularly important if Joanna Macy (2000: 256) is correct in believing, “Transformation is now a collective event.” Macy (2000: 256) agrees with Lewis Mumford’s prediction that “the era of the individual saviour, a Buddha, a messiah, or a Christ, was over, and that wisdom was going to erupt through each and all of us.”

However, power inequalities in society continue to exist, and these must be confronted in order to facilitate such transformation. Chile and Simpson (2004: 324) argue that in order to challenge existing social power imbalances, the following are important: “conscientization about the nature of oppression and injustice”; ending the “hypocrisy of disempowering ideas structures, power relations and discourse”; “telling the ‘truth’ about globalization” and its inherent scope for exploitation; and creating theories of “new social formations”. To this end, they maintain, spiritually based social development “includes at least the reduction of inequality, enhancement of personal security, respect for individual human rights, recognition of personal values, and social justice and empowerment” (Chile and Simpson 2004: 324).

In a similar way, Erricker (2001b: 113) observes that in contemporary times, both the creation and preservation of community is “achieved with difficulty”, and while spirituality may not be offered as a panacea for correcting all social ills, it is nevertheless a critical means of social engagement, “a sense of real presence and support, a striving together towards a common purpose which, at a spiritual level,
mitigates against the vicissitudes of experience, of suffering and loss and, religiously speaking, recognizes something beyond or transcending them.”

In order to recast these insights into a sustainability context, it is useful to identify the principles that emphasise it. Chile and Simpson write (2004: 318): “[t]he six dimensions of community development, namely, social, economical, political, cultural, spiritual, and environmental aspects are strongly informed by spiritual values [emphasis mine] of holism, sustainability [emphasis mine], diversity, equilibrium and social justice.” It is important to note that sustainability has been defined as a spiritual value here. Similarly, the Baha’i Statement (2003) suggests the value of creating spiritually based indicators for sustainable development, and has identified five principles in particular, necessary to achieve a just, peaceful and sustainable global community – unity in diversity; equity and justice; equality of the sexes; trustworthiness and moral leadership; and independent investigation of the truth.

The above characteristics define the prerequisites for creating a sustainable society; however, from a community development perspective, Saul (2001, in Chile and Simpson 2004: 325) identifies six elements that describe the nature of such a society. Saul (2001, in Chile and Simpson 2004: 325-326) explains what constitutes “that which unites us”; these six elements appear in the literature on both spirituality and community development, namely, ‘common sense’, which enables partnership of varied experience and knowledge; ethics, where personal choice has the support of public interest because it positively impacts the environment and the community; imagination, which allows mutual empathy, and validates intuition; memory, that relates not only to remembering the past, but also to the lessons and introspection that may be derived from such recollections; and reason, which allows us to find order and structure, and reflect on the perceived or actual “chaos” around us.

Socially sustainable development would similarly draw on these values. For instance, in her study on creative urban planning, Sandercock (2003) notes the human instinct to invest spaces with sensory stimulation as well as quiet meaning and contemplation. She emphasises “the importance of memory, desire and spirit, as vital dimensions of healthy human settlements, and a sensitivity to cultural differences in the expressions of each” (Sandercock 2003: 227). A spiritual dimension to planning and implementing
sustainable development should incorporate within itself these subtle but important aspects.

Spirituality offers itself as an important means of understanding and appreciating ideologies, particularly to the youth of society (Tacey 2003). “Living on the social surface”, according to Tacey (2003: 53) may only work when surface culture is capable of emotional and spiritual nourishment. However, this culture is “radically undermined” when it is discovered for instance, that “liberal capitalism is seen as a euphemism for social exploitation” or scientific advancement is a mask for the ruthless greed of oil companies (Tacey 2003: 53). Social alienation is a dismal reality; however, Tacey (2003: 54) says, “encounter with the spirit brings new vitality.” In the face of repeated failure of several ideologies, spirituality may thus be very useful in sustaining sustainability with vigour, enthusiasm and commitment.

However, spirituality also represents itself in a variety of positive and innovative ways on the “social surface”, which may be strongly expressive of community spirit. As discussed in the previous section, I view spirituality and religion as mutually inclusive categories, and as such, propose that several forms and types of the ritualistic and social expressions of religion extend themselves to social expressions of spirituality. Chief among these are the traditions of public social celebrations, which may be festive or ritualistic (Dorson 1982). Dorson (1982: 33) describes celebrations as including “festivals, rituals, ceremonies, spectacles, pageants, fetes, holidays, and extravaganzas”, and “affirms the joyous outpouring of the spirit” of the people partaking in such festivities. Turner (1982: 16) suggests that religious celebrations are highly expressive of communal vivacity and vitality, and may be related to Durkheim’s ‘effervescence’, “generated by a crowd of people with shared purposes and common values.” Turner (1982: 19) calls social celebrations a “meta-experience” because the “culturally stimulated experience” brings out “the part that is essential” to each of the celebrators.

Some examples of enduring global spiritual and religious celebrations include the Jagannath Rath Yatra [chariot festival of Lord Jagannath] in the city of Puri in Orissa in eastern India; Mardi Gras in New Orleans; the Roman Carnival etc. Since the 1960s, a multitude of ‘new’ festivals, carnivals and other social and spiritual celebrations have
been created, which provide a meaningful sense of place and connection\textsuperscript{35} to both the participating community, and the onlookers (Picard and Robinson 2006).

However, in an age characterised by rampant consumerism, the emerging impetus for spiritual renewal has been quickly identified as a saleable commodity (Carrette and King 2005). According to Carrette and King (2005), privatisation of spirituality has occurred, firstly, by evicting it from the public space in communal lives, and secondly, through corporatisation. For instance, spirituality courses and classes have mushroomed in their thousands the world over, promising individuals reassurance and stress free social lives.\textsuperscript{36} Such packaged spirituality have been attacked for the “commercialisation of spirituality” and been criticised as “spiritual supermarkets” for selling “spiritual fast food” where one can buy “crash courses in self-realisation — cosmic consciousness in four easy lessons” (Maria 2006, para 11). These organisations are accused of being pointedly commercial in their approach since their product is essentially for elite consumption (Maria 2006, para 11).

In addition to spiritual wisdom, physical spiritual symbols have also become items of consumption, whereby “religious artefacts and language have ‘cachet value’ for a society of isolated individuals, hungry for packaged meaning” (Carrette and King 2005: 125). Carrette and King (2005) point out that commercial spirituality sustains itself by removing itself from the authentic religious or spiritual sources of wisdom, and attaching itself instead, to the market. The community then directly begins to receive the most visible, pervasive and insistent messages of spirituality from smooth corporate suppliers.\textsuperscript{37} Ironically, these messages hark back to “a nostalgic sense of an imagined

\textsuperscript{35} It may be noted that obviously not all rituals are socially benign; some forms of religioso-spiritual expressions may be violent and cruel in the extreme. The ancient practice of sati, or burning of widows on the funeral pyre of their deceased husbands in northern India is such an example. Sati literally means a chaste and virtuous woman (Narasimhan 1990) though the word now refers to the rite that was believed to be an embodiment of complete devotion and loyalty to the husband. Though the practice of sati was abolished in 1892, the last recorded incident of sati occurred as recently as twenty years ago in 1987 in the village of Deorala in north-western India, when seventeen-year-old Roop Kanwar burned to death on the funeral pyre of her husband (Narasimhan 1990). It is yet unresolved whether Kanwar voluntarily immolated herself, or if she was forcibly flung into the flames.

\textsuperscript{36} The Art of Living, Crossroads, Landmark Education Forum, rebirthing courses etc are some examples of spiritual or lifestyle courses. Several of these do not explicitly describe themselves as spiritual; however, in their quest to lead authentic lives, they are arguably spiritual.

\textsuperscript{37} It needs to be noted that all the major religions – Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism etc – prescribe practices and regulations for market enterprises to be run in an ethical and moral
religious past where the universe was meaningful, people were devout and life made sense according to the values of one's community or group” (Carrette and King 2005: 125).

The real challenge of contemporary times, according to Tacey (2003), is to make social reconnection a reality again. Secular expressions of interconnectedness through information and communications technology for example, will always “fall short of the mark and meet with human disappointment and failure” (Tacey 2003: 225). Spirituality may bring back vitality by restoring individual and community connection to their “invisible, life-sustaining roots”, the lack of which “exhausts” us (Tacey 2003: 226). In the context of sustainability, it is useful to examine how spirituality directly connects with the individual or the self. Sustainability fundamentally calls for introspection, reflection and clarity, because in its appeal to the individual, it is arguably a call for an awakened conscience. To understand how this shift in consciousness might occur, it would be helpful to see how, in the context of sustainability, the spirit and the self connect.

**Sustainability and the Self**

Norwegian eco-philosopher Arne Naess fully agreed with Plato that the “unexamined life was not worth living” (Weber 2004: 199). It has been proposed that such introspection, which examines the complex relationships between the self and the spirit is important for meaningful sustainability (Booth 2003). Booth (2003: 4) writes: “Since a person is inevitably affected by the social practices forming her environment and these are embedded in a natural world of resources, the way embodiment is understood as an individual self in a society has an immediate impact on the sustainability of human lifestyles.” Self-awareness, it may be argued, is vital to maintaining both human and environmental health.

Naess (1988: 20-21) puts forth some important reasons why it is vital for human beings to have an enlightened and fully expressed awareness of the self. Firstly, he says, the nature of human beings instinctively causes them to identify themselves with all living manner (Carrette and King 2005). These injunctions are not to be confused with the corporate commercialisation of spirituality per se.
beings. For instance he explains, an animal dying or in pain arouses pain or horror at the suffering, because one tends to see oneself in the animal. Secondly, he says, in the stages of the “maturity of the self” from the ego self to the social self to the metaphysical self, the closely interwoven connections with nature tend to be ignored. Therefore he proposes the notion of the “ecological self”, which he says would enrich the self-actualisation potential of the self. Thirdly, Naess (1988) argues that “fulfillment of each being’s potential” is critical to increasing both joy and meaning of life, because it “implied broadening and deepening of the self.” Lastly, he says, it is important to realise the importance of enabling other human beings to achieve self-awareness as well, because of the innate human tendency to compare and see one self in others. This may be achieved by adhering to the sage advice of ‘live and let live’ (Naess 1988).

An understanding of Gandhi’s spiritual politics enriches studies on the essential connection of the self with the larger cosmos. Central to all of Gandhi’s ideologies was the notion of self-restraint. Peaceful resistance or in its extended form, non-resistance is described by Gandhi as “restraint voluntarily undertaken for the good of society” (Duncan 1951: 59). Gandhi (1949) reiterated that his ultimate desire was not to obtain India’s independence from British imperialism, but to achieve self-liberation of the individual through complete self-awareness. He wrote (1949: 259):

What I want to achieve – what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years – is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain moksha [self-liberation]. I live and move and have my being in pursuit of that goal. All that I do by way of speaking and writing, and all my ventures in the political field, are directed to this same end.

Naess (1988) points out that Gandhi here speaks of the universal self, and not of the narrow, parochial, egoistical self, for otherwise, he would not be motivated to identify himself with the poor as he did. Gandhi believed that self-realization was possible through “selfless action, that is, through reduction of the dominance of the narrow self or ego” (Naess 1988: 25). Non-violence for Gandhi was possible because of an unshakable belief in the unquestionable oneness of all life (Naess 1998). Naess (1974: 35) quotes Gandhi:
I believe in *advaita* [non-duality], I believe in the essential unity of man and, for that matter, of all that lives. Therefore I believe that if one man gains spirituality, the whole world gain with him and, if one main fails, the whole world fails to that extent.

Some environmentalists and ecofeminists believe that the dominant attitude of arrogance, contempt and control towards nature is essentially indicative of the low self-esteem and self-respect that human beings feel towards themselves. Charlene Spretnak (1991: 110) observes for instance: “The problem is hubris, the rending of the cosmic web through arrogance, fear, and an emptiness so deep it is wrenchingly painful to observe.” Cushman (1990: 599, in Kanner and Gomes 1993: 1) says that the modern self, while “bounded and masterful” on the exterior, is internally “empty”. Kanner and Gomes (1993: 1) argue that the “empty” or the “false” self is invested in feeling superior to nature and entitled to manipulate it at will. An egalitarian connection to the Earth, including the experience of other species as being equal in value and worth to humans threatens the core identity of the false self as separate and superior. To fully recognize that humans are part of a larger planetary pattern that affords *homo sapiens* a place, but not a throne, is to undermine the foundation of the false self and send it reeling into the panic and despair of the empty self.

The extensive literature on ecofeminism has contributed immensely to deconstructing the layers of complexity on issues of status, identity and the body. Self-determination has been one of the central agendas of the women’s movement (Mies 1993a). In such a context, the demand for self-determination was a “defensive one, based on the right to resistance, the right to defend the self”, because the concept primarily meant “liberation from occupation, the end of determination-by-others, by men and by patriarchal social powers” (Mies 1993a: 218-219).

Val Plumwood (1991: 10) points out that the Western tradition has encouraged thinking along “human/nature dualism that is part of the set of interrelated dualisms of mind/body, reason/nature, reason/emotion, masculine/feminine”, and that this is directly sourced from the “rationalist tradition”. The result is, she says,
a deeply entrenched view of the genuine or ideal human self as not including features shared with nature, and as defined against or in opposition to the nonhuman realm, so that the human sphere and that of nature cannot significantly overlap. Nature is sharply divided off from the human, is alien and usually hostile and inferior.

The same point is made by David Bohm (1990: 1-3) who proposes that if spirituality could “prevail in the whole of life”, the self would be enriched through meaning. Spirit may be intimately connected with meaning, he suggests, without which life would “lack significance, and we would generate little energy or purpose.” He argues, “Meaning is at the root of our whole being...how we act is determined by what everything means to us.” He believes that the artificial disconnection between science and spirituality is the cause of much of the current malaise that afflicts human lifestyles. One instance of that malaise is the extent to which corruption and its concomitant mistrustfulness of people’s motives dominates social relations.

In an era where corruption in various forms marks much of human interactions (UN Global Impact Assessment 2007), one of the foundational principles of a spiritually sustainable society would be one where trustworthiness and not corruption, marks the nature of human relationships, and particularly, where representatives of people, leaders and institutions such as governments and corporations are worthy of public trust. Chile and Simpson (2004) stress that enabling trustworthiness in individuals and societies may lead to ‘inner peace’; such inner peace requires negotiations with the external world. The Baha’i Statement (1998) observes:

Whether in the home, at work, in the community or in business or political affairs, trustworthiness is at the heart of constructive interaction and engagement. It is the key to maintenance of unity between diverse peoples...every development effort must include as a prime objective the inculcation of trustworthiness in the individuals, communities and institutions involved.

I argue that trustworthiness is also interwoven with the notion of reciprocal responsibility, which refers to the exchange of favours, and fulfilment of mutual
obligations and accountability (Abram 1996). This ethic of reciprocal responsibility is ancient wisdom, consistent with the earliest views on development, and is preached by each one of the major religions in the world today (www.edminterfaithcentre.ca, May 2006): “This is the sum of duty – do not do to others that which would cause pain if it was done to you” (Hinduism: Mahabharat: 5:1517); “Regard your neighbour’s gain as your own gain, and your neighbour’s loss as your own loss” (Taoism: T’ai Shang Kan Ying P’ien, 213-218); “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Christianity: Mathew 7:12) and “Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself” (Islam: Prophet Mohammed, Hadith). Mahatma Gandhi sums it up beautifully (Iyer 1990: 241): “My experience has shown me that we win justice quickest by rendering justice to the other party.”

However, in increasingly culturally, religiously, socially and economically diverse societies, it is important to respond to the inevitable diversity in spiritualities as the potential for “collective consensus” and not competition (Chile and Simpson 2004: 325). The Baha’i Statement asserts (1998): “(t)he immense wealth of diversity achieved over thousands of years is vital to the development of the human race which is experienced in its collective coming of age.” Chile and Simpson (2004: 325) warn, however: “Shared knowledge must not be confused with the idea of one-singular knowledge.” They emphasise that secular societies promote a religion of consumerism, because materialism may be argued to provide meaning in contemporary lifestyles. The self would not be able to find meaningfulness in such religion. In the interests of sustainability then, a society that enables both individual and collective self-actualisation is important. The diversity of spiritual resources available may be useful in informing spiritual philosophies to enable sustainability, both at the level of the self and the larger human consciousness.

However, before exploring further the notion of spirituality as a way of restoring vitality and meaningfulness to sustainability, it is important to examine in greater detail the concept of spirituality. The ensuing section provides an overview of the emergence of the notion of contemporary spirituality as a post-secular construct. It traces the phenomena of secularisation and desecularisation following on from Western Enlightenment. While the local interests of the thesis are located in India, it is still useful to refer to these events in the West since they arguably shape the dominant global
discourse on religion and spirituality. For instance, the secular ideal embedded in the Indian constitution is itself imported from the West.\textsuperscript{38} The section will also demonstrate how the sustainability philosophy is framed within a secular discourse.

2.4. Emergence of Spirituality

In surveying the literature arguing for a sustainable development to be grounded in spirituality, some problematic features are immediately evident. These are, firstly, the uncritical acceptance of the secularist nature of mainstream sustainability discussions, such that spirituality simply ‘adds’ to secular discourses; secondly, the amorphous and unclear relationship between ‘spirituality’ and ‘religion’; and lastly, the tendency to often advocate for a universalist approach to religions and spirituality.

However, whilst in a confident era of secular modernisation, religion was relegated to the private sphere, in our late modern times there has been a resurgence of a wide diversity of spiritual activities – essentially the need to address the problem of meaning and connect to the sources of value, selfhood, transcendence etc. In this section, I trace the emergence of spirituality as a post-secular, post-traditional construct. I also explore the connection that spirituality may have with religion; the latter is oftentimes viewed as an archaic, oppressive construct. I argue that there are good reasons for religion to be taken seriously while understanding spirituality; there is arguably the tendency for non-grounded spirituality to become consumerist. Lastly, I explain the particular approach that I have taken in this thesis, i.e., to focus on the particular spiritual expressions within different religious faiths [in the case of the thesis, the particular interest is Hinduism]. I recognise that there are overlaps between various traditions, even as there are differences in worldviews and practices. Dialogue between different spiritual and religious groups is hence an important challenge for spiritually informed sustainable development.

Berger (1999) argues that the notion of secularisation can be traced right back to the Enlightenment. Holden (2002: 93, in Gray 2006: 6) describes secularisation as being the “demystification of culture”, and Gray (2006: 6) argues that it is a consequence of

\textsuperscript{38} The Indian Constitution for instance, variously takes its inspiration to be a ‘sovereign socialist secular democratic republic’ from the constitutions of the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany and France (Nehru 1960).
“detraditionalization” and the Western Enlightenment thinking. Gray (2006: 6) believes that it “marks the break with blind faith in traditional authority, values, beliefs and cultural practices resulting from modernization which led to changes in religious affiliations and beliefs in Western society as rationalism took hold”.

Herbert (2001: 1) for example, points to the French Revolution as the start of the demise of the religious dimension in the public sphere, at least in Europe, because it was from this point that religion began to be not only “rejected ideologically” but also rendered “functionally superfluous”. Religion was no longer formally integrated with the other institutions of modern societies such as education, the economy and the political realm. In particular, both the French Revolution and the American Declaration of Independence dramatically captured the new values of human rights and individual freedoms as secular values (Herbert 2001).

Luckmann (1996: 73) argues, however, that while the unquestioned authority of the church had certainly come to an end, “even in the heyday of secularization theories, there were signs that a new, institutionally less visible social form of religion was emerging…the new, basically de-institutionalized, privatised social form of religion seemed to be relying primarily on an open market of diffuse, syncretistic packages of meaning.” The large institutional space, released from preordained deference and obedience was replaced by “individual consciousness”, which is free to “choose from a variety of sacred universes” (Luckmann 1996: 73).

However, it was generally agreed that secularisation then went hand-in-hand with the rise of liberal individualism, rationality and science, and democratisation. This notion behind secularisation was, Berger says (1999: 2): “Modernization necessarily leads to a decline of religion, both in society and in the minds of individuals.” Berger is equally emphatic, however, that the rise of secularism has not led to the demise of religion. He maintains that the world was, continues to be, and will remain “massively religious”

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39 The first significant counter-revolution to the French Revolution was the ‘social revolution’ in Iran in 1979 (Herbert 2001). Religion was used as a potent tool of social and political transformation; its virulent and extremist expression, however, which conveyed contempt and total intolerance for the secular and the modern, was partly a result of its aggressive resistance to the previous secularisation of politics and society in Iran under Shah Pahlavi. However, religion has also made non-violent contributions to social transformation, such as causing the end of communism in Poland and the erstwhile East Germany (Herbert 2001).
(1999: 9). He makes an important point that “secularization on the societal level is not necessarily linked to secularization on the level of the individual consciousness” (1999: 3). In this way, secularisation also marked the period of detraditionalisation. Heelas (1996: 2) defines detraditionalisation as

A shift of authority from ‘without’ to ‘within’. It entails the decline of the belief in a pre-given or natural order of things. Individual subjects are themselves called upon to exercise authority in the face of the disorder and contingency, which is thereby generated. ‘Voice’ is displaced from established sources, coming to rest with the self.

It is important to make the observation that secularism was intended to establish a system where politics and governance would show no affiliation to, or favour any particular religious group in its operations. Donald Smith (1963: 4, in Larson 1995: 178) writes:

The secular state is a state which guarantees individual and corporate freedom of religion, deals with the individual as a citizen irrespective of his religion, is not constitutionally connected to a particular religion nor does it seek either to promote or interfere with religion.

In this respect, it tolerated a diversity of spiritualities and religions in exchange for extending its influence in the public sphere. The price of this restriction may be a loss of spiritual values and a denial of the role spirituality plays in human life. Chile and Simpson (2004: 319) quote Ife (1995):

Modern society is essentially secular, and has left little room for notions of the sacred or for spiritual values. This can be seen to have denied one of the most

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40 Berger (1999) notes however, that both religious thinkers and advocates of secularisation have made such an explicit link, and accordingly lament or rejoice. Some secular advocates are happy that secularisation has contributed to purging religion of “superstition” and being “reactionary” (Berger 1999: 3). More severe secularists believe that “modernity is some kind of invincible worldview to which religious beliefs and practices should adapt themselves” (Berger 1999: 3).

41 Hewett School believes that a number of elements could characterise modern society. These include: “industrialisation, urbanisation, division of labour, technology, mass communications,
important aspects of human existence [emphasis mine]. Hence there is a strong need for community development to incorporate notions of spiritual development.

Tacey (2003) argues that human life is firmly grounded in the spirit, whether it is accepted as such or not.\textsuperscript{42} Chile and Simpson (2004) believe that most human beings are fundamentally spiritual; however, they agree that there may be some sections of the world community that reject notions of spirituality, but believe that such a ‘secular’ society comprises a comparatively small proportion of the global population. Berger (1999: 2) writes in his analysis of secularisation and world politics: “My point is that the assumption that we live in a secularised world is false. The world is today…as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places, more so than ever.”

Tacey (2003) observes that there is a worldwide resurgence in contemporary spirituality. Berger (1999: 11) makes similar observations and offers two reasons for this: firstly, that modernity and secularisation “undermined the taken-for-granted certainties by which people lived through most of history.” And secondly, that a dominant secular worldview is only subscribed to by “an elite culture that, not surprisingly, is resented by large numbers of people who are not part of it but feel its influence (most troublingly, as their children are subjected to an education that ignores or even directly attacks their own beliefs and values).”

Thus the space has been recreated to welcome a reference point by which to live. However, Tacey (2003) argues that such reference point may no longer neatly fit the category of pure secularity or pure religion. Tacey (2003: 2) writes: “We are caught in a difficult moment in history, stuck between a secular system we have outgrown and a religious system we cannot fully embrace.” There is need for a creative, sacred and fulfilling expression of human experience, and I propose that this experience may be captured by the notion of spirituality in religion. Before exploring this notion further, it is useful here to examine individually the notions of spirituality and religion.

\textsuperscript{42} Tacey (2003) warns that unless the spiritual impulse in a secular community is understood and assimilated, the consequences could be social strife, and collective and individual mental turmoil. The militant state uses religion as a political tool to oppress and control; the secular state is no less guilty in denying the existence and the implications of the spiritual element, and also uses the sacred as a political tool of power (Tacey 2003).
Definitions of spirituality are varied. Van Ness (1992: 12) calls spirituality “a notoriously vague term”. Tacey (2003: 28) describes spirituality as “the careful and reflective art of developing a relationship with the sacred.” Spirituality may or may not be viewed as having connections with religion; in fact, some perceptions of spirituality may be in stark contrast to religious principles. Sartre commented on the need to fill up the “God-shaped hole in human consciousness” (Ahmed 2002: 5).

Heelas and Woodhead (2005: 3) make imaginative use of language to distinguish between ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’. For instance, they explain, the objective perspective on life constitutes “life as”, or life lived “according to external expectations”, such as being a devoted daughter, wife, mother etc. However, a subjective perspective on life “has to do with states of consciousness, states of mind, memories, emotions, passions, sensations, bodily experiences, dreams, feelings, inner conscience, and sentiments – including moral sentiments such as compassion” (Heelas and Woodhead 2005: 3). In other words, it allows life to be internally directed, where the individual richly becomes “a, if not the, unique source of significance, meaning and authority” (Heelas and Woodhead 2005: 3-4). Viewed one way, the linguistics of “life as”, as opposed to “subjective life”, enables religion to be examined as the former, and spirituality as the latter (Heelas and Woodhead 2005).

In a simpler way, Le Bras (1960: 60) defines religion thus: “a system of beliefs and practises by which a group of people struggle with the ultimate problems of human life.” These “beliefs and practices” may be codified into ancient rituals and traditions that are inherited by subsequent generations through oral history, written records and mythological stories. Religion generally specifically focuses on an unseen supernatural power, person or persons, or is seen as a quest for ultimate reality or the highest clarity of truth. Such a practice may be parochial or communal in nature with fairly strict rules of exclusion and inclusion. This view of religion as either a dogma or a personal quest generally prevails, and Panikkar notes (2006): “This has led many countries to defend privatisation of religion as something pertaining to the individual in his private conscience.” This is particularly true of the West.
The *Encyclopaedia of Religion* (2005: 7692) describes religion thus:

(E)very known culture involves the religious in the sense of a depth dimension in cultural experiences at all levels – a push, whether ill-defined or conscious, toward some sort of ultimacy and transcendence that will provide norms and power for the rest of life. When more or less distinct patterns of behaviour are built around this depth dimension in a culture, this structure constitutes religion in its historically recognizable form. Religion is the organization of life around the depth dimensions of experience – varied in form, completeness, and clarity in accordance with the environing culture.

Gerald Larson (1995: 280) argues for an understanding of ‘religion’ as an essentially anthropological construct, comparable with concepts such as ‘culture’, ‘language’ and ‘society’. From this standpoint, he argues that while one might choose to *not* participate in one or any religion, “one does not have an option *not* to be religious, any more than a normal human being does not have an option *not* to have a culture, or a language or a kinship identity.” He clarifies that this does not mean one has to proclaim sympathy for a particular worldview; on the contrary, one may even express hostility. He explains (1995: 280):

‘Religion’ rather, has to do with the development of comprehensive interpretative frameworks regarding the meaning and significance of human existence-as-such within the contexts of enculturation, socialization and individuation, and from such a theoretical perspective even the so-called ‘non-believer’, ‘non-practitioner’, agnostic, or totally indifferent person all have a ‘religious’ dimension that can be identified and analyzed, and more than that, needs to be identified and analyzed if one is to understand any normal person’s self-understanding.

In relation to the decline of organised religion and the rise of a looser, more personalised and diverse notion of spirituality, Henery (2003: 1110) expresses reservations. He believes the notion of spirituality “legitimises a consumerist self-identity”, even as it claims to distance itself from one. He criticises the emergence of a ‘spiritual movement’, as distinct from an explicitly religious one as “homeopathic” therapy. He says (2003: 1111): “By providing small doses of religion, we are inoculated
against the real thing.” He also claims that spirituality may strengthen dominant social patterns instead of challenging them.

However, while spirituality may be addressed in several ways in relation to the notion of religion [and similarly, religion in relation to the concept of the secular], it is also necessary to examine spirituality as it relates to secularity. Van Ness (1996) notes the emergence of a secular spiritual trend in response to the disenchantment with both religion and secularity. He describes spirituality as having two aspects (1996: 4-5): the internally directed aspect that is “apprehended as a project of people’s most enduring and vital selves and is structured by experiences of sudden transformation and subsequent gradual development”, and an externally oriented aspect, that “engages reality as a maximally inclusive whole and makes the cosmos an intentional object of thought and feeling.” However, in Van Ness’s view, such an engagement does not use the language of traditional religion. He proposes that “ecological idealism, holistic medicine and visionary art”, for instance, may be described as secular spiritual traditions (1996: 12).

So although the notion of spirituality is fraught with complexities because it lends itself to a myriad of interpretations, particular understandings of spirituality may be highly amenable to a practice of sustainability. To those identified by Van Ness, I would add literature on spirituality that addresses key questions of personal meaning, the links between feminist ethics and nature, and the disadvantages of purely secular forms of reasoning (DesAutels and Waugh 2001; Noddings 1984). Importantly, some feminist scholars point to the positive relationship that can be developed between women’s empowerment and spirituality movements (Ahmed 2002; Rose 2001).

In respect of the debate between religion and spirituality, however, I argue for an understanding of spirituality, which is based in religion [particularly within an understanding and practice of sustainable development]. Historian and ascetic-saint William Irwin Thompson said (1981: 103): “Religion is not identical with spirituality; rather religion is the form spirituality takes in civilization.” Similarly, Ericcker (2001c: 225) suggests that religion may give people a “context in which they can feel spiritual,

43 In Chapter 6, I will explore in particular how a spiritual philosophy based on Hindu religion may assist in animating the notion of sustainable development in the city of Delhi.
and perhaps a weekly opportunity to practice that feeling in a communal and liturgical setting”, and Luckmann (1996: 75) argues that spiritual movements represent the “social form of the invisible religion”. The notion of spirituality in religion may be an effective means to ensure that sustainability, in the specific instance of an Indian case study, implemented through spiritually based approaches, is grounded in local colour and culture.44

I use Adam’s (1996) reservations about the relevance and validity of the dualism between tradition and detraditionalisation to support my proposal that the distinctions between religion and spirituality may be closely interconnected. Firstly, Adam (1996: 138-139) challenges the supposed dominance of detraditional influences on contemporary lifestyles, and points out that scientists for instance, are as fixated as ever on tradition, by trying to establish certainty and order. Secondly, she says, with the future’s capacity to “predefine” our present, we have increasingly become even more preoccupied with the past, or traditional lifestyles and customs. In other words, our very awareness of the detraditional future makes us more appreciative of our traditional past.

Thirdly, she says, both tradition and reflexivity are central to humanity, and hence, “irrespective of the strictness of the rules that regulate social life, there is always room to redefine situations and act in the light of experience and new knowledge.” Fourthly, she argues, people continue to cooperate with traditional principles in their lives, whether they identify their acts as such or not. Lastly, she proposes that it is possibly more realistic to speak of “re-traditionalization”, rather than detraditionalisation, because the current age of uncertainty seems to bring on a longing for “the stability of tradition”.

I refer to Heelas and Woodhead’s (2005: 6) observations on some of the distinguishing characteristics between religion and spirituality, that spirituality may refer to a “commitment to a deep truth that is to be found within what belongs to the world”, as opposed to religion, which seeks truth that is “‘out there’, lying beyond what this world

44 This is important while developing spiritually based approaches to sustainable development in India. Even while examining any aspect of Hinduism, for instance, Michaels (2005: 3) warns: “India is much too complex geographically, ethnically, linguistically, and religiously to allow any definitive statements to be made about it.” Michaels links India directly to Hinduism because he says the religion colours lifestyles in a myriad of ways in different parts of India.
has to offer, and exclusively related to specific externals [scriptures, dogmas, rituals and so on]." However, it is important to note the ethnocentrism of their analysis. Heelas and Woodhead refer quite specifically to Christianity and the related Abrahamic religions [Islam and Judaism]; they make no comment on Indic\footnote{Indic religions refer to Hinduism, the mother religion, and the breakaways, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism.} or other Eastern religions except to refer to the growing interest in Eastern sacred practices in the West [such as yoga, transcendental meditation, reiki and tai chi] as “alternate” or “New Age spiritualities”.\footnote{Mol (1976) writes that while it is the intention of any religion to sacralise communal identity, methods of doing so are decidedly different between Hinduism and its spawns, and Judaism, Christianity and Islam. He notes that there is a “hovering closeness between Indian religion and Indian social/local identity”, where even the gods are seen essentially as manifestations of human will and desire (1976: 192).} 

However, while addressing spirituality within the specific preoccupations of this thesis, it should be noted that in the particular case of Indic religions, such distinctions are not easily made, and that in fact, the lines distinguishing religion and spirituality are oftentimes blurred. Lipner (1994: 8) notes of Hinduism, for instance, that it is a “highly organised social and religious system...quite free from any dogmatic affirmations concerning the nature of God.” Panikkar (2006) also makes the important point that the etymology of the word ‘religion’ is closer to the Indian concept of dharma than the meanings associated with it in the predominant Western context. The Rig Vedas\footnote{Hinduism has not one cardinal scripture, but several holy texts. Important among these are the four Vedas – the Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda. They are believed to be among the most ancient religious and spiritual scriptures known to humanity and archaeological evidence from the ancient city of Dwarka dates it back to at least 12000 B.C. The Vedas contain prescriptions for rituals, hymns, incantations and verses from ancient India. The Vedas also form the subject for extensive research in Indo-European languages, and they are a priceless contribution to the study of comparative linguistics. Of the Vedas, the Rig Vedas are the oldest, and is based on the scientific study of sound and the sacred energy of each letter (The Hindu Universe, 2003).} may be argued to define dharma in spiritual-in-religious terms: “Patience, forgiveness, steadfastness of mind, non-stealing, cleanliness, restraint of sense, intellect, knowledge, truth and non-anger are the features of Dharma” (www.hinduism.co.za). Spirituality in this sense refers to the fundamental and essential nature of human beings, which is distinct from their material, worldly, temporal or evanescent reality.

Moreover, dharma essentially pertains to the innate nature of duty, and is an ethical, humanistic and universal concept. Dharma is thus both spiritual and secular in its
nature. *Dharma* does not require loyalty to, or belief in, any divine conception; however, in its call for restraint and control of the senses, it requires contemplation and meditation, which may be regarded as spiritual concepts, since they engage the inner conscience deeply. This understanding reflects the need for a deep introspection, and seems to combine well the essence of both religion and spirituality. Importantly, these concepts are integral to all religions, spiritualities and philosophical systems of thought, and may thus serve effectively as a framework for developing a universal notion of spirituality, which, while not an ambition of this thesis, does suggest a fruitful way of grounding sustainability in spirituality.

My thesis makes the more modest claim that the concept of sustainability would benefit from incorporating spirituality, that it ought not neglect spirituality, and to that end, there are other merits to grounding an understanding of spirituality, as it relates to sustainability, in religion. Mol (1976) notes for instance, that organised religion has an enormous power to emphasise values that strengthen societal cohesion, and reject those that threaten to destroy such solidarity. He writes (1976: 200): “They condemn contrasocial individualism, but encourage a measure of individualism that is beneficial to the social whole.”

However, if spirituality is understood to be sourced from religion, then it may be equally vulnerable to bellicism and prepossession. Religion may have a reactionary and chauvinistic aspect to its personality, which expresses itself in civic riots, fundamentalism and ‘freedom’ movements of an extreme and aggressive kind. Ironically, in a postmodernist world, where traditions have been overturned or subverted, where personal liberation and expression are becoming a powerful reality, there is also emerging a forceful move, a fierce zealousness for “absolute certainty, religious security and nostalgic traditionalism” (Tacey 2003: 5).

Religious rigidities have also been instrumental in maintaining strict controls over the lives of women. Seclusion of women and their physical, psychological and social repression was common in many orthodox Hindu, Muslim and Christian communities (Ahmed 2002). Women have a wide range of responses to religion and spirituality, and it is important to consider the impact of fundamentalism on their exclusion from positive participation in social life. The various fundamentalist movements, most
recently, the Taliban regime, the spread of Islamic terrorism or the rise of Hindu nationalism, has arguably marginalised women in several important ways, and ignored the vibrant and composite relationship that women and spirituality share. Robinson (1999: 197) puts forth some pertinent questions:

Does this imply that religion is inevitably and irredeemably associated with the oppression of women and hence that it is imperative to raise women’s consciousness about the evils of religion? Or does this imply that religion has been abused by being implicated in the oppression of women and hence that it is imperative to draw to women’s attention to the true meaning of religion?

Ahmed (2002: 8) writes that to be convinced of the validity of religion in such circumstances is “an act of courage”. However, she clarifies, “it is courage gained through a creative engagement with religion in which faith and different types of sacred and secular knowledge reinforce each other” (2002: 8). Ahmed (2002: 81) calls extremist interpretations of both religious and secular principles a “hypermasculine approach to the construction of both knowledge and meaning regarding self and the other.” She explains that secularism places humans at the forefront, trusting that through goodwill and reason, people will find a way to live ethically. However, she points out, as demonstrated by the Holocaust, communism, and Bosnia, men have proved that they are “as ready to kill in God’s absence as they are in His name” (Ahmed 2002: 81). Extremism is not an offspring of religion and spirituality, she concludes, but is a deeper psychological problem.

Ahmed believes (2002: 70-71) that the problem is not that religions in general are prejudiced against women. The issue is the conceptual perspective about gender and religion, which she says, “is that of the Western intellectual tradition’s ‘dead white male’, the legacy of Freud and Marx”, who argued that those who believe don’t think, and that those who think don’t believe. She believes that their ideas have caused some of people’s most elemental assumptions about women and religion to be distorted, thus thwarting a realistic understanding of both religion and women’s spirituality. No matter where one is located geographically, the problem has become a global phenomenon, of “psychological monotheism, which makes a monolith of any religion...and this is an overwhelmingly literal and masculine way of looking at issues” (Ahmed 2002: 81).
It is important therefore, to ensure that spirituality, particularly in the context of sustainability, does not become rigid, inflexible and unbending to changing times. It is perhaps even more vital that each particular genre of spirituality continues to acknowledge and accept the wisdom of the myriad of other spiritualities, and does not take on tones of fanaticism and communalism. Mahadevan (1967: 170) recommends a few crucial guidelines while adopting and amalgamating spiritual principles in human lifestyles:

"Each philosophical view or perspective should be, as far as possible, self-consistent;
It should contain within itself seeds of self-correction;
It should not be so narrow as to prevent it from realising that there may be truth in other views also;
It should be such that it is integrated with life as a whole."

In spite of the very real dangers of fundamentalism, however, scholars note that spirituality is also being positively embraced in growing numbers. Tacey (2003) is convinced that a ‘spirituality revolution’ has already taken place. Heelas and Woodhead (2005: 149) are more cautious about making such predictions; they admit, however that several significant “mini-revolutions” have occurred, and that fundamental shifts and changes in the “spiritual landscape” have taken place. They also propose that while congregational attendance might decline, in its place, a new culture of sacredness will strongly emerge, possibly under a ‘cultural canopy’ of education, healthcare and wellbeing.

While pointing to the importance of spirituality and advocating that it be present within the framework of sustainable development, it is useful to remember, however, that in the well-established tradition of the separation of the church and state, sustainable development has been framed in a secular way. The Brundtland Commission report (1987) makes no acknowledgement of the spiritual dimension to human lifestyles. The failure to acknowledge it, however, does not mean it is absent or irrelevant. For an example of how the vital connection may be refreshed, we could learn from Mel Gray’s (2006) review of the rising role of spirituality in social work practices. Gray (2006)
notes that even though social work can be traced to spiritual and religious practices, the
two were kept distinct and separate following the dominant secularity discourse. Thus,
an important consequence for social work, she says, is that rationality alone becomes
the vehicle for such work, and that the “grounding of virtues” is justified on logical
grounds (Gray 2006: 7).

The renewed interest in spirituality within social work occurred, Gray (2006: 8)
proposes because of a gradual collapse of faith in “social work’s dominant value system
[that comes] from an inherent belief in the rational, freely-choosing, and self-
determining individual.” However, this leads individuals to “crises of personal identity”
and “a constant state of self-questioning as they learn that knowledge has no (religious)
foundation” (Holden 2002: 12, in Gray 2006: 8).

Gray (2006: 18-19) notes that “individual social workers and policies of faith-based
social organizations within which many social workers practise” is powerfully informed
by spiritual and religious beliefs. Chile and Simpson (2004: 318) also note: “In an
increasingly globalized and diverse world, community development workers are likely
to be informed by a range of spiritual beliefs.” This suggests strongly that indeed, the
same might easily be true of sustainability workers, and that they too may avail
themselves of spiritual resources to assist them in their work.

2.5. Conclusions

Sustainable development and spirituality have generally been strange bedfellows; their
preoccupations are arguably similar but the potential for their being addressed together
was not formally articulated until recently, and then by spiritual organisations, rather
than sustainability ones. These agencies include the World Faiths Development
Discourse, Council for the Parliament of the World’s Religions, Millennium World
Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders, as well as other growing initiatives
such as Peace Council, Temple of Understanding, United Religions Initiative, and the

To achieve sustainability within communities, economies and natural environments, it
must be recognised that sustainable development as action, and spirituality as intention
or belief are intertwined, and must be addressed together. More than this, as the chapter demonstrated, it is vital to recognise the value of the spiritual to sustainable development. Sustainability deals with value variables such as power and powerlessness, vulnerability and oppression. It is critical therefore for non-economic forms of analysis, that the spiritual and the philosophical aspects be incorporated into the sustainability debate. Human wellbeing depends centrally on both the material and physical aspects of development, which have received almost exclusive recognition, as well as the non-material, spiritual dimensions. Recognising this important connection is necessary, so that sustainability goals may be accordingly reconceptualised.

Having examined the potential of spirituality to interpret, inform and ground the concept of sustainability, I am mindful that my case study for this thesis is the city of Delhi, and that cities, more than other human spaces are seen as sites which are antithetical to spiritual enrichment. They are more removed from wilderness and the natural environment, and are generally regarded difficult spaces in which individuals can connect to this larger purpose. They are also prime sites for the commercialisation of spirituality in urban spaces (Carrette and King 2005). For these reasons, I need to extend the discussion thus far into a specific site such as the city. Several new studies have emerged in recent times on the ‘spiritual in the city’ and how urban human lives might be made more meaningful (Davey 2005; Tanner 2004; Sheldrake 2001). In addition, there has been work arguing that urban planning itself needs to be re-examined (Sandercock 1998). These concerns will be examined in the following chapter, which looks at the city from the viewpoints of both sustainability and spirituality. The next chapter thus provides a necessary background for Chapter 4, which will examine Delhi city specifically from these two standpoints.
3. Sustainability and Spirituality in the City

3.1. Introduction

Agenda for environmental and social development have generally been designed for areas outside of the city; however since the nineties, there has been strong consensus that sustainable city planning has to be actively integrated in a global sustainability view, since cities arguably “shape the world” (Newman and Kenworthy 1999: 6). In fact, Yanarella and Levine (1992, in Newman and Kenworthy 1999) even propose that all other sustainability strategies should centrally revolve around designing and constructing sustainable cities. Beatley and Manning (1997) support this view. They write (1997: 56): “Any sustainability strategy that is truly comprehensive requires concern about the condition and status of cities – whether older cities, inner cities or inner-ring suburbs.” In particular, they stress, “the environmental agenda of sustainability must go hand in hand with a strong cities or urban agenda” (Beatley and Manning 1997: 56). This growing concern with city sustainability was prefigured in the Brundtland Commission report (1987: 279), which had noted that the new millennium would be the “century of the ‘urban revolution’”.

This chapter, therefore, begins with an overview of some of the major sustainability challenges that contemporary cities face, with a particular focus on the urban centres of developing countries. Such a contextual background will be useful because the case study that this thesis examines is the city of Delhi in India. I will follow this with an examination of some of the strategies that have emerged in response to these problems. Thereafter, I will examine the re-emergence of the spiritual in urban spaces, and contextualise the city as a sacred space. The final section of the chapter provides the reasons for selecting Delhi as a case study for this thesis, a summary of the methodological approaches used to study urban issues in Indian cities, as well as the methods employed to identify some of the major sustainability issues in Delhi.
3.2. Cities and the Sustainability Challenge

Cities are vivacious places. It is no longer possible to make any definitive statement about the nature of any modern city because as Rykwert (2002) notes, modern cities are contrary places, homes as they are to varied cultures, religions, nationalities and classes. He writes (2002: 7): “This modern city is too fragmentary, too full of contrast and strife: it must therefore have many faces, not one.” However, Rykwert also believes that this very contrariness is reason to rejoice, for “the condition of openness is what makes our city of conflicts so attractive to its growing crowd of inhabitants” (Rykwert 2002: 7). Therefore, far from being a problem, the diversity of a city and its inherent capacity to challenge and resist “any coherent, explicit image”, maddening though it may be in its contradictions, may be viewed in fact as a “positive virtue, not a fault at all, or even a problem” (Rykwert 2002: 7) because it presents endless possibilities for new ways of living itself.

However, the admittedly phenomenal rate of urbanisation, particularly in developing countries seems to have left planners without opportunity or foresight to deal with the rapid changes that it brought on. In Asia, for instance, the industrial boom in Japan in the 1960s was followed by the creation of the four ‘Asian tigers’ – Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong – and by the emergence of India and China as two major economic players. This brought on the beginnings of an urban explosion throughout the region. Logan (2002: xii) notes that with the exception of Africa, Asia has been urbanising much more rapidly than the rest of the world. In 1990, approximately one billion people or 41 per cent of the world’s population lived in Asian cities (Logan 2002: xii). This figure will escalate to 2.5 billion or 52 per cent of the global population by 2020 (Logan 2002: xii). More than one-third of the world’s population will live in Asian cities (Logan 2002). Davis (2006: 5) points out that this would lead to a greater proliferation of “megacities with populations of 8 million and, even more spectacularly, hypercities with more than 20 million inhabitants.”

Few city governments in the developing world have the power, resources and trained staff to provide their rapidly growing populations with the land, services and facilities needed for an adequate human life: clean water, sanitation, schools and transport. The result is mushrooming illegal settlements with primitive facilities, increased overcrowding, and rampant disease linked to an unhealthy environment.

Smith and Lee (1993) points out that it was believed that urbanisation would bring the same benefits for the developing world as it did for the developed countries: that once past the ‘dirty’ or industrial phase of urbanisation, benefits such as a comfortable lifestyle would automatically be available for all. On the contrary, however, urbanisation in the developing world has been the cause of more uneven development. The costs of such new urban development in developing countries has been a sharper escalation of the divide between rich and poor, represented this time by the difference in wealth in the large cities, and smaller cities and towns within countries (Davis 2006).

Mass migrations in unprecedented numbers to the larger cities are one of the most significant outcomes of these developments. Since the 1970s, for instance, more than 200 million Chinese migrated from the rural to the urban regions; in the ensuing years, approximately 300 million more of the “peasant flood” will migrate (Davis 2006: 11). However, Davis (2006) warns that most of the other developing countries, unlike China, Korea and Taiwan, do not have the export manufacturing support infrastructure that would sustain and manage such large populations; for instance, several large manufacturing cities such as Mumbai, Johannesburg, and Buenos Aires have had to endure significant industrial shut downs. Much of this is due to the “agricultural deregulation and financial discipline enforced by the IMF and World Bank”, causing mass migration to urban areas, even though such cities cannot employ and shelter them (Davis 2006: 15).

48 However, Davis (2006: 8) also notes that urbanisation has also led to “intensified interaction between every point of an urban-rural continuum.” Davis quotes from anthropologist Guldin’s study of urbanisation in China (Guldin 2001: 14–17, in Davis 2006: 9): “Villages become more like market and xiang towns, and country towns and small cities become more like large cities.” As Davis notes (2006: 8): “Indeed, in many cases, rural people no longer have to migrate to the city: it migrates to them.”
Pandey (1979: 150) considers urbanisation a "greater curse for Asia" than it is for the West. Unlike the West, he says, urbanisation is not a result of a rising rate of income per head but a desperate reaction against a lack of an active and healthy economic growth rate in the villages. In addition, the rapid rate of population growth causes the lower classes of the rural areas, who have little or no land of their own, to migrate to the cities in desperation. Rural poverty and insecurity in the villages creates cities in Asia, and as Pandey (1979) goes on to say, urbanisation in Asia is caused by a series of negatives: civil wars and riots, economic instability, crop-failure and a high rate of population growth.

Pandey (1979: 151) writes:

(W)hile it spells no disaster to the countries of the West where population has been stationary for decades and has not been thick either, it does in the countries of Asia where we witness the phenomenon of population-explosion of a staggering proportion. In Asia...urbanisation is admitted to be largely unrelated to any vigorous expansion of urban employment opportunities, for the cities are beset with serious unemployment and under-employment problems of their own. As squalor, overcrowding, inadequate housing and sanitation are the features of urban life in Asia, the movement towards the cities cannot be considered motivated by any increase in their overall attractiveness...in the West, a symptom of growth; in Asia, urbanisation has been an aspect of continued poverty – a malignant and retrograde development.

Pandey (1979) notes that Mahatma Gandhi opposed modernisation in developing cities, not for the concept itself, but for the way it was implemented, causing dislocation and suffering in the lives of people. He feared that individuals would not be able to live with each other in peace and harmony in consumption-oriented cities, and would thus not be able to attain true spiritual freedom, which he maintained was the highest endeavour of every individual. Gandhi preferred cities to be "functioning as agencies of advertisement for the finished fruits of well thought-out labours" (Pandey 1979: 134).

While cities have existed for thousands of years, the investment made in recent years to develop, expand and decorate them is unparalleled. This has come at an enormous
ecological cost because environmental problems almost invariably have urban sources, as well as being the place where “they are experienced with greatest intensity” (Clark 1996: 174). Clark points out that urban environmental crises occur because development is viewed in a series of linear stories; he quotes Girardet (1990: 7, in Clark 1996: 174) who views city development as a process where “food, fuels, construction materials, forest products and processed goods are imported into the city from somewhere, never mind where, and when they are finished with they are discarded, never mind how.” While cities represent some of the most degraded natural environments on the planet, their capacity to spread the pollution cannot be underestimated; for instance, less than one-fifth of urban waste such as nitrous oxide is believed to affect urban precincts; the remainder generally impacts rural areas several miles away (Clark 1996). Urban metabolism is thus different from natural metabolism, where every waste expulsion has the capacity to renew life (Girardet 1990, in Clark 1996).

Davis (2006: 134) notes that although theoretically cities were presented as the answer to ecological crises because ostensibly the “urban density can translate into great efficiencies in land, energy, and resource use”, the reality is that cities [and developing cities particularly] are generally “systematically polluting, urbanizing, and destroying their crucial environmental support systems.”

Typically, across the cities of the developing world, disposal of industrial, solid and natural waste is one of the biggest environmental threats (Davis 2006).

McGranahan and Satterthwaite (2000: 73) explain that urban environmental sustainability problems can be categorised in two ways: through the “green” agenda, which emphasises environmental impacts that are “more dispersed and delayed” and may often be global in nature [such as climate change], and the “brown” agenda that is mainly concerned with the impact of environmental degradation on human health. Of the two, the brown issues tend to impact the urban poor in developing cities the most. The urban poor are also historically more vulnerable to all urban environmental risks in general (McGranahan et al 2001).

49 For instance, Davis (2006: 135) notes: “In India, more than 50,000 hectares of valuable croplands are lost every year to urbanization” (cited from Fazal 2000).
At a surface level, the interests of brown and green agendas in cities may often be at odds with each other and this needs serious attention to address the obstacles to urban environmental sustainability and justice. Moreover, jointly addressing the concerns of green and brown agendas is also important in the interests of social justice. As McGranahan et al (2001: 174) write: “Sacrificing future generations to achieve affluence in the present may be unfair, but so is sacrificing currently deprived people in the name of a potentially affluent future.”

Above all, as McGranahan and others (2001) point out, two of the most important objectives of the Brundtland Commission report (1987) – i.e., elimination of poverty and ensuring a secure future for generations to come – can be met by achieving urban environmental sustainability. They write (2001: 160): “More sustainable cities can protect the environment for coming generations, while healthier environments in low-income settlements can reduce poverty.” However, they also accuse international urban sustainability policy of giving in to rhetoric, and sorely under-representing the poor generations, future generations as well as generations of non-human species, thus ignoring the principles of both inter-generational and intra-generational equity (McGranahan et al 2001).

Stephens (2000) argues that global poverty and inequality are increasingly becoming fundamentally urban phenomena, concentrated in developing cities. McGranahan et al (2001) point out that with most of the world’s poor now located in cities, addressing urban poverty is one of the greatest city sustainability challenges of the new millennium. As the city administration is unable to keep up with the demands for housing and shelter, developing cities are witnessing the rapid proliferation of slums.51

50 For example, “the brown agenda would seem to call for more water use, more sewerage connections, more waste collection, more urban residential land and more fossil fuel use (to replace smoky biofuels). By way of contrast, the green agenda would seem to call for water conservation, less water-borne sewerage, less waste generation, less urban expansion and less fossil fuel use” (McGranahan and Satterthwaite 2000: 77). However, a review of urban environmental management strategies would reveal that the distinctions are not as sharp as they appear (McGranahan and Satterthwaite 2000).

51 Mumbai city has the dubious distinction of being home to Asia’s largest slum – the Dharavi settlement consisting of more than a million inhabitants, right in the heart of the city (Sharma 2000). However, rapid slum growth in the city fringe has caused the shanty townships to trespass into protected natural parks. In one such instance in Mumbai, the slums have wandered so far into the national parks that several inhabitants get “routinely eaten by leopards” (Davis 2006: 136).
The sharp polarisation of assets and real income in developing cities\(^{52}\) has led to every kind of poverty (Stephens 2000: 101): "physical poverty" such as food deprivation, water deprivation, land deprivation, inadequate or no access to health and sanitation, lack of shelter, and transport poverty; as well as other standards of poverty, such as "poverty of opportunity", which denies the poor employment and education, all vital to lift current and future generations out of endemic vulnerability\(^{53}\). As Landry (2000: 26) writes:

Such frustrations with poverty and unemployment can breed hopelessness, unfulfilled expectations, and boredom can change whole areas into ghettos and self-reinforcing cycles of deprivation. Meanwhile the rich create their own ghettos...to protect themselves from the perceived or real threat of the poor.

Technology has unquestionably shaped cities and human lifestyles, and brought unimaginable benefits to the quality of human existence. Ironically, however, "the technological society helps build a world in which technological innovation is increasingly necessary to maintain, improve, and remedy existing technosystems" (Davison 2001: 107). This fosters great dependence on the technology and essentially requires that human character reshape itself, often in artificial, to suit the personality of technology (Davison 2001). However, as Charlene Spretnak points out (1999: 42):

Modern societies have been reluctant to acknowledge those 'side effects'\(^{54}\), adopting instead a surprisingly uncritical attitude towards technological change,

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\(^{52}\) The sharp polarisation between the rich and the poor in developing cities is also evident in other ways, particularly in urban density. For instance in Nairobi, there are about 360 individuals per square kilometre, as opposed to over 80,000 in an identical sized area (Davis 2006: 95). In Dhaka, over 70 per cent of the population are poor and are squeezed into less than 20 per cent of the surface area of the metropolis (Davis 2006: 95). Mumbai exemplifies this shocking state of affairs most: while the wealthy have access to over 90 per cent of the city land, the poor are pushed into the remaining 10 per cent (Davis 2006: 96).

\(^{53}\) Jacobs (1984) forewarns that the poor economic status is particularly disguised in the case of the capital cities, even though such cities generally give the appearance of thriving prosperity for the longest time. Jacobs writes (1984: 231): "When a city's principal function is being a capital...it is obvious that the more transfer payments, subsidies, grants, military contracts...the greater the work and prosperity in the city." However, she writes (1984: 232): "Behind its busyness at ruling, a capital city of a nation or an empire, vivacious to the last, at length reveals itself as being a surprisingly inert, backward and pitiable place."

\(^{54}\) Spretnak (1999: 41-42) is referring to "the level and intensity of destruction" in late history, which was "heightened by the evolution of modern technology: mustard gas, torpedoes, aerial bombing, rocket attacks, and atomic bombs." Moreover, technology also enabled "value-free
which often brings rippling and unexamined consequences. At the core of many brilliant nature-defying breakthroughs, the seeds of new misery often lie hidden, as recent history has shown.

Technology has alleviated human suffering in no small measure, and also contributed much to pure enjoyment. However, Spretnak (1999: 42) argues, “the materialist bent of the modern view of life predisposes us to perceive this vast bounty of mechanical and electronic devices as far outweighing whatever problems may exist in the areas of liberte, egalite and fraternite.” Moreover, the pervasive belief that technology can solve all problems seems misleading as reasonably placed trust, given some of its miraculous scientific breakthroughs (Spretnak 1999). As Davison concludes (2001: 108): “Sadly, awareness of this irony is faint...our common sense appraisal that something is wrong here lacks conviction and dissipates in the face of expert discourses on technocracy.”

Technology has gender-specific impacts as well.55 After the widespread misuse of amniocentesis in the 1980s in Indian urban areas to eliminate female foetuses, particularly in Chennai and Mumbai, a strong feminist protest followed to demand a ban of sex-determination tests. However, even though the ban was eventually enforced, the technology already spread like wildfire from urban to rural India (Mies 1993b). Mies (1993b: 184) charges contemporary biotechnologists of treating human beings as “organic matter”, and women as the main source of such “organic matter”. “Morality”, she says, “has no place in their laboratories” (1993b: 184).

Technological change often brings with it a host of urban social problems, as well as environmental crises. Social planners for cities have long been concerned with the change in culture, values and dissolution of community bonds that any rapid development [such as high use of technology] in cities might bring about. These transformations are reflected in the relationship of the individual to the broader social environment. While Emile Durkheim, in his classic work La Suicide, did not specifically talk about technology in study on alienation, it is useful here to examine his
notion of the concept of “anomie” as a “condition of deregulation or relative normlessness in a social group” (Durkheim 1959: 257), which he describes thus:

(A)nomic was endemic in modern societies and especially virulent in the economic sector where all customary restraints and moral limits on man’s aspirations were being undermined by the capitalist ethic of greed and gain.”

Anomic refers to the weakening of all social bonds within a community, and is responsible for suicides, mental depression and alienated individuals, leading to what David Riseman et al (2001) call the “Lonely Crowd” syndrome. Individuals of an urban environment need to safeguard themselves against becoming “a disorganised dust of individuals” (Durkheim 1964: 446). Albert Schweitzer (1949: 29, in Pandey 1979: 134) writes: “The modern man is lost in the mass in a way which is without precedent in history...he is like a rubber ball which has lost its elasticity, and preserves indefinitely every impression that is made upon it.” Mac Iver considers anomie in the context of the loss of acknowledgement of the spiritual dimension of living (1950: 80):

[Anomic is] the state of mind of one who has been pulled up by his moral roots, who has no longer any standards but only disconnected urges, who has no longer any sense of continuity of folk, of other men. The anomic man has become spiritually sterile [emphasis mine], responsive only to himself, responsible to no one. He derides the values of other men. His only faith is the philosophy of denial. He lives on the thin line of sensation between no past and no future.

There are also gendered aspects to urban unsustainability. Gender relationships within communities are socially and culturally constructed. McDowell (1999) explains that how communities decide to represent, interpret and even create new values in their use of urban spaces is a gendered negotiation. For example, women often consider urban communities to be rapacious environments and they source their apprehension for their physical safety to the patriarchal nature and value system of such societies. Feminist geographer Gill Valentine (1992: 27, in Domosh and Seager 2001: 100) calls this a “spatial expression of patriarchy”, since it reflects and reinforces the traditional notion that women belong, and are safer, at home, not in the streets. Domosh and Seager (2001) further observe that though women probably experience even greater violence in
the private confines of their homes, it is the spaces clearly defined as ‘public’ that they fear most.

As a result, women tend to isolate themselves from the wider community and restrict their actions to the boundaries of the domestic areas of urban spaces. Domosh and Seager write (2001: 100):

Research demonstrates that this fear of public spaces is true for women of all socio-economic classes, ages and stages in the life cycle. Women’s perceptions of risk from crime in the city, and the gendered association of the city as male, are mutually reinforcing. There are real risks to women who venture into the wrong street at the wrong time, but our culture also tends to exaggerate these risks, thereby keeping women in their ‘place’.

Urban communities are culturally, socially and economically so diverse and rich, and there are sections within sections that form exclusive social networks. These invisible boundaries are generally not divisive and add to the vibrancy, colour and energy of the cities. Miranne and Young explain (2000: 1): “Boundaries establish differences and commonalities between individuals and groups...they may be maintained, crossed, resisted, reconfigured...[and they] may be permeable and inclusive.” The imagery of the urban environment gets further enriched through the actions that women take within these geographical spaces and the lives they live there. Miranne and Young (2000: 1) argue that, “(s)ocially constructed gender relations and the visible and invisible boundaries affect how women use urban space.” Mostly, they conclude that as far as women are concerned, the boundaries tend to be far less “permeable”, and more exclusionary. Miranne and Young (2000) particularly consider the important point that women are active mostly at the periphery of urban communities, and that this has thus far been the primary way in which they have been able to access urban spaces for themselves.

However Rykwert (2002: 7) makes the insightful observation that cities above all, are “malleable” spaces, and that constant and swift change characterises cities, “whatever their virtues or their faults”. He proposes therefore that urban citizens are eminently in an environment where demanding and actualising their preferred change is possible,
even though “the powers raged against them seem crushingly vast and wholly impersonal.” It is important however, to have some sort of loosely defined agreement on what makes each city socially stable, safe and vivacious (Rykwert 2002).

Therefore, continuing on with my specific focus on broadly examining city sustainability, my next section will examine some of the responses to the issues of urban unsustainability, particularly in developing cities. This is important in the face of Jane Jacobs’ (1984: 232) grim warning: “Societies and civilizations in which the cities stagnate don’t develop and flourish further. They deteriorate.” Clearly, one of the biggest challenges of city sustainability in developing countries is the rapid degradation of the urban ecology, which in turn critically impacts issues of social justice and equity. In keeping with this concern, I will study urban sustainability in such a context, using other indicators such as social and economic sustainability as qualifiers of environmental protection.

3.3. Cities and the Sustainability Response

The Brundtland Commission report observes that the world’s economic system has fundamentally become urban (1987: 279): “This system, with its flows of information, energy, capital, commerce and people, provides the backbone for national development”. As such, the sustainability of the regional hinterland also inevitably depends on the sustainability of cities. So what may be the vision for a sustainable city? Newman and Kenworthy (1999: 7) offer a definition:

It is possible to define the goal of sustainability in a city as the reduction of the city’s use of natural resources and production of wastes, while simultaneously improving its livability, so that it can better fit within the capacities of local, regional and global ecosystems.

Beatley and Manning (1997) also perceive a sustainable city as being judicious in its consumption of environmental resources. They write (1997: 27): “Whether they are called ‘green communities’, ‘green cities’ or ‘ecocities’, sustainable places seek to limit environmental impacts and the consumption of natural resources.” As a starting point to this end, the city may be viewed not merely as a complex human habitat, but as an

Like all ecosystems, the city is a system, having inputs of energy and materials. The main environmental problems (and economic costs) are related to the growth of these inputs and the inevitable increase in outputs. By looking at the city as a whole and by analysing the pathways along which energy and materials (and pollution) move, it is possible to begin to conceive of management systems and technologies that allow for the reintegration of natural processes, increasing the efficiency of resource use, the recycling of wastes as valuable materials, and the conservation (and even production) of energy.

Several factors, then, influence the creation of sustainable urban environments. Some of these are: reduction of energy use and enhanced air quality; reduction of water use and generation of waste; preservation of land, green areas and the urban biodiversity; and reducing the impact of the automobile (Newman and Kenworthy 1999). Other indicators of sustainable urban forms include: containing urban sprawl; conceptualising creative and affordable housing solutions; promoting mixed-use development to increase the “vibrancy and livability of cities” and opposing “sorted” or fixed use of public spaces; envisioning alternative forms of mobility such as walking and cycling; having a clear sustainability perspective on the rural hinterland and the regions; and creating financial incentives to maintain cities in compact forms (Beatley and Manning 1997: 56-76).

As a response to the environmental, social and economic inequalities brought on by globalisation, which “turn complex ecosystems into streams of standardized commodities”, Newman and Jennings (2004: 36) suggest that the potential of local communities and economies in cities be tapped to “encourage urban ecovillages and

\textsuperscript{56} One of the earliest models to view the urban environment was in terms of the human ecology, which examined “city life and form as an extension of the processes of the natural world” (Kleniewski 2005: 1). The theory considered the city as a living organism with several mutually dependent parts (Kleniewski 2005). However, since the 1970s, new urban issues such as “racial polarization, government intervention in the real estate market, economic instability, and the growing difference between cities in the rich and poor nations” rendered the human ecology theory insufficient as a satisfactory research tool (Kleniewski 2005: 2).
bioregional economic\textsuperscript{57} and social processes.” They outline seven strategies for cities to be community and bioregion focussed (2004: 36): “local/bioregional infrastructure for cities; urban ecovillages; urban agriculture and community gardens; community spaces and pedestrianisation; complementary currencies and local banks; true costing initiatives; ‘buy local’ and ecolabelling; and community arts.”

A popular solution to the problem of urban sustainability, particularly in the context of ecological conservation in developed cities has been proposed for developing cities as well – that of building compact urban models (Burgess 2000). Burgess (2000: 9) argues, “compaction is rooted in the sustainability imperatives of resource conservation (particularly fossil-fuelled energy) and waste minimisation (particularly carbon emissions into the global atmospheric sink).” Richardson et al (2000: 33) point out that excessive automobile dependence, which is considered to one of the major impediments to sustainable cities in developed countries (Newman and Kenworthy 1999) is significantly lower in high-density developing cities, which generally tend to have more richly networked public transport systems.\textsuperscript{58} Even so, public transport in developing cities is generally unable to cope with the tremendous influx of migrants, and Richardson et al (2000) suggest that creating sustainable urban mobilities is a critical must for developing cities. Downton (2000) proposes that more systematic and supportive forms of urban agriculture may also enable compactness in developing cities.

Burgess (2000), however, makes the important point that compaction of developing cities has to be approached with much caution. In several ways, over-compaction [in the form of high-density populations] may be, ironically, just as unsustainable as urban sprawl.\textsuperscript{59} To illustrate, Downton (2000: 313) says of Calcutta [now Kolkata] for instance:

\textsuperscript{57} Newman and Jennings (2004: 36) thus describe the benefits of bioregional economies: “Bioregional economies reflect the capacities and limitations of their particular ecosystems, honor the diversity and history of local cultures, and meet human needs as locally as possible. Bioregional economies are diverse, resilient and decentralized...they do not compromise their own Social Capital, Natural Capital, or Economic Capital...they can create economies that celebrate and mirror local ecosystems and cultures.”

\textsuperscript{58} Richardson et al (2000) also point out, however, that greater dependence on private automobiles is generally associated with higher levels of income and GDP growth, which is a useful insight for a growing economy such as India’s.

\textsuperscript{59} Burgess (2000) points out that in Delhi for instance, recent middle and upper class migrations to the city fringe to escape high-density life have resulted in other problems. The city periphery is predominantly residential, which means there has been an increase of traffic congestion as
If the compact city is about intensive land use, centralised activity and higher cities, then Calcutta is compact. If it is about most people moving around without cars, then Calcutta complies. If quality of life is a key criterion, then the city fails.

Downton (2000) proposes that though far from ideal, cities like Curitiba in Brazil may be a model for urban sustainable development, in managing the problems of both sprawl and compaction, more successfully than other developing cities. Curitiba’s city planning methods included “preference for public transportation over the private automobile, working with the environment rather than against it, appropriate, rather than high-technology solutions, and innovation with city participation in place of master planning” (Rabinovich and Leitman 1996: 27, in Downton 2000: 315). In contrast, Indian cities continue to be ‘developed’ under a Master Plan, with no or minimal citizen participation (Downton 2000).

As a starting point to address the most pressing aspects of unsustainability in cities, it was proposed at the Earth Summit in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro that responsibility needed to be devolved to the local levels of governance so as to localise the notion of sustainability: the Local Agenda 21 (LA21)\(^6\) was thus developed. Urban poverty eradication was one of the most important aims of the LA21, because urbanisation at the dominant global level only meant “urbanisation of poverty and deprivation” (Tuts 2002: 3). Newman and Kenworthy (1999) note that in India for instance, law in the local governments of several states requires adoption of the LA21 [it may be noted that this law has not been adopted by the Delhi government yet].

As a sister programme to the LA21 and to facilitate its implementation in cities, the UNHABITAT-UNEP sponsored UN Sustainable Cities Programme was also launched

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\(^6\) Local Agenda 21 refers to the exhaustive sustainable development action, which is to be undertaken by every government internationally, nationally and locally, in every area where human beings impact the natural environment. The figure 21 refers to the new millennium (Tuts 2002). Agenda 21 particularly aims to implement sustainability at the local level, and to strengthen existing government regulations on transport, water management and environmental protection to ensure social, environmental and economic sustainability (Tuts 2002). A specific goal of Agenda 21 is also to strengthen the role of women in the sustainable development process (Tuts 2002).
in 1992.\textsuperscript{61} Tuts (2002: 3) of the UNHABITAT sums up the problems of life-endangering levels of poverty and, urban ecological degradation: "Unemployment with weak social services, lack of adequate shelter and basic infrastructure combined with increasing disparities are resulting in a high degree of social exclusion — the principle cause of social dysfunction, crime and violence." Tuts (2002) claims that the first phase of its implementation from 1991-2001 was successful, and objectives such as development of EPM [environmental planning and management] tools, building awareness of the urban agenda, and resource mobilisation and management were met. The second phase of its programme from 2002-2007 is ongoing, and aims to strengthen EPM management through enhanced urban mobility and provision of basic services (Tuts 2002).

However, critical findings from the United Nations Human Settlements Programme’s [UNHSP] work on encouraging the active implementation of LA21 in developing urban habitats\textsuperscript{62} are discouraging (Tuts 2002). According to Tuts (2002), the UNHSP believes that it is vital to locate the poor at the centre of any urban sustainability strategy because there is a very clear connection between the creation of healthy, equitable and sustainable societies, and the elimination of poverty; and participation must necessarily include representatives of the affected groups as well as stakeholders [and this must include women]. However, the study also notes that implementation of LA21 has generally failed in most of the countries because of poor governance and implementation of laws.

\textsuperscript{61} The UNCHS launched the Sustainable Chennai Project (SCP) in India in 1995 to assist the implementation of the LA21 in the city. Their particular priorities included improving sanitation in poor areas of the city, both rural and semi-urban; to reduce the choking traffic and road congestion; and to clean the Cooum and Adyar Rivers in the city, which rate high with the Ganga and the Yamuna in terms of water toxicity (Pugh and Dahiya 2000). The comprehensive public participation which included citizens from the industry, scientists, local government agencies, NGOs, professional and technical institutes, and the general public was unprecedented in the city (Dahiya and Pugh 2000). While it was clear that the particular issues clarified within each of the priorities would take longer than imagined in the SCP to implement because of the large size and socio-economic complexities of the city, it nevertheless managed to pervade the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority, which had generally been parochial and insular (Dahiya and Pugh 2000). It has also created new possibilities for interaction between agencies, and brought to light new and vital aspects of urban environmental, social and economic management in Chennai, which needed sustained work and planning.

\textsuperscript{62} Proposals are underway to expand UNHABITAT’s Agenda 21 activities to Delhi, Bangalore and Mumbai (Dahiya and Pugh 2000).
The World Bank and UNCHS therefore propose that urban strategies should follow policies of "enablement" (Pugh 2000: 224). "Enablement" may be described as "creating frameworks that provide legal, social, cultural and governance conditions whereby states, markets, the voluntary sector and households could achieve improvements in urban, housing and environmental qualities" (Pugh 2000: 224). Enablement would also be adaptable, and thus provide a vehicle for sustainable development (Pugh 2000). In his extensive work on welfare economics in India, Nobel-award winning economist Amartya Sen (1999) argues that the role of the state must support essentially those economic policies that allow social empowerment. In locating cities within a global sustainability worldview, governance in developing countries and cities must be institutions of enablement.

Finally, Stephens (2000) argues that the educated classes in cities, which are spaces where individuals and social groups can create a difference, need to actively demonstrate their understanding and commitment to sustainability. Knowledge capital is a key element of power, and which is controlled generally by the influential and the powerful in cities (Stephens 2000; Castells 1997). However, holders of information, particularly at political and bureaucratic levels, are not always ethical and are often motivated by parochial interests, whose actions compromise sustainability. Creation of a conscientious mindset thus has to be a pragmatic necessity for effective sustainability. In the light of the major preoccupation of my thesis, namely, grounding sustainable development in spirituality, this view leads me to consider next the city in the context of spirituality. This would be a useful background while focussing subsequently on the dynamics of such an approach in the context of the Delhi case study.

3.4. The Sacred City

Cities are arguably worthy sites to study the potential for spirituality to enliven the notion of sustainability. This argument is informed by Sheldrake’s observation (2001: 147) that the city is "pre-eminently human in conception and construction" and "represents and creates a climate of values that defines how humans understand themselves and gather together, and also shapes their sensibilities and ways of seeing the world". The city dramatises most powerfully the value that is placed upon the community, which in turns shapes its architecture, economics and planning (Sheldrake
2001). The rhetorical question: “What is a city?” is thus fundamentally “philosophical, theological and spiritual” (Sheldrake 2001: 148).

At a superficial level, the notion of the city and spirituality may understandably meet with some scepticism. Davey (2005: 105-106) writes:

Urban settings have not always been seen as conducive setting for ‘things of the spirit’. The harsh anarchy of the industrial or commercial city has often been contrasted with the ordered serenity of the village green or cathedral close. Corruption is apparent in the smells, noise, pollution and the visual temptations. Hardly a place to pray; rather a place from which one could cry for release.

Some urban planners speak with despair over what they perceive as the essential human condition in cities. Schneider writes (2004: 68): “Human behaviours, independent of changing circumstances like urbanization, have been one of the least evolutionary activities in recent times; social change primarily reflects the radical impacts of the automobile.” Davey (2005: 107) supports the idea that human beings have ceased to evolve in any meaningful sense, and believes that in current times, they have also lost the ability to recognise or understand the spirituality that is available in cities. For this, he blames the “secularization of our cityscapes”. He writes (2005: 107): “The individuality and privatization of what often passes for spirituality buys into a culture where one no longer trips over God on the pavement or in the doorway of the city church; instead, the city is seen as something to be escaped rather than revelled in.” He argues that this is a far cry from medieval cities where “not just sacred buildings, but the sacredness of the built environment and of the community that occupied it, were taken for granted” (Davey 2005: 107). Sandercoc (1998: 212) also laments, “we have created landscapes, cityscapes, devoid of the sacred, devoid of the spirit”, and emphasises (1998: 213):

The point is that perhaps our modernist/progressive longing for freedom from the non-rational is inherently flawed; out of date and out of touch with the real needs of our time.
The urban-spiritual situation is slightly different in non-Western cities, where the traditional arguably continues to have a stronger impact. Urban spiritual traditions have endured most successfully in the cities of the Indian subcontinent and the Islamic heartland of West Asia and West Africa where European colonisation occurred relatively later, and was also of shorter duration (Lowder 1986). The cities of these continents have complex histories as a result of foreign invasions, military conquests, famine and disease. As a result, their spiritual traditions include not just the orthogenetic customs and philosophies but a myriad collection of traditions and peoples (Lowder 1986). The physical development of these developing cities, therefore, is heterogeneous in nature: “each (faction) organised on highly personalized lines; their religious and commercial institutions included members from suburban and surrounding villages” (Lowder 1986: 26).

Currently, however, even where urban sacredness is (almost reluctantly) acknowledged in cities, it is often more with a pragmatist view to ‘protect’ the secular urban space (Kong 1993, in Sandercock 1998). Sometimes tensions between the secular and religious or spiritual spaces within cities can threaten the existence of a “common civic culture” (Sandercock 1998: 181). For instance, Sandercock (1998: 181) describes the struggle to maintain a respectful diversity of the religious and the secular in Jerusalem, the resolution of which will ultimately determine “the future of the city as open, tolerant and heterogeneous, or as closed, intolerant, culturally monolithic.”

In the context of the thesis, and in exploring how spirituality informs contemporary urban lifestyles in the context of sustainability, I use Tanner’s (2004) proposal that a defining characteristic of contemporary urbanisation is how the notion of space assumes new political and social significance. The impact that capitalism has on urban spaces, she argues (2004: x-xi) “is not simply temporalizing – always revolutionizing the production process,dooming to obsolescence, and chasing the new. It is also a force for ever-new spatial configurations....” She quotes Lefebvre (Tanner 2004: xi, in Lefebvre 1976: 31) that in such a context, “Space is political and ideological. It is a product literally filled with ideologies.”

From such a perspective, the spiritual and religious landscape of the city may be explored and understood in terms of the numerous negotiations and interactions that
take place in urban space. Tanner (2004: xii) suggests that theology be viewed in spatial terms:

Contextual theology – theology that owns up to the influence of race, class, and gender, theology that self-consciously addresses problems endemic to specific social locations – becomes a theology of quite physical geographical contexts: of architecture and transportation, of travel and emigration, of public processions and urban divisions.

As Sandercock (1998: 213) points out, modern cities shaped by secular ideologies may no longer function centrally around traditional sites of worship such as a church or a mosque, even though they may continue to impact the community. She suggests that we view cities as “centres of spontaneous creativity and festival” to “come closer to an appreciation of the presence of the spirit around us” (Sandercock 1998: 213).

Similarly, concerns discussed earlier in relation to sustainability also link to views of spirituality in the city. For instance, Sheldrake’s (2001: 150) concerns about the “purification of space” in the city are relevant, which he believes is an outcome of cultural diversity of inhabitants, xenophobia, and crime directed against the more vulnerable members of the community. This anxiety is consonant with feminist concerns for instance, that urban public spaces are “gendered zones” and communities in the cities have to contribute to creating women-friendly environments (Domosh and Seager 2001: 100). Sheldrake (2001) is also concerned that the technology-induced societal alienation would reduce the public space from a site of meaningful encounters, to merely a space that facilitates movement. Additionally, Sheldrake (2001) is also apprehensive that modern communities are transitory in nature, and that this constant dislocation and relocation erodes a sense of place. He argues that these are all as much spiritual issues as they are social concerns because without a grounding of a sense of place and identification, “there is no centering of the human spirit” (Sheldrake 2001: 150).

Mark Oakley (2005: 4), a priest of the Church of England points out that if Mahatma Gandhi was correct in believing that one can “meet God” anywhere, including in each person we encounter, then “the city is full of spiritual potential.” Oakley (2005) also
believes that the city may be viewed as a space where some of the most enduring contemporary spiritual struggles of human kind may be enacted, given the city’s capacity to seduce and titillate. He writes (2005: 10):

It seems to me that our cities are wonderful places for us to learn more about the Divine method of being alive. Our constant encounter with difference and our fight to be a citizen, rather than just a consumer, are both pregnant with opportunities for spiritual growth.

Making use of such opportunities may be construed as what may be called “doing urban theology”, where there is “an organic reality to the practice of faith and the pursuit of kingdom’s justice” (Davey 2005: 106). Davey writes (2005: 106):

People learn what it means to be ‘mindful of God’ in their particular situation, to be attentive to the action of God in the world around them, to be ready to see their location with new eyes and to encounter the divine in its places and people.

In a plea for creative urban planning that transcends mere modernist visions and explores “the importance of memory, desire, and the spirit [or the sacred] as vital dimensions of healthy human settlements and a sensitivity to cultural expressions in the expressions of each”, Sandercock (1998: 214) calls for a range of diverse spaces in the city:

[There is need for] places loaded with visual stimulation, as well as also places of quiet contemplation, uncontaminated by commerce, where the deafening noise of the city can be kept out so that we can listen to the ‘noise of the stars’ or the wind or water, and the voice(s) within ourselves.

The ‘visibility’ and ‘presence’ of the spiritual in contemporary urban lifestyles, and how it may be potentially used as a tool for community engagement in the context of sustainability must be viewed in creative ways.

As an example of how this might be done, Oakley (2005: 11) reminds us that religion and the theatre are “ancient cousins” and recommends that the city’s wherewithal to
entertain – its cinemas, playhouses and theatres – be used as a “gymnasium for underused imagination” (2005: 10). Oakley’s (2005: 11) suggestion that the churches in the city use their space as an enabling environment where “artists and people of faith” may “discover in each other’s worlds echo chambers of those truths that matter deeply to them” may well be extended to the sacred sites of another religion – temples, for instance. Hinduism has a long and abiding relationship with the theatre, where folklore and mythological stories from sacred texts such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are enacted. Similarly, another medium, films, may also engage viewers in a process of thought, reflection and engagement that may be arguably spiritual in nature, with the core issues confronting the individual and the community. Films can be key factors in mobilising mass social movements, challenging existing social norms or reinforcing them. Films can be a medium of portraying the human situation in a most elemental form, and as such, can play a fine role in promoting feelings of empathy and oneness.63

Another important conceptual meeting point for sustainability and spirituality in the city is in the notion of service. Oakley (2005: 11) writes: “Cities offer many opportunities for service to those who need assistance and human support. The various volunteer bodies and charities, along with the other excellent work that goes on day by day to fight alienation and poverty, are the places where Christ is still met and reverenced.”64

Similarly, Davey (2005: 108) puts forward that the “seeds of any serious urban spirituality” may be found in the experience of encountering the stranger in a city space “that is always that of the other.” The constant diversity, possibility and change in cities offer “a stunning array of opportunities for personal and communal exploration” to both local residents and immigrants (Davey 2005: 108).

63 For instance, Kishwar writes of the Bollywood movie industry located in Mumbai city in India (2005): “(A)n overwhelming majority of Bollywood films depict idyllic inter-community bonds on the basis of neighbourhood ties and personal friendship between people of different religions. They repeatedly tell stories of Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Sikhs, living together with exemplary affection and camaraderie, which includes exceptional respect for the other and even making enormous sacrifices, including that of their own lives, to protect neighbours or friends in times of trouble. Bollywood films never tire of showing a Hindu or a Muslim woman adopting a man of different religious affiliation as her rakhi [adoptive] brother and the man chosen for this honour willing to lay down his own life for the protection and well being of his adopted sister.”
64 Oakley (2005: 11) recounts the parable of the monk who sets off on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to circle the holy city thrice. However, on his way, he meets a starving man to whom he gives all his money intended to finance his pilgrimage. The monk circles the poor man thrice and returns home, satisfied that “Jerusalem visited him” instead. Likewise, there are several opportunities to genuinely ‘encounter Jerusalem’ in the city.
As Dominique Lapierre (1985) shows in his touching novel *The City of Joy*, the account of a Polish missionary, who follows a calling to live in a Kolkatā\textsuperscript{65} slum and be of service to the most wretched of the wretched – the human spirit responds to rise above the physical ugliness, when awakened to its own potential. Lapierre’s novel is also about the way a community can be saved from collapse into its own mindless vicious circle of deprivation, exploitation, aggression and grief, by a powerful infusion of spiritual understanding of itself and its people. While spirituality cannot be passed off as a panacea or placebo to cure all evils, its potential to alleviate much urban suffering must not be underestimated.

3.5. The Writing of ‘In A City Like Delhi’

To conclude this chapter, I want to turn to the city that is my case study for investigating the potential of spirituality as a way of enlightening and animating sustainable development – the city of Delhi. In this final section, therefore, I justify the use of Delhi as a case study; provide an overview of some of the issues and challenges in exploring such a theme in Delhi; and the sources used to identify sustainable development issues in Delhi.

*Case Study: Deciding Delhi and Investigating India*

In exploring the potential for spirituality as an animating medium for sustainable development in urban India, I selected the city of Delhi as its case study site. Using a case study to source the primary data lends itself as a useful methodology for this thesis, which is intended to be an exploratory study of a hitherto relatively unexplored area. However, using a case study approach immediately calls for a justification of the site.

I chose Delhi as a case study for the following reasons. Yin (2003:77) recommends that the case study be selected carefully since a “critical case” can increase the “generalizability” potential of the case. He also observes that a “typical or an average”

\textsuperscript{65} Kolkatā is a case in point of spiritual leaders who had taken on the cause of poverty alleviation, provision of education and healthcare to the poor and numerous other development causes. These exemplar models include Mother Teresa and her lifetime dedication to the city, and the Ramakrishna Mission established by Swami Vivekananda as a tribute to his master.
case study may be a poor source of information; “atypical or extreme cases often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied” (2003: 78). A typical case study to examine the interface between Hindu spirituality and sustainable development may have been any one of the numerous traditional spiritual cities of India: Benares, Madurai, Puri, Rishikesh, Haridwar, and Guruvayur, to name a few. Both spiritual and religious traditions in these cities have a generally established system of devoting themselves to charity work, social upliftment and alleviation of the various forms of deprivation.

However, Delhi presents itself as an “atypical” case study that allows the observation and interplay of rich variables. Delhi is the capital city of secular India. Some scholars have commented on Delhi as being the “microcosm” of India (Varma 2001: 217). Delhi is essentially a city of immigrants, and is possibly one of India’s most multicultural and pluralistic societies, with a rich diversity of traditions, ethnic affiliations, and cultural variety. Delhi is one of India’s and the world’s fastest growing cities, and is also believed to be one of the world’s oldest living cities (Siddiqui et al 2004). Modernity and tradition, capital and culture, and the global and the ghetto thus exist alongside each other in Delhi, creating a rich diversity of urban lifestyles.

Flyvbjerg (2001: 80) points to the validity of the indescribable “intuition” in identifying a “paradigmatic” case study. Having lived in all four major Indian metropolitan cities [Delhi, Mumbai (formerly Bombay), Chennai (formerly Madras) and Kolkata (formerly Calcutta)], I would have to admit to a sense that Delhi generally seems the most willing and enthusiastic to experiment with new ideas and lifestyle changes; the state capitals seem more sceptical and reluctant.

In this thesis, I test the hypothesis that spirituality may be a vital means of enlivening sustainable development in Delhi, and that articulating a spiritual dimension to sustainability would considerably strengthen its adoption. Sustainability studies have

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66 Creative urban planning in Delhi has begun to receive significant attention in recent years. Organisations like the CSDS [Centre for the Study of Developing Societies] and SARAI in the capital are investigating what ‘urban’ means in India in the current millennium. Several innovative research programmes on the rapid urban transformation of Delhi look at the city through the prism of new media lens, at the city as living history, and how the city is being remoulded as a space of economic consumption [Media City (SARAI: ongoing); Emerging Urbanism (CSDS: ongoing)].
demonstrated that strategies work best when they are localised (Newman 1991); I thus use this idea to consider that spiritually informed sustainable strategies will also similarly need to be localised. Therefore, I will investigate the potential for Hindu spirituality to offer productive opportunities as a pragmatic means of interpreting and implementing spiritually sustainable development in the city of Delhi.

**Issues in Studying Delhi**

Many sociologists on India including Western Indologists argue for an Indian sociology that is unmistakably different from Western or other cultural forms of sociology (Naipaul 1964; Singer and Marriott 1955). Of their proposals to study social change in India, Milton Singer’s (1972) and McKim Marriott’s (1955) development of Robert Redfield’s theory (1960; 1955) of the Little and Great Traditions has been particularly popular. This approach proposes that the civilisation or tradition evolves in two fundamental ways: firstly, through orthogenetic or indigenous evolvement, and secondly, through interactions with other cultures. Such a structure also operates at the dual levels of the peasants or the illiterate masses who form the Little Tradition, and through the educated elite who comprise the Great Tradition. They argue that there are constant and complex interactions between these two levels of civilisation.

Developing cities seem schizophrenic in that they appear to be simultaneously at starkly different levels of change. Juxtaposing the two Traditions against each other is a plausible way of viewing lifestyles in developing cities, which experience a simultaneous process of urbanisation [through corporate investment, globalisation and marked rise in consumerism], and ruralisation [mainly through peasant migration from small towns and villages]. Delhi was also built out of a conglomeration of villages, and parts of the metropolitan area continue to be designated as ‘villages’. An investigation into spiritually sustainable urban lifestyles in Delhi therefore might need to address both dimensions to the city.

However, in the thesis, the ‘Traditions’ approach is useful in a slightly modified form. As I will explain in Chapter 5, my informants who are all development planners at various levels and areas, are from the middle and upper classes, comprising essentially the Great Tradition. However, the work commitments of all of them require them to
engage with the Little Tradition. In the interviews, the respondents do not explicitly distinguish between the two Traditions although several of them refer directly or obliquely to the rural dimensions of sustainable development in Delhi, or in the regional hinterland. As the thesis specifically seeks the views of development intellectuals from the city, it deals with the ‘Great Tradition’s’ perspectives on the ‘Little Tradition’.

In exploring the potential of a spiritual dimension to development, the thesis also explores the dynamics of urban social change in the city. Recording and understanding urban social change is important for two reasons, according to Raj Gandhi (1983). Firstly, urbanisation is considered a force of social change in a developing country like India. Therefore, acquaintance with problems of social change may be important. Secondly, it is common and inevitable to draw comparisons between rural and urban India, while conducting any aspect of urban study on India. Urbanisation is often merely concluded to be different from rural structures, he notes, without any explanation on the problem and prospects that change may offer.

This is an important point for the purposes of this thesis. While the case study makes an exploration into urban spirituality, city sustainability and community development in an urban environment, i.e., in the city of Delhi, I have necessarily had to acknowledge the rural dimension that impacts the spiritual and community dynamics in the city. To understand correctly the sustainability issues of a city, it becomes obligatory to consider rural development. This is additionally so in an Indian megapolis, which continues to retain aspects of the village that it was initially carved out of. Given the distinctly rural personality of the city, even as it rapidly urbanises, it is obvious that any development strategy for an Indian city must necessarily reflect concerns for rural development, both within and outside of the city.

However, while this thesis admittedly looks at Delhi as a starting point to investigating the positive connection between spirituality and sustainability, it nevertheless guards against overemphasising the “uniqueness” of cultural distinctions. It is not possible to explain sustainability in India, for instance, without making references to growth and advancement of science and technology, international laws and treaties, growth strategies of other countries and, politics, bureaucracy and civil administration. The next
section therefore will be useful in explaining the approaches used to identify issues of sustainable development in Delhi.

Identifying Sustainable Issues in Delhi

Exploring the connection between sustainability and spirituality necessarily required that the nature of primary data collection was entirely qualitative. My background as a trained journalist had required me to constantly seek cold facts as the single most important ingredient of news reporting; in exploring the interplay between sustainability and spirituality in the lives of the twenty interviewees from Delhi, I welcomed gratefully the opportunity to tease out the “city of feeling”, which was eulogised in the poetry of Mirza Ghalib and Amir Khusrau, and in more recent literature such as William Dalrymple’s City of Djinns, from the “city of fact”, which Rotella (2003) says can be found in political space and forums.

However, “the city of fact” had to be sought to provide the necessary backbone for the thesis. The resources for locating sustainability issues in Delhi came largely from a variety of sources such as intensive studies by NGOs and research organisations such as the CSE [Centre for the Study of Environment] and CSDS [Centre for the Study of Developing Societies]; review of academic literature, government reports, newspaper articles, and reports of international organisations such as the UNESCO and World Bank etc. I essentially searched for data on development progress and policies in the period after Indian independence, from 1947 onwards. The literature search was systematically done, in both a historically chronological manner, as well as in contrasting it against the global, predominantly Western sources of data available for the same period. Oftentimes, even in post-1990s literature, the Indian reports would tend to contextualise issues in a ‘development’, rather than a sustainable development framework.

However, there have been farsighted visionaries in India who have steadily insisted on alternate ways of both viewing and implementing development. The late Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi pointed out as early as 1972 in the UN Conference on Human Environments in Stockholm, before the Brundtland vision of sustainable development,
that global poverty eradication required strategic environmental planning, as it did social and political restructuring (Engfeldt 2002).

However, development discourses in India have also evolved after the Brundtland Commission report in 1987, to gradually addressing concerns specifically framed within sustainable development theory. For instance, from debates on the breakthroughs of the green\(^{67}\) and white revolutions\(^{68}\) of the 1950-60 and the success of the biogas concept of the 1970s [and their lingering effects], the disquisitions have now expanded to include studies and analyses on networking the remotest villages through advanced information technology, corporate social responsibility, renewable energy, adult literacy and truly empowering women. Sustainable development is slowly beginning to gain acceptance in fashionable corporate circles, in non-governmental organisations and within the government and bureaucracy. However, not once in any official document or academic literature did I find any references explicitly exploring the connection between sustainable development and spirituality in the city of Delhi.

In the ensuing Chapter 4, I provide an overview of the sustainability challenges in Delhi; I preface this with a historical and demographical background of Delhi city. In doing so, I pay particular attention to the city’s modernising efforts since its birth as the capital of independent India in 1947. I consider the city’s sustainability issues in the context of the tensions between green and brown concerns on ecologically sustainable development. Lastly, I examine Delhi’s spiritual heritage, and consider some of the influences that shape religious and spiritual thought in India. An examination of this diverse range of factors that might shape any interface between sustainable development and spirituality in Delhi will provide a useful background to the primary data from interview respondents on the same issues in Chapter 5.

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\(^{67}\) The Green Revolution led to the global innovations in agricultural practices in the 1940s and 1950s. These innovations led to high yields in agricultural produce. In India, the Green Revolution practises saved the country from severe famines in the 1940s.

\(^{68}\) The Operation Flood scheme was launched in rural India in 1970 by the National Dairy Development Board to create a centralised milk distribution grid (NDDB 2007). This scheme was highly successful and India became the world’s largest producer of milk and dairy products in the 1970s (NDDB 2007). Thus this scheme is also called the White Revolution.
4. Exploring Sustainability and Spirituality in Delhi

4.1. Introduction

Most cities will undoubtedly claim a ‘spirit’ uniquely theirs and one might be accused of romanticism and sentimentality for drawing attention to Delhi’s enduring animation and vital spark. However any study on Delhi would be remiss if it did not comment on the city’s zest and liveliness. The words of Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s first prime minister, best encapsulate the essential sense of what Delhi has come to mean (Singh 2001: 1):

Here we stand in Delhi city, symbol of old India and the new. It is not the narrow lanes and houses of Old Delhi or the wide spaces and rather pretentious buildings of New Delhi that count, but the spirit of this ancient city. For Delhi has been an epitome of India’s history with its succession of glory and disaster, and with great capacity to absorb many cultures and yet remain itself. It is a gem with many facets, some bright and some darkened by age, presenting the course of India’s life and thought during the ages. Even the stones here whisper to our ears of the ages of long ago and the air we breathe is full of the dust and fragrance of the past as also of the fresh and piercing winds of the present.

Nehru, with his consistent belief in the value of both the old and the new, the spiritual and the secular, and science and tradition, has been considered by several scholars to be more pragmatic than Gandhi in his vision for the future of India (Brecher 1959; Moraes 1957). While he was keenly conscious and proud of India’s rich cultural and religious heritage, he was nevertheless of the view that “a nation cannot progress if it merely imitates its ancestors”; he believed that “what builds a nation is creative, inventive and vital activity” (Nehru 1952: 433, in, Char 1961: 31).

India has unquestionably engaging in “vital activity” in recent years; while India’s development progress was sluggish in the early years of independence as it struggled
with its inherited problems, it is steadily emerging as an Asian powerhouse in the new millennium. The city of Delhi, along with other rapidly modernising and expanding metropolitan centres such as Chennai, Mumbai and Bangalore, has been at the centre of such development.

However, India’s growth has been associated with significant sustainability problems: hard impacts on the ecological systems, uneven economic growth giving rise to issues of social inequity and inequality, and intensified poverty and deprivation among certain sections of the population. Nehru’s vision of holistic, comprehensive development for India included both a material and a philosophical basis. He saw “behind and within her battered body...a majesty of soul”, and believed that India would continue to be guided by the spiritual inspiration that had sustained it through millennia (Nehru 1960: 429-430).

My interest is in the sustainability and spirituality in Delhi, the city that Nehru believed exemplified India’s resilient spirit. In this chapter therefore, I delve into literature from the Delhi government policy reports, NGO studies and academic analyses to provide a comprehensive picture of sustainability challenges in Delhi.

It is very clear from this literature survey that the understanding of sustainability in circulation in Delhi is limited because it is generally human centred and economically driven. I found that the Brundtland understanding of sustainable development was referred to, but rather, its elaboration of the notion as “a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human need and aspirations” received far more consistent attention (India Equity Foundation 2007). The discourse retains the use and the underlying implications of terms such as “exploitation”. This ensures that such definitions of sustainable development, as with the earlier versions of development in India, are viewed fundamentally in the contexts of capital investment and technological development, thus understating the value of social and environmental sustainability.

In this chapter, I attempt to provide an overview of the development challenges in Delhi from the conceptual standpoint of sustainability. Moreover, I also have an interest in
examining the spiritual heritage of Delhi and considering how spirituality may serve as an animating mechanism to enliven the notion of sustainability in the city. Therefore, I provide a background of the history and demography of Delhi in the following section. In the third section, I trace Delhi’s specific urban planning history since independence. The fourth section makes a critical contribution to considering Delhi’s current sustainability problems and is divided into two parts: the first part identifies those sustainability problems that relate to the biophysical and natural environment, and the second part examines those sustainability issues that are social and political in nature. Together, these dramatise the tensions between the seemingly conflicting green and brown environmental agenda. In the fifth and last section of the chapter, I begin to explore how the contemporary spiritual narrative discourse operates in the city against the secular political stance of the state, and what implications this may have for city sustainability in Delhi.

4.2. PiccaDelhi: A Background

The poet Mirza Ghalib wrote of Delhi: “The world is the body, Delhi is its soul” (Chaulia 2002); and just as the soul challenges descriptions, so does Delhi. No definite dates have yet been put on this most ancient of cities. Delhi’s priceless heritage value rises with every little archaeological discovery. Mythological stories and legendary tales, which are not always supported by archaeological evidence, enhance Delhi’s reputation for antiquity (Singh 1996). Delhi is believed to be older than both Jerusalem and Rome. Delhi has been the capital city of every ruler and conqueror to invade the Indus plains, and has been destroyed and resurrected at least eight times⁶⁹ (Bhattacharya 1977). Delhi has thus “witnessed the flowering and withering away of many civilizations” (Tyagi 1982: 12).

The ancient rulers who established their capitals at what is now called Delhi include: Raja Anganpan of Kanauj in 11th century A.D., Mohammed Ghori in the 12th century from the region that in the present day is Afghanistan, the Tughlak empire between 1320-1422 [which period itself included the two important cities of Sultan Mohammed

⁶⁹ While historians agree that there are previous incarnations of Delhi, these figures often vary (Tyagi 1982). Tyagi (1982: 13) for instance identifies seventeen such cities: “Three Delhis of the Hindu period”; “Eleven Delhis of the Muslim period”; “Two Delhis of the British period”, and finally, the capital of independent India.
bin-Tughlak who established Jahanpanah in the 1420s, and Feroze Shah Tughlak who founded Ferozabad between 1351-88], and Emperor Humayun who created the empire around Purana Qila [Old Fort] in 1533 (Bhattacharya 1977). The last surviving Mughal capital, Shahjahanabad [Shahjahan’s capital, also known as Old Delhi] is situated in the northernmost part of Delhi city, and is also believed to be one of the “most modern of a number of capital cities” built between 700 and 1550, according to the Christian era (Fanshawe 1979: 2).

The Humayun’s Tomb, surrounded by beautiful gardens and water tanks contains the tombs of several Mughal rulers, including Humayun and Babar.

The British established New Delhi [also known as Lutyen’s Delhi] as the seventh capital of British India in 1911 (Bhattacharya 1977). India was the “jewel in the crown” of the British Empire (Hall 1988: 184) and the new capital of the Raj was to be one of the finest examples of the “city beautiful”, which would express “imperial dominance and racial exclusiveness” (Hall 1988: 175). New Delhi was to be “an Anglo-Indian Rome...one size larger than life” (Hussey 1953: 237, in Hall 1988: 184). New Delhi took twenty years to build; however, it served as the capital of British India for only

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70 After the transfer of the capital of British India from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911, architect Edward Lutyens was commissioned to build the new capital of New Delhi.
sixteen years (Hall 1988). In 1947, the city was reincarnated as the eighth capital of the Indic civilisation, this time of modern, independent India.

It is important to note here that the city of Delhi encompasses all of the sites of the ancient capitals, but explicitly acknowledges the last three cities which survive in living form: the Walled/Old City, British New Delhi, and modern New Delhi, the capital of India, which continues its functions on the former premises of the British Raj (Jain 1990). Delhi was made a union territory in the Republic of India in 1956. Subsequently, with the 69th Amendment to the Constitution and the enactment of the National Capital Territory Act 1991, full statehood was conferred on Delhi.71 Delhi is the seat of the central government, and has an economy supported by agriculture, tourism, commerce and a growing multinational corporate outsourcing industry. It is relevant to note the impact of New Delhi being a government city on the social processes of Delhi. Mitra (1970: 40) observes:

Cities which have been capitals first and cities later have always suffered from inhibitions of the law’s delay, the insolence of office, as distinct from cities which have been cities first and capitals later...despite the stubborn effort to subdue or deflate New Delhi’s bureaucratic dominance and the latter’s overt claim to lay down the norms of social and cultural intercourse flowing naturally (but what is so natural about it?) from its administrative authority, New Delhi yet exercises a subtle autocracy in the matter of tastes and values, certain inarticulate norms of social behaviour which though resented, are still implicitly obeyed.

Old Delhi, like the ‘new’ city, has a long and enduring historical heritage. Its population has a diversity of religions, castes and cultures, and like New Delhi, has witnessed numerous communal bloodbaths, especially following the Partition of India in 1947. Old Delhi is known as a fortified or a walled city (Peck 2005) since it is surrounded by strong brick walls72, and its population continues to engage in many of the occupations of historical times such as marble carving (Peck 2005). Studies on the classical cities of India refer to Old Delhi as the Islamic capital of India; however, as Blake (2004) notes

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71 Mr. Madan Lal Khurana took over as the state’s first chief minister. Ms. Sheila Dikshit is today the state’s leader, running her second term.
72 Entry into the Old City is possible through the Lahore Gate.
in his review of Ehlers and Krafft’s (2003) Shahjahanabad/Old Delhi: Tradition and Colonial Change, such a description became less appropriate after the Partition, when most of the Muslim population migrated to Pakistan, and were replaced by the influx of Hindu and Sikh refugees fleeing to India.\textsuperscript{73} Pandit (1983) explains that after the partition of India in 1947, 4.95 million Hindu and Sikh refugees from Pakistan arrived in Delhi to replace the 3.29 million fleeing Muslims. Blake notes (2004: 326):

The major result of the partition was to reduce the Muslim element in the [Old] city, while at the same time swelling the overall population as hundreds of thousands of Sikh and Hindu refugees sought accommodation inside the walls. As a result, the old city became overcrowded, primarily Hindu, and with the passage of time, more and more commercialised. These developments brought more destruction to the buildings and gardens of Shahjahan’s city and further strained the services of an already overwhelmed municipal government.

Modern Delhi stands at the western end of the Gangetic plains, with the once majestic but now impoverished state of Uttar Pradesh and the infant state of Uttrakhand on the eastern side. The state of Haryana envelopes Delhi on the other three sides and the Aravalli hills frame the southern side of the city. At the tail end of the Aravalli hills, the Delhi Ridge, with its thick green forest cover provides protection from the hot winds and dust storms that brew in the Thar Desert, in the western state of Rajasthan.\textsuperscript{74} The Himalayan River Yamuna, the second holiest Hindu river, flows through the state, to converge with the Ganges a couple of hundred kilometres south of the city.

It is relevant to review some literature from sociology on the design of urban centres in classical India to get some key insights into the current social and economic systems in Delhi.\textsuperscript{75} Singh (2005b: 108) notes that the forces that shaped cities in ancient India continue to impact urban centres today, primarily that a “rural-urban dichotomy is

\textsuperscript{73} Jain (1990) notes that Delhi’s population doubled in less than two months during this massive exodus in 1947.

\textsuperscript{74} Delhi is blessed with few natural resources; the city is prone to extremes of winter and summer, and faces an acute shortage of water, electricity and power.

\textsuperscript{75} It is relevant because these forces are different to what typically shaped urbanisation in the west, namely, “formalization, atomization, lack of families and kinship-bound groupings and predominance of secular ideologies” (Singh 2005b: 108).
untidy if not irrelevant.76 Traditional family norms and kinship groups similar to rural areas generally dominate urban structures even in internationally significant Indian metropolitan cities; a sizeable proportion of the population continues to be engaged in primary occupations such as farming and pottery; and the neighbourhood designs of many Indian cities continue to be designed along traditional caste groupings.77

Varma (2001) notes that while the earlier manifestations of Delhi confined themselves to occupying the area between the Ridge and the Yamuna River, the independent capital city has leapt exuberantly far beyond these confines, and in spite of formal boundaries, has expanded into the neighbouring states of Uttar Pradesh [U.P.] and Haryana. The National Capital Territory [NCT] of Delhi is quite small at about 1483 square kilometres; however, the metropolitan area of Delhi now includes NOIDA or the New Okhla Industrial Development Area [U.P.], Ghaziabad [U.P.], Faridabad [U.P.], Gurgaon [Haryana] and Dwarka [Haryana]. Varma says (2001: 209): “Indeed, the newfound confidence of the city in the viability of its own destiny is perhaps the reason why New Delhi has expanded so spectacularly.”

Delhi’s population is currently racing beyond the 14 million mark.78 In 2001, Delhi’s population stood at 13.78 million (Siddiqui et al 2004). In addition, no less than a million people travel to Delhi every single day for work from the growing satellite city adjuncts like NOIDA, Dwarka, Gurgaon and Ghaziabad (Jain 2001). If these adjoining satellite townships, as a part of the city’s metropolitan area, were to be included in on estimation of the city’s population, the numbers would be well beyond 19.5 million, making Delhi the fifth most populous city in the world (Siddiqui et al 2004). Delhi’s population alone may be thus said to be nearly that of Australia.

76 Oscar Lewis (1955) notes that such hierarchically-based kinship groupings in Indian urban centres is similar to cities in Latin America, particularly Mexico. He calls this “urbanisation without breakdown in the traditional patterns” (1955: 31).

77 Traditional urbanisation in classical Indian cities was planned in accordance with the principles of caste hierarchies (Singh 2005b). The King’s palace or fort would occupy the central location in the city, which would be surrounded by residences and businesses interests of the Brahmans or the priests, and the Kshatriyas [noblemen and merchant classes]. The lower classes would occupy the concurrent perimeter after that, and the untouchables would be placed at the outer city fringes.

78 The city’s population grew by a stupendous 43 per cent between 1991 and 2001 (Jain 2001), while the population growth for India itself was only 21.34 per cent (Siddiqui et al 2004). Since independence, Delhi has experienced the largest population growth compared to the other Indian metropolitan cities, at 427 per cent, while Mumbai grew by 227 per cent and Kolkata by 39 per cent (Siddiqui et al 2004). In 2001, the population density for Delhi increased to 9,294 persons per square kilometre from 6,352 in 1991 (Siddiqui et al 2004).
The population ratio for men and women in the capital in the 2001 census was 827:1000, while the national ratio was 933:1000 (Census of India 2001a). Delhi’s skewed sex ratio is largely due to male dominated migration to the city (Siddiqui et al 2004). However, the unfavourable sex ratio amongst the population up to six years of age is believed to reflect increasing instances of female foeticide (Delhi State Commission for Women, 1997).

The population of the city of Delhi is religiously diverse: Hindus form an absolute majority of the population at 85.06 per cent (Census 2001b). The Sikhs and Muslims are the two other significant religious groups in the city, though their numbers are considerably smaller. Muslims form 9.4 per cent of the city’s population; Sikh, 4.8 per cent; Jain, 1 per cent; Buddhist, 0.15 per cent and others, 0.02 per cent (Census 2001b).

Fifty per cent of the total area of Delhi is urban, and 90 per cent of the city’s population lives in these areas (Siddiqui et al 2004). Delhi has approximately 195 villages, 90 per cent of which fall in Outer Delhi or in the fringe lands (Soni 2000). Of this, only about 40,000 families continue to engage in pure agricultural work\textsuperscript{79}, depending mostly on their own family labour, and form approximately 15 per cent of the rural population of the city (Soni 2000).

Culturally, however, Singh (2005b: 108) reports a “continuity of interaction between the city and the villages”. He argues (2005b: 108): “Cities in India do not constitute a cultural isolate; the centre and network of culture and communication in many cities expands not only to the hinterland but a whole region and in some cases to the country as a whole.” However, the presence of the rural in Indian cities, or the Little Traditions as they are known (Singer 1972; Marriott 1955) are very resilient and in many instances, caste, class and other cultural identities have been reinforced because of the need to share fiercely competitive resources like education and employment in the city.

\textsuperscript{79} The performance of these poor subsistence farmers is impressive (Soni 2000). Their production of wheat per hectare is 37 per cent higher than the national average; they produce 1.74 thousand mega tonnes of food grains per annum; and 600,000 mega tonnes of vegetables.
This larger context is important to bear in mind as we consider sustainability issues in Delhi.

In the sixty years since a traumatic birth as an independent capital, Delhi city has achieved prominence as a major economic, political and commercial world capital. Delhi’s saga is one of resilience and determination. Unlike the other new capital cities like Canberra, Islamabad, Brasilia or Dhaka that wear a mantle of anonymity and reflected glory, Delhi has arrived as a city in its own right.

4.3. Delhi’s Post-Independence Modernising Efforts

Urban development programmes and city planning did not feature as important agenda in India’s initial two Five Year Plans between 1951 and 1960 (Jain 1990). Independent India inherited an economy in shambles because of thousands of years of colonial rule, and the primary economic focus post-1947 was agrarian, and on the rural regions (Jain 1990). It was the Third Five Year Plan (1961-65) that explicitly noted the steady rate of urbanisation in India for the first time, and defined urbanisation thus (Jain 1990: 60):

Urbanisation is an important aspect of the process of economic and social development, and is closely connected with many other problems such as migration from villages to towns, levels of living in rural and urban areas, relative cost of providing economic and social services in towns of different sizes, provision of housing for different sections of the population, provision of facilities like water supply, sanitation, transport and power, pattern of economic development, location and dispersal of industries, civic administration, fiscal policies and the planning of land use.

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80 This has been the case in the city of Pune, where caste and communal considerations were in fact, found to be more important to rural migrants once in the city, than when they lived in the villages from where they arrived (Mandelbaum 1970). Reinforcing caste hierarchies was an important strategy to ensure that they had access to education, health and other resources important for survival.

81 The Planning Commission was established in 1950 and was chaired by the first Prime Minister of India, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru. Thus far, the areas where the Commission’s Five Year Plans have had the maximum impact are: “role of public sector investment; location or public and private sector industries; role of small scale and cottage industries; industrial licensing; exchange rate policy; and foreign investment” (Jain 1990: 6-7).
Delhi city, the “blue eyed child” and the “Supermetro” of India’s towns and cities, became the first Indian city to have a custom made statutory Master Plan in 1962, and this then became “a prototype for planning and urban development all over the country”\(^{82}\) (Jain 1990: 62). The Delhi Development Authority [DDA] was established to oversee the development of the city as per the Plan.\(^{83}\) The immediate responsibility of the DDA was to prevent the spread of illegal colonies\(^{84}\), which were caused by a “bad layout of land and the haphazard erection of buildings” (Master Plan, as quoted in Jain 1990: 77). While hundreds of the colonies were “regularised”, the proliferation of unauthorised settlements continued regardless, largely because of illegal land transactions. Such disputed land would become unavailable for planned development for years, during which time it would be encroached upon by settling rural migrants (Jain 1990).

Urban planning for Delhi city has taken on two distinctly different approaches in the New and the Old Cities. For instance, the approach to New Delhi has been clearly in favour of preserving its sense of megalomania (Mitra 1970). This is because New Delhi was built as a “museum city…a collection of beautiful yet unrelated objects” (Charles Correa in Mitra 1970: 46), “as a collection of impressive Victorian structures with an extravagant and often improper squandering of valuable land”, and that tendency continues to strangely dominate the vision of the modern planners for Delhi (Mitra 1970). As a result, Mitra notes (1970: 50)

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\text{the urge for conspicuous expenditure in marble, concrete, and glass, the desire to show off wealth and status and make up for lack of taste and inventiveness by a display of architectural vulgarity in public buildings, have surely left some permanent scars on Delhi’s landscape, the passion to build expensively having got the better of the desire to build well and beautifully.}
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\(^{82}\) This has had some far-reaching, adversarial outcomes for the other cities and towns, because the planners were “fascinated by superficial features and visual showpieces of Delhi, like flyovers, multi-storey buildings, parks, wide roads, imposing District Centres, stadia, housing and architectural landmarks”, which they mistakenly believed could be achieved merely by “normative town planning” based on the capital’s Master Plan (Jain 1990: 63-64).

\(^{83}\) The DDA is the world’s largest urban planning authority, as well as the largest urban development and housing agency (Jain 1990).

\(^{84}\) Illegal colonies refer to the “unauthorised settlements, squatter areas, encroachments or non-conforming land use” (Jain 1990: 77).
Delhi is a government city. The grand South Block contains the offices of the various departments of the Indian Civil Services and cabinet ministries.

However, while New Delhi receives the bulk of capital resource allocation for urban development, it has nevertheless been victim of some gross neglect: food adulteration, water contamination, air pollution, lack of adequate housing for low-income groups, high crime rate, and insufficient and safe public transport, to name a few (Dupont et al 2000). However, as Mitra (1970) pointed out nearly four decades ago, the condition of these basic resources and infrastructures in other cities in India is so much worse, that comparatively, New Delhi’s poor show fails to attract much attention or sympathy. Such an assessment is arguably correct even in current times.

For the Old City, the urban planning has been decidedly step-motherly. The Master Plan aimed to focus specifically on urban renewal, especially conservation of architectural sites, rehabilitation and redevelopment (Jain 1990). However, the Plan uses surprisingly imperialist and contemptuous language while referring to Old Delhi, which it describes as “slum, congested, filthy, obsolete, functionally lacking in exclusive land use zones, without any green spaces and socially and culturally stagnant” (Master Plan, in Jain 1990: 79). Jain (1990: 79) points out, “apart from so-called conservation of certain areas of the Walled City, no discernible action could be realised.” Similarly, its controversial objective of “slum clearance” could also not be achieved. The slum dwellers were to be
relocated to the green agricultural belt in the city fringes for a low monthly rent of Rs. 8 per month; however, the prohibitive transfer of the remaining cost to the government ensured the demise of this plan (Jain 1990).

The Master Plan boasts a green clause in its agenda; it demarcates an “inviolable green belt” in its metropolitan area (Jain 1990: 81). However, in 1975-76, this green belt was used to settle slum evictees. While the green area was not meant for private ownership, even in the 1970s, about 5 per cent of this agricultural belt was owned by the wealthy urban citizens of Delhi; however, by 1990, more than 75 per cent of the green areas were owned by this class, who used the land mainly to build weekend getaways in “sprawling farmland mansions” (Jain 1990: 81). Lal (2001) believes that both the authorities and the residents are responsible for the sacrifice of the green areas and writes (2001: 113): “Officially sacrosanct green zones have been destroyed by road-widening schemes, construction, encroachments, wood-poaching and cattle-grazing.”

In 1977, the Delhi government ordered the creation of a new Master Plan by the DDA. However, the “improvements” to the plan are superficial; in essence, the hierarchal character of the old Plan continues to dominate, and in fact, the new Plan disregards Old Delhi even more, recommending only that development plans for the Old City be revisited at a future stage (Jain 1990: 82). Likewise, the new Plan is ominously silent on the issue of encroachments and where it does make an important recommendation, the solution is problematic.

For instance, with a view to deflecting the heavy stream of rural migration to Delhi, the Plan suggests development of the Ring Cities in the neighbouring states: mainly Ghaziabad, Faridabad, Ballabhgarh, Loni, and Narela. However, these cities fall under the territories of the adjoining states, and the Plan is powerless to ensure coordinated development between the fringe cities and Delhi. Moreover, intense development of these towns has depended on Delhi’s economic and capital resources, rather than those of their home states, thus actually increasing the burden on the capital city. City planners however dismiss this problem by insisting that it is “coordinated, balanced, regional development” (Jain 1990: 83).
In 1990, the ideal of the ‘compact city’ became part of Delhi’s urban planning policies (Kumar 2000). The erstwhile Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in 1998 argued strongly for a densification of the Lutyen’s Delhi’s Bungalow Zone area and established the M.N. Buch Committee to investigate the possibilities (Kumar 2000). However, the Buch Committee rejected the proposal on four counts: that it would not contribute to Delhi’s intense housing needs in real terms; it would strip the city of its last few green spaces; since it was a strategic location, it would create housing options only for the rich and be of no benefit to the poor who need it most; and lastly, that it would enable real estate agents and property dealers to make huge profits. However, the Buch Committee was criticised for assuming that only private dealers would build the houses, instead of calling for either partnerships or even “government-led urban development” (Kumar 2000: 155-156).

Twenty years on, Delhi’s new Master Plan\textsuperscript{85} is badly in need of a review and amendments (Desai 2006, para 3). It currently does not allow or encourage the establishment of commercial activity within the city though Delhi has grown exponentially as a hub of primary economic activity in the country, particularly since the liberalisation of the Indian economy in 1990. Desai explains (2006, para 3):

\begin{quote}
The lack of adequate commercial real estate resulted in a strange paradox: Delhi offered its scarce and shoddy commercial space at prices that were among the highest in Asia. With economic liberalisation, Delhi came under pressure. Commercial establishments sprouted willy-nilly across the city, without let or hindrance as long as civic agency officials were paid off.
\end{quote}

Eminent historian Narayani Gupta (2000) notes, however, that the spate of new commercial developments in Delhi must be considered in the light of the conservation of Delhi’s historical heritage. Planning in India anywhere, she argues, must centrally consider history, but particularly in urban India because “to be aware of the history of the place where one lives helps one situate oneself in that history and overcome

\textsuperscript{85} It is important to note, however, that the Master Plan model has been long discarded in successful sustainable developing cities such as Curitiba in Brazil, which have instead prioritised innovative and democratic methods such as enabling citizen participation (Rabinovich and Leitman 1996, in Downton 2000).
rootlessness, the commonest disease of city-dwellers” (Gupta 2000: 170). She accuses both the officialdom and citizenry of “playing Delhi’s favourite game – ‘passing the buck’”, and believes that this is largely due to the unresolved dilemma that a country as old as India will constantly face, over and over again – “is the modern not more desirable than the old?” (Gupta 2000: 170).

This is an important question, not merely in the context of historical conservation, but in the larger narrative of sustainable urban planning in Delhi. In specifically addressing my central concern of sustainability in Delhi, it articulates the substantial tension between notions of ‘development’ and ‘anti-development’ in India, and above all, the question of ‘whose development’ is being prioritised. The impact of these questions is exacerbated by the gross social, economic and political inequalities in the city, where the agenda and ambitions of the powerful are markedly different from the needs and challenges of the poor. The following section, which will critically examine the notion of sustainable development in Delhi and some of the major sustainability issues, will explore some of these tensions.

4.4. The Sustainability Cityscape in Delhi

While providing an overview of Delhi’s major sustainability issues, I will use McGranahan and Satterthwaite’s (2000) distinction between the green [prioritising the long term ecological concerns] and brown agenda [prioritising issues of social justice and the health concerns of the urban poor as well as other local citizens] while planning urban development in developing cities. In a very useful study on planning sustainable developing cities, they point out that local environmental health concerns often conflicted severely with the interests of global sustainable development, and that the agenda of each seemed to threaten the wellbeing of the other. Effective urban planning, particularly in developing cities, they argue, must be able to successfully reconcile the agenda of both green and brown ecological interests.

I use McGranahan et al’s (2001: xv) observation that “threats to sustainability” may be considered as those “activities that create appreciable environmental burdens for future generations”. However, they note that ecological threats may not be comprehended or resolved in isolation from other issues. For instance, social issues are often a cause of
environmental problems. Nevertheless, they emphatically warn that making the explicit link between social and environmental issues may be conceptually ineffectual because it is grossly misleading. For instance, they explain, forms of violence have demonstrably led to environmental crises; however, it would be deceptive to suggest that violence itself is an environmental problem, even as it may lead to ecological crises. It demonstrates nonetheless that green issues that concern ecological health, and brown issues that concern human welfare must be addressed together. It is a useful insight in the context of India, which, as a developing country, tends to sympathise more with the brown agenda. However, this is at considerable risk to green issues, on which, significantly, the interest of the brown depends.

The urban case study, particularly a developing city, best dramatises the tensions between the green and the brown environmental agenda (McGranahan et al 2001). The importance of the urban green agenda is evident in the Secretary-General’s address to the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992: “If sustainable development does not start in the cities, it will not go – cities have got to lead the way” (Brugmann 1996, in McGanahan et al 2001: 9). However, the urban brown environmental agenda is also critical because “the city’s residents suffer if their air is polluted, their water and sanitation is inadequate, their waste is not disposed off, and the urban environment is generally unhealthy (McGranahan et al 2001: 10). McGanahan et al (2001: 10) point out that green issues gain global sympathy; however, the brown issues, which particularly impact the poor and the deprived, and are equally environmental problems, may get compromised by getting “inappropriately subsumed within ‘green’ concerns as sustainability.”

In Delhi, for instance, the Ridge or the forest cover, which is known as the lungs of the city, had also served as a squatter settlement for several years before judicial intervention based on strong environmental protests evicted the slum dwellers (Dupont 2007). Similarly, green NGOs have objected to the government regularising unauthorised slum colonies because they compromise the green agricultural land in the city fringe that has long been the pride of Delhi (Dupont 2007). Baviskar (2002: 41, in Dupont 2007: 91) makes an important observation that urban environmentalism in Delhi is not a politically neutral issue; rather, it represents “the increasing powerful presence of bourgeois environmentalism as an ideology shaping the landscape.”
As noted earlier, even notions of sustainable development in India continue to focus most strongly on capital accumulation and technological enhancement. However, the Brundtland Commission report (1987: 1) envisaged that sustainable economic development would “sustain and expand the environmental resource base.” Beatley and Manning (1997: 140) propose that an ideal sustainable economic policy would have “a minimal impact on the environment and is ideally restorative of it.” This was combined with the awareness that it was “absolutely essential to relieve the great poverty that is deepening in much of the developing world” (Brundtland Commission 1987: 1). Alleviation of absolute poverty of the massive numbers of the poor in developing countries is one of the biggest economic development agendas of the report because of its grave threat to the natural environment (Brundtland 1987). The report says (1987: 87): “A world in which poverty and inequity are endemic will always be prone to ecological and other crises.” All of this reinforces McGranahan and Satterthwaite’s (2000) argument that the green and brown agenda are not mutually exclusive and contradictory, even though they may often appear so, and that addressing and resolving them jointly is essential to achieve truly sustainable cities.

In my overview of the sustainability challenges in Delhi provided below, I argue that environmental problems in developing cities are not easily categorised into ‘green’ and ‘brown’ agenda; therefore, in the first subsection, I present those biophysical and environmental issues that dramatise the tensions between ‘green’ and brown’ interests, and that need to be addressed jointly in order to achieve a sustainable outcome. In the second subsection, I identify social and political issues, which do not lend themselves to be categorically identified as ecological problems, but nevertheless indirectly have implications for environmental preservation and overall sustainability.

The Delhi Sustainability Challenge: Addressing the Biophysical and Environmental Issues

The fundamental tension of sustainable development lies in reconciling the interests of both equity and the environment (McGranahan et al 2001). While environmentalists, particularly from the West, propose zero growth, it invokes strong reactions in
developing countries, which argue that economic growth alone can raise them out of the depths of poverty (McGranahan et al 2001). On a smaller scale, such tensions arise out of development discourses within developing cities and countries as well. Alwares (1992: 12) writes:

The exploitation of man and nature has not ended with the end of western colonialism. Urban-industrial enclaves in the countries of the South are now ruthlessly colonising their own hinterlands, mostly settled by subsistence cultures. As in the old style colonialism, displacement and dispossession continue to be justified and legitimised in the name of development and progress.

In 1976, India became the first country in the world to pass a law to specifically safeguard its environment. The 42nd amendment to the Constitution stated that it was the fundamental duty of every Indian citizen to “endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wild life of the country” (Government of India 2005: 1) It asks the citizens “to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, and wild life, and to have compassion for living creatures” (Government of India 2005: 1).

However, the state of the urban environment in Delhi is a far cry from reflecting these noble aims. Neo-colonialism under the guise and pretence of ‘development’ and ‘progress’ is responsible for much of Delhi’s ecological degradation. Delhi has the dual and contrary distinction of being amongst the world’s greenest and blackest cities. Nineteen per cent of Delhi is under rich green cover (Tully 2001). A recent World Health Organisation study recognises Delhi as one of the five most beautiful garden cities in the world, and until recently, also as the fourth most polluted urban environment on the planet (Jain 2001).

Environmental laws are a critical way of ensuring ecological protection and maintaining sustainability. However, in several decolonised nations like India, archaic laws that

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86 In her study of the effectiveness of environmental laws in protecting the urban environment in the city of Bangalore, Amanda Perry (2000) notes while environment laws to control air pollution, water waste and the discharge of effluents into the waterways, among several others exist, their effectiveness in maintaining sustainability is compromised because the rule of law is not supported by a notoriously corrupt state government where bribe-taking and land frauds
once operated for imperialist interests are now used by the government, industry and the
wealthy elite to serve their own interests, leading to severe impoverishment of the rural
population that is directly dependent on the ecology for their survival (Soni 2000).

In a city like Delhi, concerns for the natural environment are arguably interwoven with
concerns for the city’s built environment. This is supported by Sastry’s (2005)
observations that in Delhi, “notions of cleanliness, environmental sustainability and
environmental standards are expressed in the language of aesthetics.” The ensuing
section therefore provides an overview of three issues that critically impact the
biophysical and ecological sustainability of Delhi, namely, air pollution; contamination
of the Yamuna River; and lastly, the conflicts between the urban and rural dimensions
of Delhi.

**Air Pollution**

Delhi ranks high among the top twenty Asian cities with dangerously noxious levels
Asians [in these cities] are exposed to are sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, ozone,
carbon monoxide, and particles such as soot and dust.” The air quality in Delhi is
seriously compromised by both industrial activity and vehicular emissions (Padma
2006). Indian cities like Delhi and Kolkata are particularly classified as “ozone
hotspots” because they have a heavy layer of “bad ozone” from vehicular and aircraft
exhaust fumes that affect the skin and eyes by hanging for days as winter smog (Padma
2006).

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operate at every level of the system, from senior ministers to bus drivers employed by the state.
She concludes that both the society and the government must show active commitment to rule
of law in order to facilitate ecological sustainability in Bangalore through increased public
participation, activism, enabling the mechanisms of social justice and equity to operate, and
recognising and addressing the inadequacies of the state legislative system.

87 The most oppressive of these laws is the Land Acquisition Act 1894, which allows the
government to appropriate any common or private village land for ‘public purpose’. The definition
of ‘public purpose’ is arbitrary. At the time of independence, 80 per cent of land resources in
India were common; now the number has dropped to less than 20 per cent because of
usurpation by the industry, state and the urban-elite (Singh 1993).

88 The other cities with particularly high levels of air toxicity are Beijing, Dhaka, Hanoi, Jakarta,
Kathmandu, Kolkata, and Shanghai.
In addition, the size of coarse particles of approximately ten micrometres diameters in the atmosphere in Delhi is three times the World Health Organisation’s [WHO] specified limit (Padma 2006). The WHO has set three targets for the gradual phasing out of all activities that lead to atmospheric pollution in these cities; for Delhi, even meeting the first target of bringing down particulate matter to 70 micrograms per cubic meter is believed to be a “serious” challenge (Padma 2006: 3).  

A key challenge of the DDA [Delhi Development Authority] is putting controls on the excessive air pollution. In this, Delhi’s immense transport problem poses the primary challenge. Suspended particulate matter and dust are also blown in through dry winds from the desert state of Rajasthan. In addition, millions of poor families add to the noxious soup through wood smoke and stinging fires from burning cow dung cakes, which they use as cooking fuel (Tully 2001).

Delhi has also transformed rapidly into an industrial city over the last 50 years. In 1951, Delhi was home to 8000 industries; this number had shot up to 93,000 by 1993 (Tully 2001). While the newer factories adhere to pollution control regulations, about 90 per cent of the units are small-scale manufacturing houses, many of which are unlicensed, and on whom it is very difficult to impose controls (Tully 2001).

A World Bank Development Research Group led by Maureen L. Cropper concluded that air pollution actually has a lower mortality rate in Delhi as compared to the cities of the United States; however, the deaths in Delhi were likely to occur earlier in life, thus affecting longevity and quality of life (Padma 2006). These deaths are avoidable, they stress. Padma (2006) observes that bad air quality accelerates global warming, and in a hot tropical city like Delhi, it can have severe consequences for the community.

89 Only Bangkok and Singapore have the capacity to meet the second target of bringing down pollution levels to 50 cubic micrograms per cubic meter. The third phase of bringing down levels to 30 cubic micrograms per cubic meter is believed to be a challenge for “all” Asian cities (Padma 2006: 3).
Yamuna’s Troubled Waters: Toxic Torture

The horrific contamination of the Yamuna River, a major Himalayan river, and one of the holiest Hindu water systems\(^9\) is one of Delhi’s most alarming ecological concerns. The Yamuna River occupies a revered status in Hindu mythology as a goddess, as a lover of Lord Krishna, and as a nurturing mother (Haberman 2006). However, the once-magnificent Yamuna has since been variously described as a “sewage canal”, “cesspool” and the “poster child” of India’s dismal river management strategies (CSE 2007). The Yamuna retains its pristine form in its uppermost reaches (Bhargava 1983). Its pollution starts in the lower-upper segments or the river, and extreme toxification starts as soon as the river enters Delhi, where it is used for the city’s surface water supply. In his pathbreaking book, River of Love in an Age of Pollution, David Haberman (2006: 94) notes, “ironically, the most polluted section of the river runs through the area [between Delhi and Braj] in which Yamuna theology and worship has been fully developed.” Bhargava (2006: 111) writes: “At Delhi, heavy discharges of untreated domestic sewage and non-availability of dilution has degraded the quality in the downstream stretch of the river.”

The river in Delhi is marked by its evil stench and miserable look. Out of all the rivers that were extensively analysed, studied and sampled between 1996 and 1998 by the CSE (2007), the Yamuna stretch from Delhi to Agra presents the most dismal picture. Though only two per cent of the total length of the river winds through Delhi, it receives the majority of its pollution from the city (Haberman 2006). Bhargava (2006: 111) writes:

At some points, the river water is jet black, with a thick layer of waste scum on the surface, flooding the city’s main market to a depth of about one metre, with stinking sewage, floating dead animals, high load of organic and inorganic

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\(^9\) The Yamuna River springs from the Yamnotri glacier in the Greater Himalayas, which is situated at 6,380 kilometres above sea level (Bhargava 2006). The Yamuna, along with the rivers Ganga and the mythological Saraswati, is believed to be one of Lord Himalaya’s three daughters. Rinsing the mouth with the water from the Yamuna [aachaman] is considered to be a route to divine salvation. The Yamuna flows through several prominent historical and religious cities, such as Delhi, Mathura [the birthplace of Lord Krishna], Faridabad, Brindavan, Agra, Kalpi and Allahabad. At Allahabad, the Yamuna merges with the Ganga, and this spot is considered to be one of the holiest Hindu pilgrimage locations in India.
material, significant oxygen depletion, excessive presence of pathogens and periodic mass killing of fish and other aquatic life.

The water quality index (WQI)\textsuperscript{91} that is used to measure the pollution levels of natural water bodies shows disturbingly poor levels of 10-20 for the Yamuna (Bhargava 1985). Bhargava (2006) notes the following primary sources of pollution of the Yamuna: domestic water dumping of nearly 100 million litres a day; pollutants from industrial and agricultural wastes; the acute problem of solid waste disposal; disposing of religious materials into the Yamuna; and lastly, the hygiene issues related to mass religious baths in the river.

The holy Yamuna River faces threats from the cancer of ‘development’.

The Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) report (2007) explains that domestic discharge is a far greater threat to the river than industrial waste, even though the latter is more noxious and toxic. They write (2007: 7): “This is because industrial discharge is point specific. It can be identified, the source located, tapped and connected to treatment facilities. Rules and regulations can be formulated to ensure this happens.” However, domestic waste, particularly human excreta, accounts for 75-80 per cent of the river

\textsuperscript{91} A WQI of 100 indicates no pollution and 0 indicates extreme pollution of the water body.
waste, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). To treat these, the CPCB recommends the following (CSE 2007):

- "Interception and diversion of sewage;
- Building sewage treatment plants
- Building low-cost sanitation to prevent open defecation;
- Building electric crematoria;
- Measures to improve the ‘look’ of the river front, and create recreational facilities;
- Other measures, such as creating public awareness”

The CSE (2007: 1) report on the Yamuna River cleaning programme points out that like most other rivers in the country, the Yamuna is drained of fresh water for drinking and irrigation, and receives only toxic effluents back, which means that the river lacks its “assimilative capacity” or its “self-cleansing ability” as it flows between two large settlements [such as Delhi and Agra, for instance]. The CSE notes (2007) that Delhi is also among the most water profligate cities in the world, where 5 per cent of the city’s wealthy population are among the highest domestic consumers of water in the northern hemisphere.

The Hindustan Times reports (2004) that despite crores\(^2\) of rupees that were poured into cleanup projects as international aid from Japan since 2000, the condition of the river seems to have considerably worsened. Similarly, the CSE (2007) claims that even though the Yamuna and the Ganga rivers alone received nearly 40 per cent of the funds from the National River Conservation Plan (NCRP), the cleanup operations have spectacularly failed. The Hindustan Times report (2004) also mentions that despite numerous litigations against the state under the Water [Prevention and Control of Pollution] Act 1974, the State Pollution Control Board is pusillanimous about doing any more than sending timid warnings to the heavyweight industrial polluters of the Yamuna.

\(^2\) One crore equals 10 million.
In addition, Bhargava (2006: 111) argues that the restoration of rivers, particularly one with a high religious profile such as the Yamuna [and the Ganga], are “complex and interdisciplinary endeavours.” Diverting the course of sewage drains and waste pipes are self-evident strategies, he says; however, the sources of pollution of the Yamuna may come from sources that are cloaked in sensitive religious fervour, and hence require a multiple approach to de-contamination (Bhargava 2006). Equally however, it is worth noting David Haberman’s (2006) observations in his study ‘River of Love in an Age of Pollution’ that religious devotees who have an immanent view of the river goddess and view the pollution as a sign of the death of divinity are likely to be closely involved in restoration of the river. He notes that the Hindu act of seva or loving religious service has begun to extend itself an awareness of the urgent need to reverse the ecological deterioration of the Yamuna.

It is almost rhetorical to say that water is arguably one of our most precious resources, absolutely vital for the preservation of both current and future generations. The CSE (2007) argues that the entire system of water management in India has to be overhauled, involving the participation of the industry and the community, to restore the Yamuna as a sustainable water resource. Ramakrishna (2004: 111) says:

Sustainable water resource systems are one such means for achieving sustainable development that are designed and managed to fully contribute to the objectives of society now as well as in future, while maintaining their ecological, environmental, and hydrological integrity.

According to the Bhargava (2006), unlike the developed world, where water and river sustainability programmes are directed towards build-up of sediments in rivers, and degradation of surrounding wetlands, the agendas for water management in India are primarily concerned with “providing access to water for drinking and growing food, eradicating poverty, and stopping groundwater overexploitation.” Thus while river management and water conservation itself is in the interests of the green agenda, in Delhi, strategies that also serve the interests of the brown agenda need to be designed. As Delhi’s population continues to exponentially increase, the CSE (2007) argues that other sustainable water management strategies, of which river cleaning would be a part, need to be employed.
Firstly, they say, the rich cities of India like Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai need to find innovative excreta management solutions, because this is a significant cause of river pollution. In not making this vital link between the Yamuna pollution and the “sewage-and-excreta-economy” of Delhi, sustainability policies have a “critical institutional gap” (CSE 2007: 146).

Delhi has a waste management plant; however, it is able to currently process only one-third of the city’s waste (CSE 2007). These plants are also extremely expensive to both install and maintain, and it is unrealistic to imagine that they alone may serve to contain the problem. For that reason, the CSE (2007: 145) recommends “reinventing the paradigm of waste treatment by reinventing the paradigm of waste generation itself.” Big sections of Delhi’s population, especially the poorer sections, are not connected to sewage systems at all as they generally live in illegal constructions, or are squatters on government land. Even the expenses of capital investment in operation and maintenance of sewage are not borne by the city’s privileged, who both use the river’s water, and continue to release waste into it. The CSE writes (2007: 146): “In this situation, the political economy of defecation is where the rich [and sewage connected] are subsidised, not the poor.”

The Ministry of Environment and Forests (Government of India 2007) reports that Delhi alone dumps more waste into the Yamuna than all the Indian class-2 cities\(^\text{93}\) put together. Kumar (2002: 5) writes: “Immediate actions are thus necessary to improve the quality of water in the river, some of them being the harvesting of water, a new eco-sanitation system and implementation of stringent regulations.” However, he emphasises (2002: 5): “The most important one is the change in mindset of people, because all these things will be useless if we do not respect nature’s gifts to us.” In the River of Love, Haberman (2006, in Gold 2007) provides some convincing evidence that religiously inspired conscience such as “devotees’ heartbreak” can inspire “effective action and bring about change” (Gold 2006: 452). Haberman (2006) dwells at length on

\(^{93}\) Class II cities in India include the large metropolitan state capitals of the south like Hyderabad, Bangalore and Chennai, which have not yet become megacities [cities with a population of over 10 million]. This is expected to rapidly change in the next few years because real estate development and global capital are increasingly being invested in such cities where Greenfield developments are more possible (Parker 2005).
the notion of seva or “loving service” (Gold 2006: 452), as a way of rendering religiously inspired ecological service.

The same plea to change the contemporary mindset can equally apply to the built environment. After having explored two of Delhi’s most pressing ecological problems, I now turn my attention to the built environment that demonstrably has an impact on city sustainability.

*The Great Metropolitan Village: Architecture and the Built Space*

Few would dispute that the tangible characteristics of Delhi have changed almost beyond belief in the past decade. Since liberalisation, products and advertisement hoardings for Adidas, electric rice cookers, Levis, Longines watches, BMWs, frost-free fridges, plasma televisions, holidays in Mauritius, and real estate developments that promise Malibu and Manhattan townships in Delhi – and specifically hasten to reassure the potential customer that “You won’t even notice you are in India!” – have taken over the tactile and visible urban landscape in the historic city.

V.S. Naipaul (1990) observes that architectural aesthetics in a populous tropical developing city is not a statement of picturesqueness alone; it is also a matter of maintaining emotional harmony and peace within the urban community. It is about retaining and preserving the sense of self through images and structures that *do not impose on the self*, but *blend with the self* with understanding and tranquillity. Beatley and Manning (1997: 124) write: “There is no question that many of the ways in which we live unsustainably are directly tied to the design and construction of homes, businesses, and built structures of all types.” Eminent Delhi-based architect Gautam Bhatia (1996: xii) writes of his reaction to the visual changes in the city that he could barely keep pace with:

> The place had changed beyond recognition. Much of what existed around, much of what constituted the places I inhabited was new. Every place was marked by sudden and bewildering hyperactivity; over the telephone, on television, in the newspaper, on the movie billboard, was the urgency of a paranoid expression…I was afraid to die, and frightened to live. Too much was happening around me,
within me. My world was never of action, only sensation and emotion. When the wind blew, I blew with it...I could not defend the space of my territory, because I belonged nowhere, and nothing belonged to me...my life was only a shadow between events, between measurable times and places of birth and those of death. I had no responsibility except of just being there.

Ancient Indian architecture has been long celebrated for its symphony of astounding scientific precision and insight, and aesthetic beauty (Rewal 1986). Across centuries, modern historians agree, Indian architecture responded to the lifestyle needs of the time with care and creativity, and were often monuments to the very pinnacles of splendour, beauty and perfection (Gupta 2000). However, contemporary architecture in modern Indian cities, particularly Delhi, is motivated by greed, profit accumulation and corruption. Bhatia writes (1996: xv): “Architecture for mass consumption has come to be viewed the same way: as an object of acquisition.” Of modern architecture, he writes with despair (1996: xv):

Architecture was a guttural emotional, physical thing. Architecture was a message felt by the heart, no longer a zen-like wave within the mind. It spoke, it stank, it captivated; it was rancid and sublime and stupid and sonorous. It was hardly the stuff of historical debate or intellectual inquiry.

An important consequence of the rapid real estate development of Delhi is its overt and unselfconscious usurpation of its rural space. Skyscrapers dwarf the adjoining and yet disconnected villages. Within Delhi, New Delhi’s growth rate particularly has been exponential. However, it has neither been uniform, nor consistent throughout the metropolitan area. Varma (2001: 210) writes:

New Delhi is both a metropolis and a village. The metropolis has increased in bulk by swallowing new territories, and yet, parts of what it has swallowed remains undigested. These are the villages within New Delhi, disdainful of the pretensions of the metropolitan capital.

Soni (2000) believes that the city is conspicuous in that unlike most large world cities, it has generally successfully managed to push the poor to the outer reaches of the city, and
reassigned its rural tracts to its fringes. The three million residents [which include both the urban and the rural poor] of Outer Delhi constitute both India’s and the capital’s largest parliamentary constituency; however, it is treated as one of the most backward electorates, rife with crime and violence (Soni 2000).

The notable exceptions to this group constitute the residential ghettos of the ‘cocktail circuit’ or the rich residents of Tughlakabad Institutional Area, Saket, Qutub Enclave and Vasant Vihar, which Soni describes as “arrogant complexes of palatial mansions with gardens, enclosed behind tall boundary walls” (Soni 2000: 76). While these are also unauthorised constructions on illegally appropriated land, they are regarded as “farmhouses”, and are allowed electricity and water supplies (Soni 2000).

From a sustainability concern, Soni (2000: 77) describes the farmhouses as an “ecological disaster”. The farmhouses are categorised as agricultural property and the rich owners therefore receive tax exemption benefits and subsidised power meant for poor farmers. This group is also most guilty of massive energy and power pilfering (Soni 2000). Their profligate use of groundwater is not controlled by the state, and the consequent depletion of the water table has been “catastrophic” (Soni 2000: 78). A large number of farmhouses engage in commercial floriculture, which uses four times as much water as food crops (Soni 2000). While more than 1800 such farmhouses already exist, the numbers are expected to rapidly shoot up, opening up immense possibilities for black market acquisition and speculation (Soni 2000).

**The Delhi Sustainability Challenge: The Social and Political Issues**

The Brundtland Commission report (1987) emphasises equity to be of central importance in achieving sustainable development. The report focuses largely on intergenerational equity but notes that other localised forms of equity may need to be addressed in particular locations to enable sustainable development. In this section, I examine four issues of equity and social justice in Delhi, all of which are demonstrably important from a sustainability perspective in the city. These are: the issue of entrenched corruption in the legal and judicial systems; corruption within the governance; the proliferation of slums and the rise in the numbers of urban poor; and lastly, I study the empowered, educated citizens of the city – the middle class, who were
also instrumental in writing India’s socialist constitution – and their current tendency to ignore events and issues that do not directly serve their self-interests. This, in my view, is a serious sustainability concern.

These issues are directly related to the larger issue of institutional changes and the Brundtland report observes at length that the change from unsustainable practices must necessarily come from a revamping of public institutions, both at the national and international levels. The Brundtland Commission report (1987: 1) states at the very outset that “hope for the future is conditional on decisive political action now to begin managing environmental resources to ensure both sustainable human progress and human survival.” The report identifies some key institutional flaws in responding to the challenges of poverty, degraded environments and other related issues of development: traditional organisation of governmental bodies, both national and international, were based on “narrow preoccupations and compartmentalized concerns” [for instance, the institutions meant to protect the environment are separated from those managing the economy], and that governments have failed to use their power to prevent organisations from abusing the environment (Brundtland Commission 1987: 9). The report notes that the government and public institutions of both developed and developing countries need to urgently transform such institutions and make them integrated.

In the next section, I examine some of the problems that beset public institutions in India, notably the phenomenon of corruption, and how this impedes sustainable development. Such an examination is necessary because India today stands at a complex crossroads – whether to pursue economic development or sustainable development, for instance – and every such decision presents a challenge to the state. Moreover, important goals such as the Millennium Development Goals can only be achieved if the government and its affiliated bodies are effective institutions. Therefore, I examine the criminalisation of Indian politics, and corruption in the legislature and the judiciary, and how this relates to sustainable development in Delhi.

**Law, Judiciary and Corruption**

It is evident from the literature, for instance, that corruption is a predominant feature of official processes in India, and is a great impediment to various forms of environmental,
economic and social unsustainability in Delhi. The UN Global Impact (2007) reports that corruption is one of the single biggest challenges to sustainability globally. Pavarala (1996) notes that corruption is not a Third World or a developing country phenomenon by any means; in fact his analysis of corruption in India leads him to conclude that corruption is shaped most strongly by class motivations.\textsuperscript{94} There is both a financial and an ethical case against corruption; however, it is recognised that corruption has a destructive effect on the very structures that are meant to support sustainability efforts, i.e., the community, the businesses and the governments (UN Global Impact 2007). Additionally, they have an extremely disproportionate adverse effect on poor communities, leading to their greater impoverishment and vulnerability (UN Global Impact 2007).

The phenomenon of corruption has a wide range of definitions. Heidenheimer (1970) defines it as the misappropriation of public resources by government authorities to serve private gain. Other scholars have explained corruption as a legal problem that leads to squandering of public resources, erosion of citizens’ trust and greater social inequality (Gillespie and Okruhlik 1991). Gillespie and Okruhlik (1991: 77) argue, however, that in some situations, corruption has “positive impact” as it works around inefficient government processes. Machiavelli (1961) took the controversial position that corruption is justified as a means if it leads to the right ends. The Stanford University Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (2005), however, explicitly identifies corruption as a moral problem, as opposed to a legal phenomenon.

In India, corruption is evident at all levels of society, including most disturbingly, the officials charged with administering law and justice. The Global Corruption Report 2007 unambiguously pronounced India’s judicial system to be “overbearing and democratically unaccountable”; disturbingly, it highlighted in strong terms the lack of the public’s trust in their judicial system (Bidwai 2007). The study was based on a countrywide survey that was compiled by Berlin-based Transparency International;

\textsuperscript{94} Pavarala’s (1996) case studies within India include judges, politicians, journalists, bureaucrats, and capitalists. He noted that judiciary and mediapersons were most likely to take a moral stand against corruption; industrialists and capitalists were likely to blame the politicians but at the same time, employ corrupt practises to bribe the bureaucracy; bureaucrats would also blame the political system; and the politicians were most likely to blame the legislature.
seventy-seven per cent of the respondents believed that the providers and protectors of justice in India are corrupt (Bidwai 2007).\footnote{The survey probed the integrity of the lower levels of the judicial system and excluded the state level High Courts, and the national Supreme Court; however, these courts are also not free from the taint of corruption. Kishwar (1999) describes in detail her ten-year battle with the Supreme Court in Delhi to seek inheritance rights for a tribal woman from Bihar.}

Bidwai (2007) provides three reasons why the judiciary in India is able to defy principles of democracy, integrity and justice. Firstly, a case of judicial corruption has thus far never been put on trial because under the Constitution, it is virtually impossible to impeach a judge.\footnote{The vote requires a two-thirds majority in the Parliament, and most judges are politically well connected. Besides, it is also in the best interests of a corrupt legislature to have a corrupt judiciary. In 1993, an independent court committee found Justice V. Ramaswamy guilty of corruption; however, for the above reasons, he was not impeached.} Bidwai (2007) notes that under a system that practically seeks no accountability from the judiciary, the judges have handed down judgements that “abridge or abolish labour rights, dilute environmental regulations, promote big business interests and uncritically support globalisation and privatisation.”

Secondly, India has one of the lowest rations of judges per million people at 12 to 13, as compared to 107 in the United States, 75 judges per million people in Canada and 51 judges per million people in the United Kingdom. Upendra Baxi (2007, in Bidwai 2007) says:

This high workload encourages delays and adjournments on frivolous grounds. The judicial system, including judges and lawyers, has developed a vested interest in delays as well as corruption; it promotes a collusive relationship between the different players. This works against the public interest and the citizens’ rights. But even more important is the assault on rights that has occurred under the globalising neoliberal turn made by India’s higher judiciary since the early 1990s.

Bidwai (2007) writes:

Instead of guarding the public interest and acting as defenders of human rights and Constitutional freedoms, the courts are now conscious promoters of neoliberal
globalisation, supporting unrestricted freedom for capital and shrunken rights for the ordinary public.

Thirdly, Colin Gonsalves of Transparency International says that the Indian judiciary has appropriated for itself duties and roles of the executive and the judiciary (Bidwai 2007). In recent times, for instance, Indian courts have laid down decisions for the city of Delhi that fall within the purview of the government: the switch to CNG fuel in public transport, city planning, censorship of films and books, and the ban of the tradition of the sale of street food in the city.

However, the legal systems that operate in developing cities have to be reconsidered from the viewpoint of sustainable urban management for several reasons. Moving the city to a more sustainable future and addressing urban environmental problems all require sound enforcement of law and policing – and judicial corruption undercuts both.

Opposing and reversing corruption has both sound business and ethical reasons (World Bank 2007). However, this chapter is interested in addressing the ethical dimensions to corruption as it relates to sustainability since it is more in keeping with the thesis’s interest in creating a sustainability mindset, and animating a sustainability consciousness through using spiritual resources. This aspect will be explored further in Chapter 6, which will examine the potential of spirituality to facilitate sustainability-oriented changes at the level of the consciousness at both individual and institutional levels.

**Debilitated Democracy, Corrupt Leadership**

That Delhi is governed by criminals may be more than an aphorism. More than twenty-five per cent of the members of Parliament have criminal records (Johnson 2007a). Under the Indian legal system, a person may be debarred from public office only if they have been convicted – a highly unlikely and long drawn process in the painfully slow judicial system in India. Johnson (2007a: 11) writes: “The risk is that the systematic criminalisation of politics spreads further afield, dragging down standards of governance throughout the country. There is growing anecdotal evidence of an ever-widening nexus linking politics to organised crime.”
Political parties, including the large ones like the BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party or the Indian People’s Party] and the Congress, seem to have no hesitation in using their office for personal gains. There is not a single political party in Delhi, which does not have important office-holders with charges against them that range from murder to abduction to rape to inciting riots (Johnson 2007b). Johnson (2007b: 11) says:

Some political parties may be demanding large upfront payments from their candidates, knowing that those elected can more than recoup their ‘investment’ by hawking favours, by siphoning off funds for development or by selling in the market foodstuffs destined for a midday meal scheme for school-age children.

Criminalisation of the Indian polity is a vital sustainability concern for several reasons. In 2006, for instance, the World Bank withheld funding on two major public health projects because it suspected that the money would be redirected into the personal coffers of public officials instead of being delivered to its intended recipients (Mitra 2006). Corrupt governance also compromises other development agendas. For instance, the extent to which India is able to achieve the objectives set out in the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG)\(^{97}\) depends on the commitment of both the central and the state governments to respond to the goals. In order to achieve these goals, the governments of developing countries have pledged to ensure transparent and just governance\(^{98}\) (UNDP 2007). The UNDP (2007) declares:

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\(^{97}\) The UN Millennium Development Goals (2005) have a target of achieving the following eight goals by 2015: eradicating extreme hunger and poverty; achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and empowering women; reducing child mortality; improving maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and developing global partnership for development. The Goals have been described as “unprecedented efforts to meet the needs of the world’s poorest”.

\(^{98}\) South Africa is a signatory to the MDGs. Harpham and Allison (2000) note in their study of South African cities that while the government could provide a framework for understanding the social and political context of environmental and economic health, with the end of apartheid, the organisation of civil society in the cities has tremendously changed, forcing new methods of interaction between the government and society. As a developing country in transition, it is not yet clear what governance means in the local context, or what the mechanisms of this new governance might be. However, the civil society is emphatic about a relationship with more transparency, less control and domination, and greater participation of NGOs. This renewed citizen activism is expected to finally address some of South Africa most debilitating environmental concern such as urban sanitation.
Democratic governance is central to the achievement of the MDGs, as it provides the ‘enabling environment’ for the realization of the MDGs and, in particular, the elimination of poverty. Recognizing this, world leaders undertook in the Millennium Declaration to ‘spare no effort to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law, as well as respect for all internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms including the right to development’.

The poorest of the poor are most vulnerable to the exploitative tendencies of a corrupt system. The 500,000 odd street vendors in Delhi, who fall way below the minimum tax threshold, pay approximately US$100 million in bribes annually (Varma 2001). Seabrook (1995: 18) writes: “The harsh tactics of market reforms and political corruption have turned Delhi into a city of madness and chaos. The city has become synonymous with murder, violence and poverty.”

The government has made some efforts to ostensibly eliminate corruption from its operations. In 2005, the government of India passed the Right to Information Act (2005)\textsuperscript{99}, which allows a citizen of India to request information from any public authority or government body, and the concerned authority is required to respond to such an appeal within thirty days. This was celebrated as a landmark achievement in a country of a billion people. It was believed that this act would have the effect of curbing corruption, because it would increase transparency in the operations of the government.

However, in 2006, the central government in Delhi enforced several amendments to the Act that weakened much of its earlier anti-corruption force. For instance, an amendment deemed that information would be withheld from the public on who took particular decisions and why. An editorial in the Financial Times (July 2006) commented: “The official reason is to prevent the act being abused to pursue vendettas against individual politicians and bureaucrats. Freedom of information campaigners protest that the move is intended to cover up misdeeds.”

\textsuperscript{99} This Act does not include right to any information that threatens the sovereignty, integrity or security of India; information which has been denied permission for publication or disclosure by a public court, information provided in confidence by a foreign government; information that has no bearing on any public interest; information that is likely to retard the prosecution process of criminals; and information that can cause a breach of privilege in Parliament or the Legislature (Right to Information Act, 2005).
Arguably, corruption has become embedded in social psyche and behaviour of the population. Rumours abound every year of university exam papers leaking, doctoral theses can be purchased for a standard price, government ministers routinely get involved in corruption scandals, it is possible to purchase the job of a trained nurse or even a doctor, and movie stars are believed to have connections with the underworld mafia.

Varma (2004: 76), in his highly acclaimed study Being Indian, on India’s role in the twenty-first century, points out that corruption is in no way a uniquely Indian experience; however what is unique, he says, is “its acceptance, and the creative ways in which it is sustained…their understanding of right and wrong is far more related to efficacy than to absolutist notions of morality.” He writes (2004: 77):

For all the condemnation that corruption publicly provokes, Indians are ambivalent about the practice. In this sense, corruption is like litmus paper: it takes the colour of the specific experience…the world is not inherently fair, it does not guarantee a level playing field. In such a situation, success is the consequence of a well-understood transaction.

In the interests of Delhi’s [and India’s] long-term sustainability, it is clear that anti-corruption measures must be a top agenda. Recommendations to curb corruption within Indian politics and governance include loosening the strangulating vice-like hold of the Indian bureaucracy, and outsourcing key government functions to private agencies (Financial Times, July 2006).

However, Pavarala (1996) warns against taking a positivist approach to corruption as behaviour that includes bribery, nepotism, extortionism, rent-taking behaviour etc. Solutions to corruption, he says, need to be creative and localised, and should use a contextual-constructivist approach. Above all, Varma makes a poignant observation that it is crucial to “resurrect the citizen who cares” (1998: 207). He proposes therefore that NGOs and religious organisations may be able to play a role in reawakening the “dormant instincts of social responsibility among the privileged” (Varma 1998: 208).
The scourge of corruption, however, affects the poor and the unprivileged in the city the most. As the ensuing section shows, urban poverty and deprivation, and the proliferation of slums in Delhi is intensified because of rampant corruption practices within the very organisations that are meant to address the problems of housing, homelessness and rehabilitation of the urban poor.

*The Slum City*

The Economic Survey of Delhi 2005-2006 reported that the number of persons living below poverty line in the city had dropped significantly from 49.61 per cent in 1973-74, to 8.23 per cent in 1999-2000 (Delhi Planning Commission 2006). However, despite these impressive achievements, the Human Development Report 2003 points out that the country itself has massive rural and urban pockets of endemic poverty\(^{100}\) (UNCTAD 2003). Urban poverty and associated stresses in India, the report warns, is on the brink of an explosion as the large rural hinterland empties itself in large numbers to the cities and metropolises.

The Delhi Development Authority [DDA], which is responsible for housing, and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi [MCD], which is concerned with slum removals, relocations and resettlements have been involved in a series of corruption scandals since 2003, regarding the renewed demolition of unauthorised slum colonies, as well as illegal constructions in the city. Senior bureaucrat K.J. Alphons who worked in the DDA for two years in the early 1990s describes the DDA as the “most corrupt institution in India” (Macdonald 1995: 78). During his short posting, he had brought down 10,000 illegal constructions on 1,200 hectares of land owned by the DDA (Macdonald 1995). The demolitions include not just squatter encroachments but highly successful commercial ventures, many of which have been in business for several years. The Demolition Demon or the Demolition Derby as the operation has been called, has

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\(^{100}\) It is pertinent to briefly compare the sustainability challenges of the city of Shanghai to Delhi. While Shanghai has already achieved status as a prominent international economic city, the city, like Delhi, went through a rapid rate of economic and population growth since the 1980s (Abelson 2000). However, the city continues to have a dismal natural environment, with poor air, water and land quality, as well as inadequate housing and sanitation facilities for the urban poor in the city. Abelson (2000) notes that in spite of impressive economic reforms, the lack of complementary social services for the poor have resulted in inequitable social conditions, leading to further unemployment and inequality. This is an important lesson for Delhi.
met with widespread protests and anger from all echelons of the citizenry against the government that allowed such constructions in the first place.

However, Overdorf (2003) points out that the demolitions have the worst impact on the city’s poor, because it becomes nearly impossible for them to establish and maintain a basic standard of living due to constant upheavals and shoddy implementation of resettlement policies. The MCD’s resettlement policy includes a payment of Rs. 29,000 (or US$624) per slum dwelling that is razed to subsidise the tenant’s relocation and, in addition, the Delhi government pays Rs. 10,000 or US$250 to the relocated tenants (Overdorf 2003). In return, the family pays the government a licence fee of Rs. 5000-7000 (US$150-200) for a 12-18.5 square metres plot for rent for five to ten years (Overdorf 2003). Nonetheless, several reports attest that the compensation rarely reaches the needy families and is generally diverted into other schemes and projects, and often, into the personal accounts of DDA and MCD officials (Overdorf 2003). In 2002, fifty-six cases of corruption were filed against several municipal organisations in Delhi; the MCD alone had nearly 20 of these charges against their officials.

The DDA also reneged on two promises that it had made as part of its demolition drive; that it would resettle the poor refugees in land with complete access to basic civic facilities, and also build low-income affordable housing to replace the slums entirely. Instead, the locations for resettlements are often 20-50 kilometres from the city centre, like Rohini, a rural hinterland in the poorer parts of northern Delhi. The relocated slum dwellers are forced to invest their meagre income in developing their own facilities on land that they cannot even claim as their own (Overdorf 2003). Moreover, according to Sajha Manch, an NGO for Delhi’s urban poor, 80 per cent of this housing was sold to middle income households, and the city’s slum population in the meantime, has risen to 3.2 million in 2002 (Gopalakrishnan 2003).

The last few sections, which examined the various forms of unsustainability in Delhi, lead us to naturally consider the role of that group of educated, ostensibly empowered citizens in the city that might actually make articulate and forceful objections to the various forms of injustices and unsustainable practices, and demand their removal – the middle class. However, this affluent class worldwide has been guilty of leaving some of the heaviest ecological footprints on the planet, and the Indian middle class is no less
guilty of the perpetuation of urban unsustainability in Delhi. The next section examines the city’s middle classes, and their impact on sustainability in Delhi.

**Delhi’s Consuming Middle Class**

In 1947, for the first time in Delhi’s history, the majestic city, variously the imperial capital, the emperor city and the regal throne of virtually every ruler of the Indic civilisation, was reincarnated – certainly as the capital of independent India – but also seemingly shorn of its royal trappings, as a *middle class* capital. India, for the first time a democracy, was to be ruled by her “midnight’s children”, the Indian middle class, the intellectuals, the statesmen and the shapers of the country’s destiny. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru’s prophetic address to the nation at midnight on the 15th of August 1947, in English, was essentially a speech for the Anglicised Indian middle class (Varma 1998: 1):

> Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awaken to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance.

The middle class in India has always played a significant role in determining the destiny of the country. The Constitution of India, arguably one of the finest in the world, was framed by the elite members of the Indian middle and upper classes. According to Granville Austin, the noted political scholar, no other constitution has “provided so much impetus toward changing and rebuilding society for the common good” (Varma 1998: 58). The middle class responded stoutly to Nehru’s socialist visions, and to Gandhi’s clarion call for peaceful mass cooperation.

However, the six decades since Indian independence has shown disconcerting trends in the evolution of the middle classes. The sense of noble and high-minded purpose, the spirit of equality and justice, and the loyalty to Gandhi and his ideals, seemed cast away in favour of a single-minded pursuit of material wealth (Varma 1998). Numerous
sociological studies have pointed to the appalling insensitivity of the educated Indian middle class to the squalor, poverty and filth that surround them, and have marvelled at their single-minded ability to steadfastly ignore events and circumstances that do not directly serve their material well-being (Sen 2006; Van Wessel 2004; Varma 2004, 1998). Importantly, Varma (1998) argues that the rise of India as a major global player has compounded this propensity further. Varma (2004) predicts that the Indian middle class, estimated to be nearly half a billion, is likely to become the second largest consumer market in the world.

Sustainable consumption of available resources is a chief economic concern in the Brundtland Commission report. The report says (1987: 88):

Living standards that go beyond the basic minimum are sustainable only if consumption standards everywhere have regard for long-term sustainability...perceived needs are socially and culturally determined, and sustainable development requires the promotion of values that encourage consumption standards that are within the bounds of the ecologically possible and to which all can reasonably aspire.

In 1991, the erstwhile Congress Prime Minister Narasimha Rao and the then Finance Minister Manmohan Singh [who is now the present Prime Minister of India] proclaimed a series of economic liberalisation policies, which opened up India's economy to foreign direct investment for the first time since independence. This was a revolutionary move to loosen up state controls on the Indian economy, and effectively and meaningfully integrate it with the global economy (Varma 1998).

Following these reforms, the Indian elephantine economy, traditionally slow-moving, started to lumber forward to begin its rapid rise as an important economic power. Since 2003, the country has consistently achieved its annual growth rates as proposed in the Five-Year plans; for 2007, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced a target growth rate of 10 per cent, which he believed could not only be eminently achieved, but also exceeded (Thakurta 2006). As Varma (1998) astutely notes, a question that has since liberalisation only become more important to the world economy is: how much can
India buy? Serious research efforts began to be directed towards estimating the purchasing power of the burgeoning Indian middle class (Varma 1998).

Following the opening up of the Indian economy to foreign investment, urban India, and Delhi no less, lost no time in appropriating and living a lifestyle of power, luxury and big dreams when the Western alternative was brought to their living rooms through satellite television, American serials and products. Jain (2001: 124) writes:

Middle-class India is now beginning to rule as their dreams are fast becoming a reality. The city [of Delhi] has a loud commercial heartbeat, drummed up by the burgeoning middle classes which were fairly invisible until not too long ago...there has been nothing short of a revolution in the way the younger middle-class generation dress and behave, or what they expect from life; the lid’s off the expectations and aspirations is what drives these inhabitants of the capital city.

Sophisticated consumer outlets have begun to define Delhi’s urban landscape.

Jain (2001: 125) observes that the “shopping boom” and the “eating boom” have most significantly redefined urban culture in Delhi in recent times. Varma (1998: 175) writes: “In a sense, it was the collective exorcism from the nation’s psyche of the repressive and life-denying nature of Gandhi’s idealism.” Multiplex cinema complexes and
shopping malls like Ansal Plaza and Shipra Mall that sprawl on acres of key land and shopping suburbs like the Greater Kailash markets, South Extension, Connaught Place, Vasant Lok and the trendy Khan Market in the diplomatic area encourage these two instincts in the city’s middle classes to levels that are quite simply gluttonous. Satellite televisions beam the American dream into Indian middle class homes through over fifty channels, twenty-four hours a day. Venkatramani (1996) bemoans: “Delhi seemed to be drawing its sustenance from Dallas.” With increased incomes, the middle class is expanding at its lower levels to include citizens of the lower classes, who suddenly have access to those material symbols that make them ‘worthy’ of the new class.

Varma (1998: 174) argues that one of the outcomes that was not foreseen by myopic planning was that liberalisation would have its impact in a “social vacuum”, separating the middle class from the other classes, and also reinforcing the identity of the Indian urban middle class as predominantly a consuming class. Varma (1998: 174) writes:

First, it gave to the middle class an economic clout that it could not possibly possess in a country as poor as India, and second, and with far more serious consequences, it failed to take into account what the policies of liberalisation would do to a class which was already morally rudderless, obsessively materialistic, and socially insensitive to the point of being unconcerned with anything but its own narrow self-interest.

The middle class in Delhi [as the ruling capital and the seat of the bureaucracy] were the wielders of influence, intellectual authority and administrative strength. Liberalisation additionally bestowed upon them economic ascendancy. Gunn and Bell (2003: 15) write:

Class is not simply a matter of economic possessions or of social position, but also of power. One of the important attributes of middle-class status was the ability to wield power over others, whether immediately, or in the form of employees, servants or tradespeople, or more widely, by influence exerted through institutions such as voluntary associations, political parties and parliament.
Many academics have noticed that the Indian middle classes have no notion of ‘national development’ beyond their own material welfare – the idea that the benefits of ‘development’ should extend to the millions from the poorer India simply does not seem to occur to them (Varma 2001; Jain 2001; Varma 1998; Kishwar 1998; Guha and Gadgil 1995). Van Wessel (2004: 108) observes in her study of middle class urban Indians:

The idea that national development needs to incorporate and promote issues pertaining to the poor is not their chief concern. The people speaking consider themselves well above the mean, both as individuals and also as a class, but they do not see their class privilege as obliging them to work for the greater good of the nation.

However, the middle class in Delhi is inevitably a part of the larger community in the city, and it is not possible that it can sustain itself or its interests interminably, without considering the health of the whole. Varma writes (1998: 202): “For, if the middle class remains insensitive to the needs of the vast number of Indians who live in extreme poverty, it does so at the risk of considerable political instability which will militate against the very prosperity that it desires.” Unless the feelings of prosperity, genuine empowerment, and sense of ownership and belonging in the city are truly shared by all its citizens, it is inevitable that the socio-economic fabric that holds Delhi together would begin to rip.

Varma (2004; 1998) and Van Wessel (2004) note that Gandhian economic principles of austerity and simplicity are revered by the middle class, but as ideals. Van Wessel (2004: 99-100) writes: “Indeed, Gandhiji is so much a sacred figure that he is marginal to the actual conduct of daily life; his ideals are often seen as having no real place in the daily lives of common folk.” This is an irony, because in his lifetime, Gandhi tried consistently to distance himself from the near divine status that was accorded to him, precisely because he was aware that it would remove him from the common people, and the title of Mahatma [‘Great Soul’] distressed him greatly (Gandhi 1949).
However, it is myopic to propose that idealism has no place in a sustainability debate, where the very notion of sustainability exemplifies an endeavour to reach the ideal. Varma (1998: 210) explains:

But between the unachievable social activism of the Mahatma and the supreme social indifference of the present generation of the privileged, there must be a halfway house, a modus vivendi, which does not jettison all that he stood for merely because what he did is so difficult to do...India needs a pragmatic revolution, which can stabilise the pendulum of social involvement somewhere between doing something as significant as Gandhi and not doing anything at all.

It is important from a sustainability perspective to consider: what will it take for the middle class citizenry of Delhi to embrace the principle of downsizing and sustainable, ethically motivated consumption? With the rapidly disseminating power of the modern media, the urban Indian middle class can only continue its gluttonous economic binge at its own peril. Varma (1998: 214) makes a grim prediction:

Will the great Indian middle class be able to read the writing on the wall? If it does, there is still hope. If it does not, the India of today will be the envy of the amoral, cynical, economically lacklustre and debilitatingly divided nation that can emerge tomorrow, the harvest of an opportunity lost, a heritage wasted.

It is important to note that unlike the developed world, further economic growth is a necessity in the developing world in the interests of sustainability (Brundtland Commission 1987). However, asymmetrical and lopsided economic growth results in great environmental and social injustices, and does not serve the greater common good. Economic development in a city like Delhi has to serve the poor, and reduce ecological costs. Reduction of poverty in the developing and under-developed nations of Africa and Asia is in global environmental interests (Brundtland Commission 1987).

On a more hopeful note, however, it is heartening to observe that there are some sections of the citizenry in Delhi, including the middle classes, who display a conscientious sense of responsibility, and are worried and outraged about the scale of environmental damage in the city, for instance. While admittedly their concerns
generally restrict themselves more to ecological wellbeing, the growing citizens movements in Delhi are nevertheless the sign of some important positive change.

In recent times, there has been a growing awareness of, and concern among, the citizenry about the environmental issues that plague the national capital. Social activists as well as non-governmental organisations, have taken on a leading role in raising awareness and protesting the damage to precious green resources like the Delhi Ridge. In 2000, university students participated by the hundreds in ‘Save the Ridge’ campaigns by squatting in front of government bulldozers that had arrived to deforest a section of the Ridge (Lal 2001).

A certain wariness accompanies the arrival of new and seemingly necessary development to the city. Even as the much-lauded Metro system promises social and economic deliverance for Delhites, it also bodes a few ills for the city’s natural habitat. It is believed that this would mean the killing of 10,000 trees in Delhi, even though the government has promised to plant ten trees for every one taken (Lal 2001). Delhi citizens groups have also been demanding that concrete pavements around the capital be broken and replaced with grass and mud side paths. The concretisation of Delhi’s footpaths has resulted in uprooting of large number of big trees in the capital, particularly tamarind woods (Kohli 2006, para 4). When concrete tiles seal the breathing space around the roots, deep or even superficial water percolation is not possible. Citizens groups have petitioned in partnership with the Central Empowered Committee at the Supreme Court in 2003 under the Delhi Preservation of Trees Act 1994. Frustrated by the slow movement of justice, angry citizens and volunteers even ripped out large tracts of tiles themselves along Aurangzeb Road, incurring the wrath of the mining and construction companies (Kohli 2006, para 5).

However, one noteworthy achievement marks Delhi’s journey towards a sustainable city, and sets an example for other Indian cities to take an important lesson in sustainability. The vast stretch of wasteland along Ring Road, between the ISBT-Sarai Kale Road and Bhairon Road was for a long time a stinking dumping ground for sanitary and human waste. As a response to community agitation and demands to clean up the area, the DDA displayed exemplary initiative and imagination in cleaning up the entire area, and creating in its place the 34-hectare Indraprastha Millennium Park. The
Park is rich in green foliage, and has the historic Humayun’s Tomb as its scenic backdrop. The lawn now ranks amongst the garden city’s Landmark Greens.¹⁰¹

This is an example of positive human contribution to the environment. However, for sustainability to occur on a much larger scale, such conscientiousness needs to be more ingrained in individuals and the society. It is an argument of this thesis that spirituality may enable such shift in consciousness to occur, such that sustainability, as a way of being and doing, may become part of human lifestyles. In the context of Delhi, it is useful to now examine the spiritual narrative in India, and to what extent, and how, it shapes lifestyles in India.

4.5. The Spiritual Secular Narrative in Delhi

As in other Indian cities, spirituality and religion form a significant dimension of urban lifestyles in Delhi. Delhi, through its complex history, has retained its vital characteristic of being a vibrant potpourri of diverse faiths and cultures. However, some of the earliest incarnations of Delhi with its Hindu history have disappeared almost without a trace because of subsequent colonisations (Hurlimann 1965). Even oral tradition has failed to preserve detailed accounts of the earliest periods of Delhi’s history (Hurlimann 1965). The sole exception who attained the legacy of immortality is King Ashoka, who subsequently became “an apostle of Buddhism”; several wrought-iron Ashoka pillars stand in Delhi, with engravings of his edicts (Hurlimann 1965: 9). Muslims ruled Delhi until 1857; however, Hindus assisted in its administrative, economic and military processes through various important roles (Pandit 1983).

During the first organised revolt in 1857 against the British imperialists, Hindus and Muslims displayed a spirit of cooperation and fraternity in unifying their forces and resources towards the common goal of freedom (Pandit 1983). The British immediately realised that the continued colonisation of India was possible only by weakening this

¹⁰¹ The Landmark Greens include Delhi’s most beautiful and preserved natural greenery, parks, gardens and lawns. These include the Swarna Jayanti Park [Rohini], District Park [Dwarka], Deer Park [Hauz Khas], Jamali Kamali Park [Mehrauli Complex], Sanjay Lake Complex, DDA’s Golf Course [Lado Sarai], District Park [Kanti Nagar], Indraprastha Park, Aastha Kunj, Bhalswa Lake Complex, Sultan Garhi, Tughlaquabad Recreational Complex, Bharat Vandana and Yamuna Biodiversity Park.
bond, and embarked on an official strategy of ‘divide and rule’ to separate the communities, and cause mutual animosity and distrust (Pandit 1983).

While statesmen and politico-religious leaders like Gandhi worked tirelessly to restore the spirit of inter-religious harmony and peace, the struggle for Indian independence still ended in a bloodbath of bitter Hindu-Muslim riots. Pandit (1983: 18) says that the presence of the new immigrants, shaken and bereft after the bloody violence, gave a “boost to the narrow nationalistic and communal feelings” fuelled by right-wing parties like the Hindu Mahasabha and Jan Sangh.

The theory that Delhi is culturally and religiously a smaller version of India has been a favourite amongst political scholars. New Delhi particularly, with its considerably greater cosmopolitanism than the more traditional Old Delhi, inspires this view; Varma (2001: 217) writes: “New Delhi is a microcosm of India on a reduced scale. India is New Delhi magnified a thousand-fold and more.” However, other arguments have long persisted that Delhi really only represents northern India or the Hindi-speaking cultures (Mitra 1970). Mitra (1970) admits, however, that Delhi is most successful of all Indian cities in projecting a far greater cosmopolitanism because religious, spiritual and cultural activities are systematically organised and celebrated. Such activities are also easily perceived because Delhi is divided into informal “cultural zones” (Mitra 1970: 21), where members of a particular state of cultural group have generally resided.102 Therefore, notes Mitra (1970: 21): “Nowhere…does the country present such an apparently effortless and unique Indianness of content.”

While examining the mainstream sustainability discourse, which has thus far been largely secular, and its emerging interface with spirituality or what is quite commonly referred to as ‘neo-religious’ in the context of India (Larson 1995) as an enlightening medium in Delhi, it is useful to examine briefly the larger narrative between religion and secularism in India. Here, I found Gerald Larson’s brilliant study (1995) on the relationship between religion and the secular state in India, India’s Agony Over Religion, especially helpful. Larson (1995: 5) observes that in one sense, an analysis of the relationship between religion and the Indian state may not be about “traditional or

102 For instance, Chittaranjan Park is popularly known as a Bengali suburb and R.K. Puram as a Tamil area.
Hindu India at all". This is because Western or "non-South Asian" notions of the state and religion have been embraced by Indian political thought to such an extent that such a task essentially involves "identifying a set or network of ideas that originate mainly outside South Asia but become exemplified in the subcontinental region when an entity called 'India' emerges as a 'secular' nation-state in 1947" (Larson 1995: 5). In fact, even before India was exposed to Western philosophical and religious thought through British colonisation, India has already experienced the impact for several centuries of another Abrahamic, non-South Asian religious culture, through Islamic imperial rule (Larson 1995).

India's incarnation as a secular state was because of a pointedly religious, traumatic event: the Partition holocaust of 1947, which led to the creation of both secular India and an Islamic Pakistani republic. The two-nation theory emerged as part of the emerging neo-Muslim movement in India, which itself was in response to the massive momentum of the neo-Hindu movements that were sweeping across the nation in the early twentieth century (Larson 1995). As it became increasingly clear that independence from the British was a matter of time, scepticism grew stronger that the Indian National Congress, the major national party, was capable of satisfactorily representing Muslim interests. Muhammad Iqbal, writer and one of the most vociferous advocates for a separate Muslim state, and member of the Muslim League political party, believed that "the formation of a consolidated North-West Indian Muslim state [was] the final destiny of the Muslims, at least of North-West India" (Wolpert 1991: 319-320). V.D. Savarkar of the Hindu Mahasabha party echoed this later (D.E. Smith 1963: 459, in Larson 1995: 188):

103 Larson (1995) analyses the metaphor of the British-inspired ceremony "Beating the Retreat" on 26 January [the Indian Republic Day], which in modern India, symbolises the retreat of the British Empire from the country, and the transfer of power and independence to the Indian Republic. The marching tune of the ceremony is of the old Christian hymn "Abide with me", and Larson says the moving ceremony exemplifies India's ongoing struggle and agony over presenting itself as a modern secular nation-state. While the dominant religions in India are Hinduism and Islam, and secularism may be viewed as an instrument to preserve communal harmony between these two groups, the secular nation-state nevertheless has difficulty in maintaining a purely non-sentimental stance towards religion.

104 Larson (1995) argues that the Partition impacts most of South Asian regional politics even today, and major subsequent events can be attributed to the Partition: birth of Bangladesh in 1971; the Sikh separatist movement which attempted to form the state of Punjab as an independent Sikh state in the 1980s; the demolition of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya in 1991 etc, to name a few.
India cannot be assumed today to be a unitarian and homogeneous nation, but on the contrary there are two nations in the main; the Hindus and the Muslims…there are two antagonistic nations living side by side in India.


My whole soul rebels against the idea that Hinduism and Islam represent two antagonistic cultures and doctrines. To assent to such a doctrine is for me a denial of God. For I believe with my whole soul that the God of the Koran is also the God of the Gita, and that we are all, no matter what name designated, children of the same God.

However, Jinnah remained unmoved and the Partition was generally a foregone conclusion and occurred in a “holocaust of pain, looting, rape and murder” (Wolpert 1993: 348). D.E. Smith (1991, in Larson 1995) correctly notes that secularism in India is thus a ‘good’ word as opposed to the negative connotations of ‘communalism’ that refers to the mutual hatred between the two religious groups. In the context of India’s birth, secularism is also consonant with nationalism (D.E. Smith 1991, in Larson 1995). Importantly, because of Gandhi who reinterpreted Hinduism in a universal language and because of his mass appeal to the poor, intellectuals and politicians alike, secularism in India has also acquired strong shades of neo-Hinduism (Larson 1995).

Subscribing to such views as he did, Gandhi was clearly against the notion of creating an independent India based on religious identity; he preferred instead that a universal religious philosophy underpin secularism in India (Larson 1995). Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, India’s first president, who is also regarded as Plato’s ideal philosopher-king, strongly supported Gandhi’s vision for a universal spiritualism to inform the politics of secular India. Radhakrishnan wrote (1956: 147):

It may appear somewhat strange that our government should be a secular one while our culture is rooted in spiritual values. Secularism here does not mean
irreligion or atheism or even stress on material comforts. It proclaims that it lays stress on the universality of spiritual values, which may be attained in a variety of ways... this is the meaning of a secular conception of the state though it is not generally understood.

To his own question, ‘is India a secular state’, Larson (1995: 284) unequivocally answers “yes”, but qualifies it by adding “in very much the same way modern India is 83 per cent\textsuperscript{105} Hindu.” He points out that India is a secular state, but bewilderingly, “much more than that, or perhaps better, the expression ‘secular state’ has a dense and specific meaning, a kind of ‘overplus’ of significance, in the South Asian hybrid discourse of modernity”\textsuperscript{106} (Larson 1995: 284). There are thus two narratives to be aware of: one is the current discourse on the importance of secularism and religion in modern India, but it is necessary to frame this within the larger discourse of the history of religion in India as a whole. Therefore it is critical to this study to recognise that much of modern India’s political thought is shaped by Western influences; it is equally important to remember, however, that India’s specific secular stance is a development only since 1947 (Larson 1995).

Secularism however, has brought with it a host of problems and several scholars are not convinced that it is an intelligent answer to India’s religious problems. Madan (1991: 748) believes that secularism in South Asia as a “credo of life is impossible, as a basis for state action impracticable, and as a blueprint for the foreseeable future impotent.” He asserts that secularity in India is the “dream of a minority which wants to shape the majority in its own image” and is essentially an oddity in cultures which have large numbers of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Buddhists; he claims that secularism has the best chance of survival and meaning in Protestant Christian cultures.

Madan (1991) further attacks the secular state in India for being pretentious at best, and defensive at worst. Larson (1995: 290) comments that in India, as elsewhere, secularism has come to mean that one may “believe whatever one wishes so long as it makes no

\textsuperscript{105} According to the 1991 Census.
\textsuperscript{106} When commenting on India’s ‘hybrid modernity discourse’, Larson (1995: 179) points out, “India is remarkably different from other nation-states, not simply by reason of the sheer antiquity and continuity of its civilizations but more by reason of the complex density of traditions that exist side-by-side on the subcontinent, ranging from archaic traditions to the most sophisticated developments in the late-twentieth-century high-tech arena.”
difference on the level of social reality”, and that anyone who is not secular is called ‘intolerant’ (Nandy 1985, in Larson 1995). However, Madan (1991: 758) admits his helplessness in being unable to provide an alternative solution to secularism in India: “I must conclude; but I really have no conclusions to offer, no solutions to suggest. Let me hasten to say, however, that I am not advocating the establishment of a Hindu state in India – not at all. It will simply not work.”

Other scholars, however, have suggested a ‘middle approach’ between a secular state and a Hindu state. These have included the creation of a multi-religious state, which would recognise all persuasions, including secular, atheistic and agnostic beliefs (Larson 1995). This is not a new idea; it has been often considered and then dismissed as being variously naïve, complex or unworkable (Larson 1995). Larson (1995: 295) however believes that it would work and that the idea deserves a “renewed hearing” because India has the advantage of drawing “freely from its rich, pluralistic heritage” to find a unique and appropriate answer.

Such a background is useful while commenting on the emergence of a theoretical investigation into the potential of spirituality as an animating mechanism for sustainability in Delhi, as well as while considering the reactions of spiritual and faith-based groups and representatives to issues of sustainability. There is arguably growing recognition of the potential of spirituality in assisting various forms of development in Delhi. While many of these engagements do not explicitly own Delhi or city sustainability as their central agenda, the fact that several of these important dialogues are taking place in the capital city strongly suggests the gradual awakening of the realisation in Delhi to the value of employing spiritually based methods to understanding and implementing sustainable development.

However, I argue that conceptually, the notion of such engagement and the approaches employed are problematic in Delhi for the following reasons. Firstly, I discovered with much surprise the hesitation of some of the leading spiritual organisations in the city to use spiritual language or even identify themselves explicitly as such while engaging with secular development institutions. This is most evident in the case of the Art of Living organisation, which has the self-confessed ‘spiritual master’ Sri Sri Ravi
Shankar\textsuperscript{107} as its founder, but prefers a secular identity such as “the world’s largest NGO” (Art of Living 2004), even as they almost entirely draw on central religious texts such as the Bhagavad Gita and the Bible, among others, as a means of spreading universal messages such as love and compassion. Also, they continue to respond to highly specific issues, for instance, HIV/AIDS or poverty alleviation strategies (Art of Living 2004), rather than recognising that issues may be interconnected through complex relationships.

Secondly, even within academic discourses, the tendency to frame approaches within the notion of ‘science and spirituality’ or ‘spirituality and development’ is stronger than specifically arguing for a case for \textit{sustainable development} that is spiritually based. One of the more significant efforts to acknowledge the value of spirituality, as a valuable means of enabling development in Delhi, was the ‘Colloquium on Science, Religion and Development’ held in 2002. The interfaith, interdisciplinary convention brought spiritual and scientific experts together to specifically examine how the combined talents of the diverse fields could be used to reduce poverty, and achieve social justice (Baha’i 2003). The purpose of the colloquium was essentially exploratory, to consider how spirituality may be used to enable relevant insights that may translate into pragmatic actions at the level of the grassroots. However, the conceptual focus of development was not extended to the notion of \textit{sustainable} development.

Thirdly, the focus of spiritual engagement vis-à-vis sustainability continues to be focussed centrally on the individual. While this is very useful in awakening individual consciousness to the cause of sustainability, the focus remains predominantly self-centred, rather than acquiring a more institutional form. The tendency of religion and spirituality to form themselves into parochial and domineering units is a valid criticism; however, it is a well-recognised argument that institutional values shape individual values, and that to effect change in consciousness at the individual level [which sustainability calls for], it is important to simultaneously transform values at an institutional level (Hamilton and Dennis 2005). While human beings may continue to be variously foolish, wise or indifferent, changing the values of the institutions we situate ourselves in is one of the most important steps to a sustainable future (Hamilton and

\textsuperscript{107} Sri Sri Ravi Shankar was nominated for the Nobel Peace prize in 2006 and 2007.
Dennis 2005). Translating into action at the institutional level principles such as non-violence was one of Gandhi’s most effective strategies in the freedom movement.

I argue therefore that while the methodology and even the aims of institutional religion and spirituality may have been misguided in the past, it would be unwise to discard the notion altogether, because such a method, intelligently considered on the principles of social justice, equity and ecological conservation, may precisely be the framework that enables sustainability to be vibrantly expressed. In the context of conservation in the city, Gupta (2000: 170) is optimistic that “in Delhi, attitudinal change has begun, and the third generation of independent Indians will achieve and gain more from it.” However such attitudinal change has to necessarily be extended to an awareness of sustainability, and furthermore, change in attitude also has to be accompanied by a change in behaviour if it is to facilitate change (Raj Gandhi 1983).

In order to move forward meaningfully, I felt it was important to ground my exploration of using spirituality as a critical means of enlivening sustainability in Delhi by getting primary accounts and perspectives from development workers in the city. In this thesis, I have chosen to engage with them, rather than spirituality practitioners, because I was interested to explore the kind of theoretical space that spirituality would occupy within the sustainable development arena. I was keen to essentially discover from these professionals, their sense of spirituality, their understanding of the concept of sustainable development, and how they viewed the idea of using spirituality as an animating mechanism for sustainability. Therefore, as starting point to grasping such a concept, I chose to speak with twenty women from the city of Delhi, who are all associated with sustainability planning and implementation at various levels. My reasons for choosing women as my primary informants, the methodological processes for selecting them, as well as the interviews themselves, are all provided in the ensuing chapter.
5. In A City Like Delhi

5.1. Coffee, Chai and Conversations: Setting the Agenda and Interviews

There are many ways of exploring the connections between spirituality and sustainability in a city like Delhi. In this thesis, I have chosen to focus on the connections made by women working as secular professional development workers and in this chapter, I will report on conversations I had with twenty professional women working in various development related occupations in Delhi. I chose to interview secular development workers rather than priests, theologians or other religious professionals because I was interested in the way spirituality was understood and applied in the specific contexts of development practices and discourses. I chose to interview women because of the strategic importance of a gender perspective on development issues in India, particularly during a time of rapid modernisation. India is fast becoming a ‘modern’ country, and has steadily subscribed to values such as equality between the sexes since its birth as an independent nation; however, the long traditional heritage generally prevails, and in several instances, may continue to translate itself as a patriarchy.

In focusing only on women I do not mean to negate the male perspective on these issues; indeed, I strongly believe that achieving a gender balance in sustainability planning and implementation is vital to its success. However, particular emphasis needs to be given to the perspectives of women, since women have been historically and even currently victims of gender-insensitive or gender-neutral ways of planning development (Shiva 1993). The distinctive voices of women have often been either stereotyped or viewed as add-ons even in religious studies despite being vitally relevant in these aspects.

There are both general and specific reasons to focus on women’s perspectives on spiritually enlightened sustainable development. Anand (1992: 1) defines a gender perspective:
A gender perspective is one in which women’s knowledge, experiences and perceptions are given validity and allowed to come to the fore in analysing and presenting issues...a progressive perspective insists that changes occurring in society, planned or unplanned, have to be viewed critically, with the objective of taking people forward, not backward, and that a consideration of human dignity is essential in all change.

A number of feminist scholars argue that women’s perspectives may be crucially important for a number of reasons. Harding’s definition (1989: 93) of “standpoint or feminist successor science” has the premise that “women (or feminists) are able to use political struggle and analysis to provide a less partial, less defensive, less perverse understanding of human social relations – including our relations with nature”. Similarly, Tedlock (2000: 466) argues that it is important to take into account women’s binary view or “double consciousness”, which gives women a certain advantage in understanding oppressed peoples worldwide. This would be important for attending to the complexities that have to be understood, acknowledged and reconciled for achieving sustainability.

Some studies also argue that it is vital to specifically incorporate the perspectives of ‘women’ and ‘religion’ in a successful development strategy (Eck and Jain 1986). However, there are disturbing trends in Delhi, which affect women in more immediate ways, even as they impact the community as a whole. This chapter therefore devotes itself to investigating women’s perspectives on planning and implementing spiritually informed sustainable development.

Choosing the Women

Ethnographer James Spradley (1979) suggests that five aspects guide the process of good qualitative interviews. First, he says, the informant should ideally be thoroughly enculturated. Spradley (1979: 47) writes: “Good informants know their culture so well that they no longer think about it. They do things automatically from years and years of practice.” Second, the respondent should be currently involved in the cultural scene from which information is sought.
Third, he says, the researcher’s familiarity with the cultural scene might be problematic. In fact, Spradley believes that the most productive data is sourced from an interview “between a thoroughly enculturated informant and a thoroughly unenculturated ethnographer” (1979: 50). I, interestingly, was not in that position. As a native researcher, I often sensed that my informants were getting slightly impatient with my asking them for information or viewpoints that they believed I should already know. More than this, I also found myself facing a similar challenge to that recorded by Mascarenhas-Keyes’s (2004: 432) while researching her home environment: “For a native anthropologist, the ‘exoticism’ of one’s own society is less apparent, and hence I have been beset by an unconscious need to look for ‘extraordinariness’.” For the same reason, I also often noticed a compulsion to “explore the ‘exotic’ through history in order to highlight the ‘exotic’ of the ordinary, contemporary situation” (Mascarenhas-Keyes 2004: 433).

Spradley (1979) suggests that the native ethnographer overcome these difficulties by carefully choosing informants who retain a strong element of familiarity or expertise that is superior to the researcher’s own knowledge. However, many feminist researchers have resisted Spradley’s assertion that a native interviewer is dis advantaged by his or her familiarity with the case under study (Stanley and Wise 1983). On the contrary, they argue, native researchers have an enormous advantage over foreign interviewers because they are more readily able to interpret meaning in qualitative research. The disinterested researcher who maintains a distance from the subject of study is unable to make those analyses (Stanley and Wise 1983).

Spradley’s fourth injunction is that it is vital to ensure that the informant has sufficient time to respond to the questions. Lastly, he has a word of caution on using informants who are experts or academics, and are prone to analysing as they speak. While he agrees that they may make “excellent informants”, their exhaustive analyses of their own culture as an ‘outsider’ might be disorienting to the ethnographer (Spradley 1979: 52). In such situations, he advises that the researcher be alert to subtle patterns of power in the use of language.

This thesis, however, quite specifically seeks the viewpoints of the native expert. In attempting to explore the incorporation of spirituality within the understanding and
practice of sustainability in Delhi, the thesis requires the opinions and knowledge of informants who are in the field, who have a developed and insightful understanding of the issues, challenges and possibilities on the ground, and who are thus able to serve as a key starting point for this research. This thesis seeks their analyses of [our] shared and familiar social and cultural scene. They serve a rich purpose in my thesis, because they are my starting point, my sounding board, and their speculations significantly shape the narrative of this research. The sample size of the interviews was small and targeted, and the responses from the conversations captured insightful detail on the potential for grounding sustainable development in spirituality in Delhi, that was not captured by the broad range of development and sustainability literature on the city.

The sample of women was chosen in the following way: I first approached some of the city’s well-known women developmentalists like Dr. Madhu Purnima Kishwar, Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath, Geeta Dharmarajan and Prof. Susan Vishwanathan. This list is naturally not a comprehensive list of Delhi’s female intellectuals; several women whom I wished to interview were either away from the city at the time of my data collection, or were unable to give me an appointment due to prior commitments.

Nonetheless, this small group of initial contacts allowed me to implement a snowball technique, as they put me on to other people whom they thought might be of interest to my research. These women included NGO workers, development researchers and civil servants. I also saw that inputs from women in city politics would be useful, so I approached the offices of both the Congress and the BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party or the Indian People’s Party], and had an interview with a senior woman official from each party. They were emphatic, however, that their views did not necessarily represent the views of their respective parties, that this was not a political interview and that they were responding to my questions merely as ‘women in the development process’. Some of the other women are also peripherally or more centrally involved in politics, though not through any party affiliation.

The method by which this thesis sourced its primary data was through the use of semi-structured interviews with the twenty women. Semi-structured interviews ensure that an interview schedule is followed [so that the responses to the key preoccupations of the thesis are covered]; however, the questions are broad-based enough and the
conversations relaxed enough, that they allow the interviewees to “identify for themselves the topics and issues of importance” (Atkinson and El Haj 1996: 438). These women spoke entirely out of their own unique background, even though the questions addressed to them were broadly the same and the women were allowed to recount their experiences, understandings and expectations from the ‘starting point’ that they perceived was immediately important to them. During the course of the interviews, I often found myself asking them specific questions or for further elaborations on the themes that they chose to bring up during the interviews, which they thought were pertinent to a broad understanding of sustainability and spirituality in Delhi.

I had an interview questionnaire (see Appendix 1) and approval from Murdoch University’s Human Research Ethics Committee to carry out the interviews. The interviews were designed to take approximately 45 minutes to complete though often the women would often talk for longer than the anticipated time. The bulk of these interviews were taken during a field trip to Delhi between December 2004 and February 2005. The women were provided with an information sheet that described the purpose of the interview, and were aware that their input would be used for a PhD thesis, and were also likely to be used in case of publication of the thesis or any papers that may be produced thereof (refer to Appendix 2).

The women were also requested to sign a consent form prior to the interview. The consent form provided to them (see Appendix 3), states that their names may not be used. However, during the writing of the thesis, it became quite clear that assigning the women pseudonyms or numbers or any generic identification would not serve to obscure their identity since several of these women and their work, are well known and regarded. Hence, I subsequently again contacted the women whose perspectives I have used in the thesis, and obtained permission to use their names. Most of the women gave me permission, and were in fact, particular that they be credited for their ideas. However, with some others, I have identified them as ‘Development worker 1’ etc. This is because I was unable to contact them, either via email or phone. Of the women that I was able to successfully contact, no one denied me permission to use their names. All of these interviews were recorded with the women’s consent. I transcribed all of the interviews between March and June 2005, upon my return to Perth, and the remainder
of this chapter, which contain the primary empirical research, sources all of its data from these interviews.

**Incorporating Interviews**

The interviews allowed me the opportunity to observe the women. Raj Gandhi (1983: 5) notes that it is important to acknowledge the problem of “change in behaviour” versus “change in attitude” of urban Indians when considering or observing any aspect of social change in the city. This is because, he says, when the two changes are simultaneous, change can be said to be firmly established. He also maintains that it is important to identify the root of change, and comment on the nature of change. My interviews with the women provided me with a sense of their “change in attitude”. All the interviews were taken at the respondent’s preferred locale, which was generally in their home, or in their workplace. The opportunity to observe the subject in their daily lives allowed me to reflect if there was a corresponding “change in behaviour” as well. I was thus able to observe the social phenomena with which they engaged, because the various properties or characteristics of lifestyles in Delhi of these women cannot be understood separately from each other.

In this context and returning briefly to Spradley’s instructions to an ethnographer, it must be noted that while I was certainly a citizen of the larger community of the city of Delhi, I did not necessarily have an insider’s status within all the communities that the various women that I interviewed belonged to or lived within. In other cases, however, I certainly had insider’s status by default; I might have belonged to the same community, or had or developed numerous and ongoing engagements of a personal nature with it. This contrast between and mix between the two further helped me to comprehend better the sense and nature of the lifestyles of the women and the larger complexity of the city.

Throughout the interviews, all these women continued to engage with the city non-stop, in an unconscious way, even as they ruminated, meditated, pondered and challenged my questions. A mother kneaded dough for *chapattis* for her children’s lunch, even as she kept an alert eye on the clock for the school bus to come back. I sat with a senior bureaucrat in her well-appointed government office, sipping tea in her visitor’s room overlooking the grand South Block, as she simultaneously answered my questions, gave
orders to her secretary and signed a dozen files. I spent peaceful mornings at the quiet
chapel of the Carmel Convent with enormously warm-hearted nuns, greedily soaking in
the undiluted peace and wishing never to leave. I had interviews in noisy autos,
shouting over the traffic. Some of my best conversations were on the footpaths of
Connaught Place, balancing bags of shopping and a cassette-recorder.

The rich diversity of the settings only serves to reflect and reinforce the vast complexity
of both the backgrounds of the women, as well as of the issues that they considered
vital. The various locales and backdrops of these interviews [in some instances captured
by the photos in this thesis] also showed the city's dynamic and versatile character.
They told Delhi's story as much as the women did, and formed a vibrant mosaic against
which I listened to the women's viewpoints.

While the women interviewed are broadly within the area of development, they are still
from different cultures and backgrounds, have different social and spiritual values, may
disagree with one another and miss each other's points entirely. Eck and Jain (1986: 12)
point out that it is important to identify the "faultlines" when attempting an
understanding of the cracks in issues of religions and ethics. However, they also observe
that persistence in open, honest and respectful dialogue almost always overcomes the
enormous challenge of building communities based on trust and goodwill.

Analysis

The data collected from the interviews was interpreted using the domain analysis
 technique as explained by ethnographer James P. Spradley. As opposed to a purely
ethnographic analysis, which allows the informants to determine the major categories of
analysis, the domain method makes the researcher responsible for identifying the
primary domains or sections, which occur repeatedly in the conversations (Spradley
1979). There is, therefore, a certain degree of influence of the interviewer's subjectivity
domain analysis, they write: "The challenge here for the researcher is to ensure that the
domains that are defined, do reflect the concerns of the interviewees as indicated in their
narratives, rather than merely reflecting the researcher's own pre-defined set of
categories."
However, they suggest a few strategies to lessen the impact of the researcher, and to ensure that the vital categories or domains are identified. They say that it is essential to determine the practical matters that concern the interviewees, so that "concrete" domains may be established (Atkinson and El Haj 1996: 439). This was done after I had familiarised myself with the data by going through the transcripts many times. I then created a basic list of the themes that arose from the interviews. Some of the major domains also included the areas that I was specifically seeking viewpoints on, namely, spirituality and sustainability. The ones that recurred more frequently were identified as dominant themes, and the others as sub-categories of these major sections. In listing the sub-themes within the larger thematic group, Atkinson and El Haj (1996) recommend using actual phrases that the interviewees use; thus, these sub-categories rise from the respondents' own perspectives and more credibly represent the concerns that are most important to the informant (Atkinson and El Haj 1996). This stage essentially involved tabulating and collating many of the phrases and in most cases, entire narratives into the sub-categories of the main domains.

The next major function of the analysis process was to summarise the findings of the second stage. I very rarely paraphrased the words of my respondents, preferring instead to use entire passages from their own narratives, thus preserving the tone and nostalgia of a storytelling narration. I then tried to establish a "semantic relationship" between the major themes and the sub-categories so as to knit the themes together into a coherent whole (Spradley 1979: 108). Atkinson and El Haj (1996) note that in this stage, it is important to specifically look for those sentences that make a credible connection between the sub-categories.

The primary problem that arose during analysis was that, as Spradley (1979) predicted, there were a few respondents who had the gift of expressiveness, insightfulness, and a personal interest and often, greater knowledge about the themes explored. Such informants quickly became key respondents; however the amount of importance that was placed on their views was problematic. As Atkinson and El Haj (1996) suggest, I have used their views as both key information, as well as amalgamated them with the greater body of primary data. They suggest that if the views of the 'key respondent' are not endorsed sufficiently by the other informants, then the attention given to their views
be restrained in the final analysis. It may also be considered all of my respondents should be positioned as key respondents, since the sample size is very small, and their views were specifically sought to inform an otherwise text-based study. However, it remains the case that several women’s voices dominate the analysis by virtue of their capacity to put into words what others struggled to express. I have, nevertheless been careful to highlight different views to each other and to my own, when they arose.

The structure of this chapter loosely follows the pattern of the interviews themselves, to enable the best sense of the thought processes that the women put themselves through as they considered my questions. Most of the women had not made the explicit conceptual link between sustainable development and spirituality, and as such, the initial stages of the interviews convey strongly the sense-making processes used as they tried to make connections. Some women slipped into using spirituality as a concept more easily than the others; overall however, there was a clear sense of struggle in articulating what spirituality meant to them. The sense of effort to speak of spirituality in a discursive manner is perhaps a strong reflection of the dominant secular discourse and language that they generally find themselves in, as development workers.

The women were more familiar with the theory of sustainable development, although some of them asked for an explanation, and I relied on the Brundtland definition to provide this. Unsurprisingly, some of their immediate concerns were focussed on the social aspects of sustainability such as poverty alleviation, illiteracy etc. However, as will be evident, all their concerns were intimately intertwined with care for the environment, and apprehension about the consequences of untrammelled economic growth on both the environment and society.

As the interviews proceeded and specifically began to discuss issues pertinent to Delhi city, a more definitive tone emerges. Very interestingly, as the conversations settle more comfortably around the conceptual interface between sustainability and spirituality, the confidence in affirming such a connection is clear. The initial hesitation in embracing such a link immediately confirms Larson’s (1995) observations in the previous chapter that even in a largely Hindu and traditional India, the predominance of the secular language has significantly challenged and replaced a spiritual narrative.
For this reason, in the next section, I begin this analysis exploring the women’s views on spirituality. Section three of this chapter then discusses their notion of sustainable development, and leads into section four, which will bring the two themes together and consider how the two narratives engage in a city like Delhi. The fifth section will present two examples where two of the women have used spiritual language and resources to assist them in their development work. It may be noted that they considered such a methodology to be a natural process, and did not view it as a strategic approach to implement sustainable development. The sixth and last section offers some of the key insights of this chapter.

5.2. Speaking Spirituality in a City Like Delhi

My first objective during the interviews was to get a sense of what the women understood by ‘spirituality’. I chose to first request their views on spirituality rather than sustainability because given the highly flexible nature of the notion of ‘spirituality’, it seemed to me that contextualising spirituality [with any earlier discussion of sustainability] might accordingly shape responses. The women were already aware of the context of the interviews; however, talking at length about spirituality first made the discussions more discursive.

I found that many of the women describe spirituality as a humble, integrated worldview that internalises one’s essential nature and conscience, and allows introspection on one’s thought and actions. Spirituality is described as a force that may restore harmony, coherence and congeniality in an order and future that seems otherwise chaotic and inharmonious.

Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath, recipient of the Padma Shri award [one of India’s highest civilian honours] in 2006 for advancing culture and education at the tertiary level, and Principal of the prestigious Lady Shri Ram College for Women, University of Delhi, says:

Spirituality to me means several things at different levels. At one level it means, the ability to conduct with and relate to other people, nature and the environment at a deep level. It also means the ability to move outside the concept of experience,
and move into a zone of relative harmony, altruism, and empathy. It also means an ability to enrich my inner self, replenish it in a manner that everything has to be in consonance with something that is aesthetic, that is honest and that is empathetic. But it also means harnessing all of one’s creativity to the best of one’s ability, in a manner that seeks a certain kind of balance and harmony.

Like Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath, Geeta Dharmarajan, who heads the internationally reputed Katha NGO that is concerned with ensuring that children living in slums below the age of fourteen are able to access their constitutional right of free primary education, also views spirituality as a creative potential, particularly in being steadfast about fulfilling one’s duties, and being true to one’s chosen work. Spirituality is seen as an animating moral force that enables one to translate wisdom into practice, but she also connects spirituality to an explicitly religious context:

I think it is what we call atma-vishwas [soul conviction]. My husband is religious, is good about his morning poojas [prayers], and so is my old mother. So I would definitely say that there is a religious aura in our house, but we are also a family of high-achieving intellectuals. And at Katha, our staff would always start any project with a prayer. I think I would define spirituality as something that allows us to perform our responsibility sincerely.

Sister Nirmalini is a senior member of the Carmel Convent chapel and school, which heads development programmes related to literacy and adult education, AIDS relief, healthcare clinics and manages an orphanage through UNDP funding. Sister Nirmalini distinguishes spirituality as ‘feeling’ that comes from being dedicated to religious wisdom:

Spirituality to me is what one feels from religion, what reaches them and what instills itself in them. It is also making sense of what values you derive from society, and how you reconcile your own behaviour with that. How you respond to the value and behaviour of others. India is a very spiritual land and Indians are essentially a spiritual people. Spirituality comes easy to us but one must admit that there is a degradation of all values. One has to constantly evaluate one’s own beliefs these days, because these are culturally changing times, and values have
become a very fluid concept these days. Anything goes, but one has to wonder: at what expense?

Interestingly, Latika Dikshit, senior social worker of the Congress Party, and personal advisor to Mrs. Sheila Dikshit, Chief Minister of Delhi, is a self-confessed agnostic and her reply illustrates most clearly the conceptual struggle between a religious sense of the spiritual, and the secular sense of the spiritual. As a way of resolving the perceived contradictions, she views nature as her spiritual solace. Curiously, she also perceives age, or implies the maturity presumably gained in the process of ageing, to be a qualifying factor for ‘being’ spiritual. She says:

In a way, you’re asking the wrong person because I’m an agnostic. But I certainly respect all religions and faith, and especially in a country like ours, where there is so much hardship, faith, religion, spirituality, whatever, it is a very strong anchor. I think it plays a very important role. But personally, for me, it means nature. I treat nature as my greatest force, and that’s the force I respect. Maybe 10-20 years down the line, I may think of spirituality.

For Dr. Promilla Bhutani, retired community paediatrician and healthcare worker in six villages in South Delhi, the notion of spirituality seems directly sourced from the core message of the Bhagvad Gita, which essentially urges human beings to perform their duty with no expectations of the fruits of their labour. For her, bringing complete dedication and integrity to work makes a truly spiritual human being. She says:

Spirituality to me means commitment. It means tremendous hard work. I was just reading out the newspaper to my 86-year-old mother, and I was telling her about Sania Mirza’s achievements. The fact that she achieved so much at the age of 18 must mean she must have worked at least 12 hours a day, single-mindedly. That devotion is spirituality. Be honest to yourself and be honest to your work and family...there is nothing other than that.

\[^{108}\text{Twenty-one year old Sania Mirza is the first Indian female tennis player to be ranked in a Grand Slam tournament, and is also the highest ranked Indian player. Mirza was eighteen at the time of this interview.}\]
Spirituality is seen less in ritualistic and traditionally religious terms, and more as a medium of making core human connections. Sudha Raina, who is a senior member of the regional women’s welfare wing of the UNDP, says:

Spirituality as I see it is how I correlate with the suffering and feelings of others, and how you react to that. Spirituality is very self-oriented, and you see your maker in every human being and every animal and every part of nature that’s around you. It’s not just going to a temple, it’s not just praying, and it’s not about being comfortable with just that aspect of it.

Interestingly, Sushma Mehrotra, who heads an NGO on HIV/AIDS awareness and assistance in the city, also veers away from any religious explication of spirituality, even as she rhetorically refers to God. Even in a city like Delhi where nature is constantly visibly removed to make room for all forms of human encroachment, she too still yearns for a connection with nature and a sense of inner peace. She says:

When you think of spirituality, you think of peace. Peace and probably humanity, tranquillity, human values like genuineness, being close to nature, being close to God. Delhi is very far from all that.

Such values were also identified by Dr. Nirupama Bhatnagar, scientist researching malaria eradication, in terms of “good” and “human” values in her sense of spirituality. Such values were those that have survived the test of time, and will remain ever meaningful to human beings and she feels no hesitation in referring to the notion of God as the ultimate source of such values. She says:

I think these are good values. Even as we believe that God is the ultimate authority – we take permission to do something – which has been the right way of living for us from the ancient times. The good feeling that you get from respecting traditions and showing respect to other human beings is a spiritual feeling. It is a human value. The individual is the smallest unit of a community, and spirituality has to be present in the smallest unit also. We should not harm or have bad feelings to anything or anyone in the community – these are small-small things but are
important to a community. I think it is the individuals who have to be good and spiritual to make sustainable communities.

However, “good values” as an enlivening force equally have the potential to erode one’s spirit and sense of vitality if misappropriated to serve narrow ends. Latika Dikshit briefly ponders the meaningfulness of spirituality as a way of promoting good, decent and wholesome values, but she immediately dismisses it because of its abusive potential. There is justifiable apprehension that the powerful classes and castes may use spirituality as a means to preserve hierarchical, exploitative social orders, and may perpetuate further oppression of both the ‘lower’ social classes, as well as women. Latika Dikshit emphatically argues that if values are to be promoted through spiritual means, then it is vital to be clear on how and whom those values shall serve:

Yeah, okay, to me, values are a highly, highly abused term, especially in India, you know? And it is especially abused in women’s contexts. I think religion and values are used to dominate women. Tradition doesn’t allow you to be like this, etc. and if you’re a workingwoman with a child, she hears, “you’re not taking care of your child properly, you’re not giving it enough time”. That’s why I get extremely upset – what are values, what are traditions, what are customs if they don’t change with time, and they are not there to help people who desire to grow. They promote biases between human beings. If they discriminate, then for me, they are not values. If it does not promote harmony, equality, equanimity, they are not values. It particularly offends me in our country – this whole thing about sanskar, sanskriti [culture and tradition]. It is only used to keep the other person down. The values that didn’t allow for hundreds of years, people to come into another’s house, eat and drink from the same utensil, cannot drink from the same well – we do not want our children to inherit these values, and I do not want to be a part of this system.

This overview of the women’s perspectives on spirituality offers a few rich insights. Firstly, it is evident that as Larson (1995) observed in Chapter 4, the post-independence religious narrative in India is strongly influenced by the language and ideas of secularism. Secondly and importantly, these women are clearly relaxed and comfortable about fluid and flexible notions of spirituality that is very accommodative of a range of
interpretations, based on clearly religious, secular or agnostic viewpoints. Overall however, there is also a sense of respect for the value of the spiritual in human lives, and in particular, of its continued prominence in India.

5.3. Speaking Sustainability in a City Like Delhi

My next important focus for discussion was to investigate how the women understood sustainable development, to explore the extent to which their concept aligns with the more general construct. Many of the women instinctively interpreted sustainable development in a social framework; however, while they do not necessarily phrase their notion of sustainability in the terms of the Brundtland report's definition, it is clear from the discourse that the women exhibit an understanding that encompasses concern for the society, the environment and the economy.

Intergenerational and intragenerational equity is seen as one of the central themes of sustainable development. Concern that the future generations, as well as the weakest of the present generations should not inherit degraded environments, or bear the cross of helplessness and subordination is evident in my interviewees’ responses. There is a keen awareness of the connection between the degrading effects of poverty and thus dependence on both human wellbeing and the natural environment.

Sushma Aggarwal, director of the Arpana Trust NGO that seeks to rehabilitate slum refugees who arrive from the regional hinterland, explains sustainable development thus:

You can call development sustainable when the element of dependence is removed and it doesn’t come back again several generations hence. Dependence causes exploitation. Our history has seen to it that we are well and truly in the throes of exploitation, it has been endemic in our past, either we were exploited or we were exploiting our own weaker people. So if we want development, sustainable development, that exploitation has to be removed. If each citizen is self-dependent, then we can call ourselves a developed nation. It will be always a case of one-step-forward-several-back as long as there is dependence of this extent. Sustainable development to me is development such that there is no dependence;
everyone has the access to what they need – food, water, education – to be self-reliant.

Similarly, Susan Vishwanath of Jawaharlal Nehru University, professor of sociology, also places equity as central to sustainable development: she considers it integral to human dignity, which in turn is vital to sustainable and equitable lifestyles:

Development can be sustained when there is accord and like-mindedness. How else can you unitedly sustain anything? Right now, we don’t have that and we don’t have that because we are not all equal, simply putting it. The affluent have choices, the poor have to adjust their lifestyles according the choices that we make. You know how much we keep using the word human dignity – see any government document or any international treaty. There should be no compromise on something as basic as human dignity. Once we all have that with no fear or patronisation, then we can talk about sustaining something that is worth preserving. For this you need quality education to be available to all, for women to be completely at the forefront with the men, and no struggle for food and housing.

Taking this notion of intergenerational equity to a level of personal responsibility, Latika Dikshit argues that the privileged classes particularly have an obligation to “give back”, and a special responsibility to work to ensure that even the less fortunate fellow human beings, and not just the future generations, are able to benefit from the resources that are available to the middle and upper classes, both as a result of government subsidies and their education.

These accounts of sustainable development are very human-centred, and in the context of India’s development needs, this is hardly surprising. However, my informants did appreciate that these aims required environmental responsibility. Sucharita Sen, research associate with TERI [Tata Environmental Research Institute] and a doctoral candidate in political science at Delhi University, directly connected intergenerational equity with a concern that the available natural resources be used judiciously to ensure that they are available over time:
Planned utilisation of available natural resources that is efficient in the sense of not being wasteful, from which one can extract the most, and used in a way to make it last over a long period of time, long here meaning intergenerational time. You do see to it that you leave well alone those resources that cannot be renewed. There are alternative options for limited resources. I mean, what does it take to use solar power in a tropical sun blessed India? We are all getting excited over renewable energy – I mean, with India rising and all that, we have so much money, why can’t we substantially invest in solar power? This is sustainability too, that we cut back on using coal etc. Clean up our rivers. Poverty. And equality across the regions. And within regions. Even in Delhi there is extremes. When it is equal, Delhi will be sustainable.

Sustainability is also considered from its ability to withstand the constant change in political, social and environmental dynamics that is inevitable as a result of forces such as globalisation and the pervasive influence of information technology. Interwoven with the concern that globalisation might bring about substantive change is the anxiety that sustainable development should ensure access to resources [vital for a healthy lifestyle] such as healthcare and education. Finally, sustainability is also framed in terms of collective and individual self-esteem. Latika Dikshit says:

Sustainability has to be dynamic, and sustain and cope with the change that is constantly going on. I would call a society or a certain group of people sustainable if they are able to take advantage of their opportunities. They should be able to enjoy all the rights and their religion. For me, this freedom is sustainable development or sustainability. It’s not all in money terms – it does have economic connotations but it means a lot in terms of ability, confidence, opportunities – not necessarily job opportunities, but how to get good health care, education facilities.

The women’s view of sustainability is thus generally about sustaining development into the future for the benefit of human dignity. It is less explicitly about balance and constraint, about living within ‘limits’, although implicitly such a sense of balance is embryonic in several of their references.
As observed earlier, several of the women tend to lean instinctively towards the social concerns of sustainable development and dwell extensively on the notion of social responsibility. The women view sustainable development in terms of an obligation to civil society by responding to its concerns by going beyond the call of duty or law. They understand their social sustainability roles to mean proactively addressing any issue that might bring about distress or harm to society.

When asked about how she understood her particular role in contributing to sustainable development, Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath speaks from a socially oriented viewpoint. She speaks of the need for a democratic existence, emphasising again the concerns of the other respondents for equality of class, gender and culture, and of the value of a harmonious social coexistence. She says:

My understanding of social responsibility is to be able to use my privileges as a resource to society, to be able to give back, to share that at a level of my personal life, my life as a citizen, my role as a woman. I am able to reach out to those who have fewer privileges than me, and at the same time, receive the goodwill of people who have been able to experience and value my respect. I don’t turn away from the problem, I take decisions on issues and I am willing to let my walk talk. In a country like ours, where there is so much diversity, it really means that there is a celebration of democracy; tolerating opinions that we don’t really understand, attempt to understand people who come from very different kinds of backgrounds. It means making my voice count; trying to impact positively the environment around us, perhaps intervene to help other individuals who might help me benefit from my vast heritage.

Geeta Dharmarajan also views her role in participating in the sustainability process in communal terms; however, she argues for the need to redefine traditional Hindu religious prescriptions for responsible [and what may be understood as sustainable] social behaviour. As of now, even spiritual codes smell of corruption. She says:
Though we don’t term it as such, all these concepts have been embedded in our culture, *anna-danam*\(^{109}\), feeding the poor, donating books as religious penance etc. unfortunately we have got stuck in that mindset. We continue to think that that is all social responsibility means. That was for that time, but we have no religious leaders who are devoid of the taint of corruption and suspicion that we can really rely on. All we have is Chandraswami\(^{110}\) and his ilk. We Indians, especially those who have become or are becoming upwardly mobile, we have forgotten that such a thing even exists. We have no notion of it.

Latika Dikshit feels strongly about the hypocrisy and pretensions that surround the notion of social responsibility. As long as purpose and resolve are absent, she believes that the concept would be a mockery. She says:

> I work in that sector and hear that word all the time now — corporate social responsibility, people’s social responsibility. See, if it doesn’t come from inside, then you don’t feel it, and then I just say, stay out. You have to feel this from within; it’s not challenging otherwise and you won’t do a good job. Its not money that we are lacking, it’s the will.

From the perspectives of women on both spirituality and sustainability, there is a sense that there is an overlap of several important themes, which are congenial to contemplating a conceptual interface between the two notions. For instance, views on social responsibility, communal harmony, respect and tolerance, and a strong concern for the natural environment arose frequently in discussions on both spirituality and sustainability. In the next section then, I will provide an account of the women’s responses to an explicit exploration of their views on the potential of spirituality in animating sustainable development in Delhi.

\(^{109}\) Feeding grains to the poor.

\(^{110}\) Chandraswami, a prominent holy man, was identified as a chief suspect in the Bofors arms controversy in the late 1980s and 90s. Later, Chandraswami was also found guilty of currency fraud.
5.4. Bringing spirituality and sustainability together in a city like Delhi

It was apparent from the interviews that few of the women had previously thought about the relevance of spirituality to promoting development in India; however, they were very enthusiastic about embracing the idea in a positive way. Moreover, as they tried to conceptualise the idea of grounding sustainable development in spirituality, they seemed to realise themselves that subconsciously, they had not made a distinction between the two notions either in theory or in practice. Sudha Raina explains this:

Of course they are all linked, everything in this universe is interlinked, we cannot separate ourselves from just about anything, our welfare depends on the welfare of everything else, this sense of separation is maya [illusion]. I had not really thought of development in terms of spirituality specifically before, for us it’s just been a way of doing things always [emphasis mine].

Dr. Madhu Kishwar, senior fellow at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, and editor of Manushi [a leading women’s journal] also puts forward that the synthesis of spirituality and development was, in fact, quite fundamental to Indian spiritual prescriptions for what may be understood as sustainable living. She says:

These two concepts never, ever existed separately. They were always one and the same. This whole separation is a Western development, which of course it wouldn’t occur to the rest of the world to question. The West is more prone to dualism. This was always one and the same for us [emphasis mine]. Mahatma Gandhi lived it to show us that. All his millions of followers lived that. Freedom through ahimsa [non-violence] would not have occurred if there was a difference between spirituality and development. I don’t see any difference. It is in our behaviour, in our conduct. We can’t achieve either if we see a dichotomy.

For Sudha Raina, this sense of non-duality between a spiritual sense of duty and sustainability seems particularly implicit in terms of fulfilling social responsibilities, and she observes:
They [spirituality and social sustainability] complement and supplement each other. When you talk of God – Mahatma Gandhi said, “Cleanliness is godliness”. So everything is linked. You cannot be socially responsible if you were not spiritual, and to be spiritual, you have to be above yourself as an individual, you have to go to a greater magnitude. If you remain an individual, you would neither be spiritual, nor be socially responsible.

However, the women admit that formally proposing such an idea in politically secular India would be a challenge. Furthermore, the corporatisation of society and the concurrent rise in consumption, as well as the increased stresses of high-pressured lifestyles, seem to have left people with little time, inclination or energy to engage with issues of the spirit. Sudha Raina says:

When you try to put forward your views, people think you are mad, because today in the cities, people have very little time to actually think about these things. They are so busy with their own lifestyles, that it leaves them with very little time and interest for anybody else. Maybe that’s not all either. We have also shut ourselves out – the kind of stresses that you’re under, you are coping with a society that is very materialistic and has contempt for any lack of success on your part – is intolerant. Society is not in tune with yourself as a human being as such. You are under so much external stress and pressure to be a part of this rat race, that you are losing a part of yourself in it everyday. You’re losing your core values, you are losing your basic human instinct, and you are rushing after a mirage which may come about or which may not. I think at the ultimate end of it, we are left with nothing.

Sudha Raina adds:

The trouble is that we don’t exactly know what the trouble is. We are all stressed but we don’t know exactly why that is so. There is a veneer of okay-ness on the surface but its all bubbling beneath; there is a constant tension. So when you come in and say you want to study spirituality and Delhi, it feels aha, maybe that is it. It seems to strike a chord. It feels possible. There may be something in this.
Here, some women put forward that women may be able to take on leadership roles in the sustainable development process better through a partnership with leaders working within the spiritual realm. Development worker 1, who volunteers seven days a week at a Sikh hermitage and coordinates their programmes on providing daily mid-day meals for the urban poor, feels strongly that the loss of Delhi’s natural beauty will have severe consequences for some of the more oppressed groups in the city:

I think both women and spirituality can take a powerful stand in mobilising community groups and the government, to prevent further degrading of Delhi’s greenery. I think so because both women as well as the cause of spirituality have no interest in humiliating anyone, both can help to break the experience of humiliation that society perpetuates, on itself, on each other, and on the environment. If you are spiritual, you will not want to humiliate anyone in any way. You won’t molest women, you won’t harass and terrorise old people, you won’t dirty the Yamuna, you won’t cut down trees, because in all these acts, there is arrogance. Arrogance makes people humiliate each other. If we are spiritual, we will immediately recognize the need to humiliate in each one of these acts. I think women will instinctively understand this because I think they are less inclined to inflict humiliation.

In attempting to frame sustainable development in Delhi in the context of spirituality, issues of promoting equity and trust in communities were prominent. The city’s environment needed to facilitate, rather than retard, creative processes that would allow innovative strategies to fill key gaps in the sustainable development of Delhi. An affirming sense of equality, mutual trust and respect in communities is required to remove the element of control and domination that may otherwise mark possible partnerships between the grassroots and the higher classes. Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath proposes that the notion of ‘habitat’ may be an important way of facilitating a shift in consciousness in the sustainability mindset of the citizens, by viewing the city of Delhi as the habitat of Delhi. In her view, this enables more sustainable interactions than the impersonal, hierarchical human relations that ‘the city’ may stand for:

I think we should stop looking at a city as a city, and rather as a habitat. It changes the realisation to inter-connectedness. It makes us realise that for anything to be
sustainable, the link of interconnectedness has to be respected. You cannot have
power and dominance in your relationships. You have to bring in spiritual power
to bear out interaction. See, whether you are in an office, or a bureaucratic set-up,
you have to ensure that the power of the bureaucracy does not undermine or get
suffocating, rather it is there as an enabling environment. If a city really has to
reach its potential, it has to be an enabling environment for its citizens. It has to
provide sustenance, it has to provide community. Now what is happening by and
large in urban environments is the breakdown of the sense of community, the
alienation, the isolation.

The undermining of mutual trust is a huge loss for sustainability, for trust vitally
contributes to cooperation, sense of safety and belonging, and as such is a significant
contributor of social capital. Sushma Mehrrotra points to this lack of this social capital in
Delhi as an unfortunate historical heritage and explains:

There is a lack of trust in Delhi. Its because of a collective unconscious – Delhi
has been invaded so many times in the last hundreds of years. People had to be
aggressive to protect what was theirs. This aggression has been passed on from
generation to generation. I think there is too much aggression in the city. It lives
on in the subconscious of the people. If you go south, you will notice that people
are much more gentle there. Here, people are used to fighting to preserve
themselves, self-preservation at any cost was the goal.

Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath concurs and believes that a steady, secure and a considerate
environment that utilises the diverse creative energies available to it to seek alternatives
may cushion the effect of historical upheavals, many of them very recent. She says:

Stability at the level of a caring environment, an ethical environment for the
elderly, providing spaces and a supportive environment for the differently abled,
and a sense of concern, my stretching my arm [to help], [pushing] my limits. It
means a concern for all other human beings, above all a respect for the
environment. I think a city has several advantages – has energy of creativity, the
energy of a lot of different people living together, energy of professional
accomplishment. Their energies can somehow be harnessed into expression, and
be supportive, to create community, and then I think the city need not be so threatening, alienating.

These energies and processes are useful in establishing key networks and avenues for social interaction. Sushma Mehrotra is clear that a safe environment in an often violent and volatile Delhi would increase the resilience of existing social bonds; she points out that a trustworthy city is essentially a sustainable city:

Delhi should be made safer, that’s how trust can be built up again. This will lead also to a better level of professionalism. This is because people will become more god-fearing. People will become more religious, be more tolerant of different behaviours, have fewer expectations.

Latika Dikshit believes that Delhi’s report card on embracing cultural diversity and tolerance speaks well on the whole. She admits there is palpable gender-based violence in Delhi but feels that on the whole, the city is culturally and communally large-hearted. She says:

I would see this spirituality as connected to humanity, connectedness, to community. Delhi’s community mostly makes me very proud, except for those ’84 riots\(^{111}\). It’s highly cosmopolitan. It’s a very inclusive city — you have the Punjabis and the Marwaris and the UPites and the Keralites and Assamese…everybody is here. And this really adds to the character of the city. There is a sense of security. I know there is no security for women on the road. But you know, you won’t get the feeling that I’m from outside, I may be discriminated against. The other thing I really like — we never had anything like ‘Mumbai for Mumbaikars’, the way they did in Mumbai some years ago. We have never had anything like that in Delhi, and nor do I think we should. And we have a very large expatriate population who feel very much at home. So it’s a truly, truly cosmopolitan city and that makes me feel very nice. And that’s spiritual too. That’s the best thing about Delhi — everything and everybody comes here and makes it their home. And I would call that a very spiritual thing.

\(^{111}\) Reference to the carnage against the Sikh population in Delhi in 1984, after the erstwhile Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards in her residence.
Sister Nirmalini points out, however, that the most significant aspect of trust is that it requires one to go beyond believing; it requires belief and faith even in the face of uncertainty. She says that trust allows individuals to invest in the concept of the greater common good, and freely identify with a more universal identity. In her view, this is also possible, perhaps, because ultimately every individual is concerned with seeking meaning and purpose of life in some way, and she explains:

I basically believe that people are essentially very sensitive and well meaning. At times of tragedy, we just rally around like a family. But there is a lot of goodness among people, hope is never lost because ultimately every individual seeks his answer in some sort of spirituality, in some meanings, and that introspection will be a sustainable reward. Like with the tsunami – people generously came forward, never questioned the need to help the diverse range of people, allowed no prejudice to come in the way, and every institution in Delhi, regardless of whether it was a minority institution or not, conducted an inter-religious prayer service, invited members of the Sri Lankan High Commission, parents of the Sri Lankan kids in school, and we prayed for the welfare of all those affected, not just from our country.

Latika Dikshit cautions however, that cultural harmony as it were, should not serve to obscure the distinctiveness of smaller groups, and says:

And I don’t like the cliché that everybody is assimilating to the mainstream etc. what is the mainstream?! Every stream is main; you are mixing all the streams. I retain who I am but I also become part of the larger picture with my and everybody else’s place in it! This is also part of our identity. That’s important for me, and learning to enjoy diversity – that’s spirituality too.

Ultimately, respectful and meaningful interactions with both human beings and the natural systems seem to form the core of a spiritual lifestyle for many of these women. Sister Nirmalini says:
Generally, people are live up to a broad aspect of spirituality, and generally their tendency/instinct is to go beyond themselves and think larger, I think. What is spirituality – it is your day-to-day interaction with the environment and people around you. At the end of the day, these interactions can leave us with a clear conscience or not. It’s about honouring and respecting all that you do or say. Can you look at yourself clearly and respect yourself?

The accounts of the women’s voices above show their perspectives on the broad exploration of the interface of spirituality with sustainability. Interestingly, it was also possible to broadly identify four major themes that arose out of the conversations with the women. I have provided the women’s viewpoints in the four sub-sections below so as to give a sense of coherence and structure to the interview data. Numerous linkages, overlaps and other themes can naturally be deduced from these categories as they cover a variety of rich and complex issues.

**Spirit of Place**

An example of the way spirituality is the lens through which the women express sustainability concepts is the way they talked about the spirit of place of Delhi. The spirit of a place is important in locating that invisible thread that weaves linear time, stories, traditions and customs together. Identifying the spirit of place helps in creating environments, both built and natural, that are physically, emotionally and spiritually nourishing.

Dr. Madhu Kishwar says:

Our spirituality – and by this I understand our inter-cultural diverse connections – are played out in public spaces like the streets. Our public spaces are celebrated exuberantly in our movies. Our public spaces are alive and available to celebrate the private even. We have little images of gods under our trees. Women tie the red thread to the trees to ward of the evil eye – you have seen that? Educated women also. Our streets really need to retain their vibrancy, and it needs to be done in a way that both safety and traffic flows are not compromised. We have to create the atmosphere from our external surroundings, we feed off it all the time.
In Delhi, the spirit of place seems to come overwhelmingly from both history and its culturally diverse, highly pluralistic society. Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath believes that multiculturalism and pluralism allow the expression of diverse faiths and as such, reinforce the image of Delhi as the microcosm of the whole of India. She explains:

Multiculturalism firstly enriches the city. Delhi has always been a multicultural city. It’s had Islamic influence, Greek influence, some Christian influence, you have so many different places of worship, you have so many different monuments, and its very rich in its cultural life, in terms of its performing arts, all different schools of performing arts. It’s a culturally very alive city and in that sense, it’s very different from Bombay, which used to be the commercial capital of India.

Geeta Dharmarajan echoes these views strongly and believes that Delhi’s vital strength comes from its capacity to be highly accommodative of diversities. She says:

Delhi is rich, rich in multi-religious and spiritual resources. It’s already a vibrant scene for our rich arts and culture; it can become even more so. The positive characteristics of Delhites is that we are actually a very good natured people, very confident, there is a lot of bonhomie in Delhi among the different communities. But we definitely need to retrace our spiritual roots. Use that as a framework to develop, to interact with each other. That’s the way the violence in the city will subside. Deep down, we actually do have love for each other; Indians are steeped in the ideal of unity in diversity. We just need some spiritual reawakening. I for one cannot think of living anywhere except Delhi.

The multi-religious and multi-ethnic community in Delhi then makes it possible to create a sort of ‘cosmopolitan localism’, whereby even as the citizens are grounded in a particular local space, they are open to a constant flow of new and innovative ideas through the networks of their diverse community. Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath says:

So you are connected, you have a cosmopolitan link. You are also connected to your roots because of your monuments; you are connected to your tradition because there is such a rich diversity of cultural activities here. All the possibilities
of connectivity, of connection exist here. It’s only a question of somehow being able to create community groups that are able to emphasise it. I also feel that monuments should be used as spaces creatively, rather than exhibitions that people go and visit. There should be more creative use of monuments, have workshops in monuments, have children do something, have activities for them, have clubs. There should be activity around the monuments, they should be used. At the same time, they are like show pieces. The lived experience of the times should come out from them.

While concerns for the social dimensions of development came most strongly to the women, anxieties for Delhi’s urban ecology were not far behind. Delhi’s sprawling lush green lawns, adorned with majestic Mughal palaces and forts, surrounded by fiery gulmohars in vibrant reds, purples and yellows, have long served as a muse for some of the most eloquent poetry on the stuff of the spirit: nature, love and passion. However the senseless rape and mutilation of the city under the guise of ‘development’ is also evident throughout the vast grand old city. It is pertinent to note here, however, that contemporary Delhi is a human-shaped environment that is rich in history. So notions of “environmentally” sustainable development were cast in terms of the social and historical environment, as well as the more typical environmental qualities of the city, such as air and water quality.

**Urban Planning**

Ill-considered and draconian urban planning in Delhi arose as a major sustainability challenge that undermined the city’s environment. The women expressed concern that the gentle, rural dimension to Delhi’s character was being eroded by powerful capital-oriented development, and the ambitions to convert the ancient city of Delhi into a “world city”. In this section, a range of views, all of which point to urban planning in some form, are provided.

What was a topical issue at the time of the interviews was the frenzy of government initiated demolitions of structures and buildings deemed illegal. Some of the women express reservations about the integrity of a system that allowed the constructions in the
first place. Development worker 2, sociologist and senior researcher at an urban studies research institute says:

The government took huge payoffs and cuts from builders and real estate developers and allowed them to build illegally. Now they are back in power and are destroying buildings. It’s an incredible slap to our self-confidence, we can never be sure when we are going to wake up to bulldozers outside our house. We paid for it with our hard earnings and then are told to get out, this is illegal. Across the board, rich or poor, they are razing what they think is illegal, suddenly the Supreme Court has woken up and disposing off stay orders with machine efficiency. And the cost of this to the environment, they remove one source of pollution and add another! No point in puffing up your chests about the switch to CNG fuel, we are back to breathing probably worse air with so much asbestos, dust and carcinogens in the air.

The fuel transfer to CNG [compressed natural gas] in Delhi’s public transport is itself problematic. While there is a generally uniform consensus that the move has appreciably reduced pollution levels in the city, there is concern that the strategy was planned in a typically haphazard manner. Meenakshi Mishra, a senior bureaucrat within the Indian Audit and Accounts Services [IAAS] says:

To be able to use CNG well, the vehicle needs to be in ship shape condition, of a certain configuration etc, that’s when efficiency is maximised. Then there are these Harvard studies that were released that the CNG also emits micro particles, which are polluting. Certainly it is a better fuel than diesel though, less noise pollution also. There are other social aspects to the problem, bus drivers have to wait for six hours to get the fuel, in the meantime, in a transport dependent city like ours, all havoc breaks loose. The biggest problem was though that it was planned in a willy-nilly manner, as usual with no consideration for the effects of such bad planning.

Irresponsible planning seems to mark every aspect of my informants concerns about sustainability in the city. Delhi’s beautifully landscaped public space prior to independence is in stark contrast to the outcome of the Master Plan created in 1950. The
city’s history lends it its grandeur and beauty; however, the city was not planned to accommodate the exponential growth in economic and commercial activity since independence in 1947. Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath says:

The remnants of the Mughal architecture are a splendid aspect of the city. But Delhi of the post 1970s is not a very aesthetic built space, because it is by and large an architectural kitsch. It’s trying to put together a dozen extraneous architectural forms, and not really looking at harmonising structure and space. So here you’ll see a whole motley group of buildings, which don’t actually fit together or sit together, and each one is trying to jostle for space. And you get the feeling here that buildings are in competition with one another, and not in harmony, with the built environment or the natural environment. It is encroaching, invasive, and you know, it is something, which is impinging, and not very happy with itself. It’s trying very self-consciously to say something, to take over space, and it is not comfortable with itself. That’s a part of Delhi’s carpet bagging culture.

The women also comment on the parallel ruralisation of the city, even as Delhi stretches itself unhesitatingly in a massive urban sprawl. The parallel ruralisation and de-ruralisation are important dichotomies to note. The older women wistfully recall the greener, simpler and slower city of their youth with the old villages of Delhi either gone or shrivelled up; however, there is also much concern about the increase in urban poverty and associated traumas as a result of staggering migration from the small towns and villages of India. Sudha Raina says:

Everybody is rushing towards the city these days for more employment, and in the process, they are losing out on what they would have had in their normal village life. They come here and live in lesser conditions, which really are not fit for animals even. If we keep our eyes open, we can see the suffering in the city, and help relieve it and help these people as much as we can. But the other thing is, the pressures of our Indian city life don’t leave you with much time to deal with these things either. We have to fit so many things in a day; we are constantly rushing around in Delhi. It is never like this in Jaipur [Rajasthan], where I live a lot of the time. You are between a rock and a hard place in Delhi.
However, Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath points out that the villages within the city, which were little sustainable, self-contained communities, are unable to withstand the power of Delhi’s metropolitan ambitions. She says:

There are remnants of it. But most of the villages are dying out, because they cannot sustain their way of life any longer. For example, where we are today, LSR [Lady Shri Ram College] used to be right in the middle of an agricultural belt! And when I was a student here, across the road, there used to be a huge cabbage patch! You just cannot recognise it now! The other thing that has changed about Delhi today is the sounds. Earlier we used to have a lot of people who used to sell their wares, and they used to advertise it with a song or a jingle, so the street hawkers have disappeared from the streets. Now of course we have the haats, the weekly markets - and they have now come into Delhi as remnants of the earlier village culture, a common gathering where people would come and bring their agricultural produce.

A purely urbanised environment is viewed as a serious sustainability concern. The ideal of the village city, which optimises the benefits of sustainable technology and continues to retain the simplicity and community of the village, is viewed as the new urban aspiration. Geeta Dharmarajan says:

The distinctiveness of all our great Indian metropolitan cities is that they are really village cities. Delhi has the infrastructure to become a modern village city, with the amenities of an efficiently run farm. A village city should be the new ideal of world city everywhere actually, but definitely so in India. It’s also more possible in India, we are already living this ideal anyway; we just need to do it more sustainably. We are already such experts at urban agriculture, and we grow spinach and cauliflowers and potatoes in Delhi even out of unwilling land. We have so many poor migrant farmers from Rajasthan and Haryana and Bihar; use their wisdom to enrich the city, instead of making them coolies [poor porters] and taxi drivers. Greater corporate social responsibility can actually aid this to happen, so we should start working on that.
Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath warns, however:

I don’t think we should romanticise the countryside. There are some pretty inhumane practices in the countryside. Of course, the city today by and large symbolises violence in people’s minds, uncaring, alienation, all of that.

Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath points out that one of the main drawbacks of rapid urbanisation in a developing city is its reincarnation as an automobile-centred city. Such express change also results in different generations of values and traditions jostling each other for dominance. Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath says:

One thing about Delhi that I find particularly negative is that it is not a city that is friendly to pedestrians. And increasingly, in the built environment, it is becoming less and less friendly to pedestrians, to cyclists, to people who do not use any automobile. At the same time, it is a city where three centuries are living side by side – you have the 18th, 19th and the 20th – and the 21st century, juxtaposed together! So there is a kind of chaos in terms of traffic, in movement, in understanding and values.

However, in a characteristically Indian manner, Delhi displays an incomprehensible contradiction by being one of the most polluted, as well as one of the most beautiful and green capital cities in the world. The incredible variety of flora and fauna in the city are a valuable heritage of the jungles that once existed in the city. Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath goes on to add:

The wonderful aspect about Delhi is the amazing number of birds in the city, which you won’t find even in developed cities, you won’t find in Washington DC, or London. Here in Delhi, you can hear the birds, which is amazing given the size of the city, its traffic and population and everything. I find that a tremendous balm for the soul, if there is such a thing as the soul [laughs]. So that’s the wonderful aspect of the city.

However, in developing more strongly a responsible and caring relationship with Delhi’s natural environment, some of the women expressed frustration with what they
viewed as the educated middle class women’s indifference, self-centredness and reluctance in taking on a meaningful leadership role in preserving and protecting nature. Dr. Promilla Bhutani says:

A lot of working women just think about “me” and “myself”. We are getting more and more selfish in our attitude, since we have become independent. We have developed a sense of arrogance. They don’t look at their environment around them in a positive manner anymore. Why can’t we have eco-friendly ways of handling waste? You have your green waste and you have your other waste, and you have people collecting your waste. Why have a waste dumping area right next to the children’s playground in Sarvodaya? These are our social responsibilities; that we look after the needs of our children! We can have garbage collectors come to each house, but people have no sense of communal responsibility, they don’t want to pay for it. People have to pay 100 rupees a month and also take the responsibility of segregating their garbage, but they won’t do it. Everything the community cannot do for you, you also have to do for the community. Women need to get out. That’s what I come back to each time. If some of us educated women got around, and spoke to people – that would be a first step.

Alternative ways of visualising social, environmental and economic prosperity in Delhi have begun to emerge. Here, there is great desire to recall that face of Delhi that is reminiscent of gentler and more cultured times. Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath says:

It’s a very difficult one, I think – we have to begin to think that we have to humanise our city. How do we begin – how do we balance the extreme acquisitiveness of global capitalism and a gentler way of life? I think it has to happen through a movement of people’s lives, assessing people’s alternatives, looking at the option that this is not the only way of existing, of living. In the sixties, you did have people who opted out of that system, who had the niti movement [the green conservation movement], and that was a liberating force. I think we need to highlight the fact that there are other ways to connect with ourselves, the universe, that there are alternative lifestyles, we need to celebrate those, and somehow, examine and think about these things.
Ecological issues are primarily about the environmental qualities of urban life, both in
terms of aesthetic quality, and in terms of air, noise and water pollution. What is
noticeably absent is a sense of the city’s connection with its rural hinterland and the
environmental footprint of the city, which extends beyond its geographical limit. None
of my informants raised such issues.

There is one more important example of how the spiritual inflects the women’s
reflections on the environment. The women make a number of explicit references to the
city’s environment in spiritual terms. The sense of history and ancient heritage in Delhi
provides an important line of continuity into an otherwise unpredictable and seemingly
chaotic future, and forms the basis of an authentic affinity with the city. Modern Delhi
has been the cradle of the Indus civilisation, and the throne of all of the rulers of
ancient, medieval and modern India. As such, the rich texture of Delhi’s history seems
to foster an inherent love for the notion of India.

Dr. Madhu Kishwar says:

Delhi is a city that I have lived in all my life, been politically involved with since
my student union days. Delhi best represents the patriotism that we feel. For
many, Delhi is the culmination of the love that we feel for India. I am not saying
that this feeling does not exist in the states, but Delhi was where India’s identity
was born and nurtured. There are others places in India – Rishikesh, Haridwar,
Varanasi, Vaishnodevi, Tirupathi Madurai – which have even more refined and
pure forms of religious expression. But there is something about the spirit of the
city – vibrant, intelligent, creative, absolutely beautiful. You know the Lahoris say
of Lahore “Lahore Lahore hai” [Lahore is Lahore]?? We can say the same about
Delhi: “Dilli Dilli hai” [Delhi is Delhi]. It’s for dilwals, people of the heart. Delhi
is quite simply for romantic fools like you and me. How can you explain why you
love your lover? Is there any rational reason? Delhi is like a lover. You just click
with the city.
Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath says:

But there are so many aspects of the city that lend itself to tremendous connection with something that’s beautiful and exquisite. One of my favourite places in Delhi is Humayun’s tomb. The fact that Delhi has so many beautiful monuments – if only they were well looked after, it’s possible to not have to go far and to find little oceans of tranquillity.

In describing the haunting historical quality and value of Delhi, some women refer particularly to the Old City, even as they acknowledge that New Delhi is by no means “new”. Dr. Madhu Kishwar says:

What I love best about Delhi is the history you find in every nook and cranny. You can’t walk 20 yards anywhere without stumbling on an old fort, or at the least, a plaque or a stone. Purani Dilli [Old Delhi] is like a walking tour. Even in Nayi Dilli [New Delhi], there is layer upon layer of age, stories. Delhi is mysterious. At the same time, Delhi is confrontationally direct. Delhi makes you a real person, you realise that nothing is as it seems.

It emerges that what the women would unanimously like is for Delhi to retain and exude its historical character. Loss of the sense of history, they believe, would lead to an erosion of their sense of self. They view with some scepticism and alarm the enthusiasm to ‘upgrade’ Delhi into a world city. Geeta Dharmarajan says:
I am a bit nervous about the Times of India ad\textsuperscript{112} to tell you the truth! (laughs) I am also nervous about the Commonwealth Games. In 2010 and after, who knows what our city will be like? New Delhi might be highjacked straight to outer space, beyond our reach. All this terrible consumerism that we are seeing now, I shudder to think of the condition after 10 years. We will have to start depending on Old Delhi for our sense of romance, and our sense of memory, identity. New Delhi may be nothing like the city we know today.

Geeta Dharmarajan has an alternative vision for Delhi as a world city, and interestingly, she grounds this vision in the colour and texture of traditional Indian culture. She says:

My vision for Delhi to become a global city is grounded firmly in the values of Indian culture. In becoming a global city, Delhi should not lose her distinctiveness, like many other Asian cities – you know, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong. Delhi should continue to belong to India and exude her Indianness, which will set her apart as an example of spiritual sustainability. As the national capital, Delhi is best poised of all our cities to represent India. Otherwise millions of our poor, millions of Indians countrywide will lose Delhi, Delhi will become the property of a handful of powerful elite Indians and the corporate West of course. This is unfortunately already starting to happen.

However, this vital sense of place seems only appreciated by the long-term residents of Delhi; it otherwise seems replaced by a sense of rootlessness or dislocation, particularly as large numbers of immigrants arrive in the city. Latika Dikshit refers to Delhi now as an “orphan city” and says:

\textsuperscript{112} Reference to a widely promoted advertisement and campaign in 2005 by leading newspaper The Times of India entitled “Delhi: From Walled City to World City” (The Times of India, 2006a). The campaign sought opinions from its readers as to whether they believed would Delhi qualify as a truly world city by 2010, the year that Delhi would host the Commonwealth Games. An amazing 97 per cent of Delhites surveyed conveyed their conviction that Delhi could be the face of modern India (The Times of India, 2006a). With increased levels of income, improving infrastructure, location of a high number of multinational companies and overall political stability, Delhi seems ready to make the transition to a world city, according to the respondents. The reasons given were that Delhi had the best to offer in terms of infrastructure, employment opportunities, lifestyle and truly gave the sense of being part of a global city, much better than other Indian cities, including Bangalore, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai. The respondents who belonged to the 15-55 age group spouted optimism about their city’s future: ninety-six per cent of the respondents believed that lifestyle in Delhi could be “excellent” or “very good” in ten years (The Times of India, 2006b).
What Delhi was twenty– twenty-five years ago when I was a child - Delhi consisted of people who had lived here for generations. But in the last 15 years, you can see people come in from all over north India especially, as a city of opportunities. But nobody really belongs to the city anymore. But unless you have a sense of belonging to a city, an attachment, it is a very parasite mentality – I come here to eat, to seek, I get and I go back, and I leave my lack of respect behind. But that’s because there is no longer an attachment to the land. The street doesn’t belong to anybody; the parks don’t belong to anybody. We have to realise that we have to take ownership of the city, revive the feeling of ownership to extract full potential out of it, because Delhi has such a lot to give! Everyone expects the government, and the government alone to take responsibility – the government forms one per cent of the population of Delhi! We have still not understood the role of the community in the development process in India. And that’s basically because nobody has a sense of ownership about Delhi – Delhi belongs to nobody. Delhi is an orphan city. There is an empowerment that people get from taking responsibility.

The Delhi state government has attempted to reawaken the sense of ownership of Delhi in the citizens through the Bhagidari system that facilitates citizen participation in the governance of the city. However Latika Dikshit says:

But because of the sceptics – even before anything is launched or anything is created – the attitude is that – oh, this will not work. We have become a nation of sceptics and that’s something that really worries me. When scepticism becomes a part of you, then it’s really sad.

This tendency to doubt and cynicism is arguably an important barrier to participating in sustainable behaviour. This requires a shift in consciousness to overcome, and the women’s language is layered with hints that the solution may lie in spiritual possibilities.

*Corruption*
Concerns about the economic sustainability of Delhi, the power capital of rising India, are strong. Here, the overarching challenge is the rampant corruption that is blatantly evident throughout the government and bureaucratic system, and that has steeped into the daily lives of citizens. The women express great apprehension that corruption has the corrosive ability to eat into the very fabric of a healthy sustainable society in Delhi.

When asked what she thought were the main impediments to sustainability in Delhi, Latika Dikshit listed four, all of which revolve around her first:

One, highly corrupt city. Everybody is somebody’s somebody. Everybody has contacts. It’s a city of contacts. You cannot enforce the law because somebody or the other is powerful enough to harm the enforcer. I hate the black money in the city. It’s the capital city and so it’s so top-heavy, almost everyone ends up with a contact. Secondly, and that’s where the indiscipline comes from, it’s a highly undisciplined city because of that. That attitude - I don’t care – I don’t like that. And thirdly, the black money in the state. The kind of black money that’s here, the power economy, is just unbelievable. And again comes from contacts, indifference, the ‘I-don’t-care-two-hoots’ attitude. It’s much worse than even Bombay, you know, which is a much larger city. Things like tax evasion – nobody bothers. This whole thing I thoroughly dislike. Last thing, because there is so much of black money and the arrogance that nobody can get to me – the pomp and show, the flashing of money, has increased so much in the city. There is just so much money and people are showing it around. The immunity that everyone feels here – they won’t even bother to stop at traffic lights – ‘oh, woh mere ko kya kar leyga? Sau rupai mein cop ko de doonga’ [‘oh what can he do to me after all? I will give the cop a hundred rupees’]. This whole thing is bizarre…‘I don’t fear anybody, I don’t care what he or she says, and anyone can be paid off.’

Corruption then provides both a justification and a protection while indulging in unsustainable behaviour. Corruption cripples the processes of governance, businesses and community, and reinforces inequality in society. Tied in with rampant corruption is the issue of social and economic justice, and my respondents were scathing about the ineffectual judicial system and the lack of legal check on the misuse of power. Latika Dikshit says:
One, [we need] to address the question of leadership. Nothing gets solved here, when there is a case or a problem with the judiciary, nobody is really worried because the cases take years and years so they know it themselves that they won’t really have to answer. Whether it is murder or it is corruption, everybody is sitting pretty and having a ball. If the judiciary does not deliver, then there is no threat! The legislature can only legislate and make laws. The executive says okay, I enforce. But suppose lets say there is this illegal construction. I come from the government department and break it down. It goes to court and gets a stay order. The stay order lasts 30 years!! So where is the redressal? So nobody fears the law. Look at America – cases move-like-this!!! [snaps her fingers repeatedly] They say, it will take us at least 700 years to dispose off all the court cases that are pending at the Delhi High court, if they are disposed off at this current rate. And justice delayed is justice denied. There are cases of corruption in court but nobody has been booked to date! Nobody fears it because you never get caught. And if you get caught, you are never punished.

Meenakshi Mishra says:

I have seen closely how bad the system is. Somehow in the IAAS [Indian Audit and Accounts Services], you are protected from the system of taking and giving bribes but I have seen how honest officers are intimidated and threatened if they do not cooperate. Especially in the Administrative services, it is very distressing how the money meant for every sort of development in the regions is drained away into their personal pockets. I am not saying the whole system is guilty, mind you, but there is enough filth there for you to notice straightaway. Everything becomes dirty when politicians push their way through the system; it is their way of controlling their areas. We had George Fernandes, who was the defence minister taking bribes – at least he was found out on hidden camera. That’s probably the best way to deal with it, catch them in the act and publicise it.

The growth of the middle class in the city is seen as both one of the hopes against, and reasons for, corruption. The rising incomes of the middle classes have caused an unprecedented stratospheric escalation in real estate prices. They are thus accused of
greasing the wheels and aiding the black economy to save on massive taxation. Alternatively, the middle classes also exhibit indignation at the catch-22 situation. Several women commented on the self-absorbed nature of the middle classes, which was described as “only worried about itself, very self-obsessed, especially in Delhi”, and thus, “taking the devil’s path” was deemed to be very easy. Delhi’s unique creative and progressive energy becomes a double-edged sword. Nevertheless, my informants themselves are middle class, and as members of the middle class, they speak out against corruption, and for the group most adversely affected by corruption: the poor. Dr. Madhu Kishwar, for example, actually campaigns for dispossessed street vendors in the city:

I am with Gandhi on this one – as he said, showing empathy and self-identification with the poorest of the poor. We distance ourselves with the poverty in India, most people do. It’s too much, too big to be able to deal with, and mostly we are too self-absorbed, we are not even interested. We show an incredible level of self-infatuation. The middle class Indian is obsessively in love with himself or herself. We see without seeing. We just have been overruled, we have to appeal again. Where are my street vendors going to go now?¹¹³ The government is causing impoverishment of these people. We have so much government induced poverty in India. But our wonderful middle classes won’t protest till it affects them directly. We are so proud of our high levels of education, we all have our fancy PhDs and MBAs but confronted with the poor, our eyes glaze over.

Unsurprisingly, the women laid great stress on the importance of education, and it was viewed as a tool to build responsibility that would eventually lead to sustainability in both behaviour and practices. Education was considered vitally important so that citizens may be able to take a proactive role in eradicating the ills of contemporary society, and also, so that they may reciprocally “give back” as Latika Dikshit mentioned previously.

Therefore, the women express the unanimous opinion that ensuring access to quality primary and tertiary education to all citizens is a primary and urgent social

¹¹³ This issue is discussed further in Section 5.5.
responsibility. Illiteracy and widespread semi-literacy is believed to be one of the chief causes of exploitation, superstition, apathy and crime. For instance, Geeta Dharmarajan says:

I think our social responsibility is first and foremost to lobby for a high standard of high universal primary education and tertiary education also for the poor. It’s ridiculous that when we can produce the world’s leading brain scientists and space scientists, we are suddenly at a loss when it comes to providing good basic education to our masses. It is because it does not really serve us directly. That’s why we have been so apathetic about it. Who cares about the hordes? When it comes to us, we have no problems building world-class institutions like the IIT and IIMs. That’s necessary too; but so is our social and political responsibility in this regard.

Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath concurs and sees education and awareness as a vital means of connecting with the city, and taking ownership and pride in it. She says:

As someone who is involved with education, getting young people like you and the students of this college, to know their city better. You know we have had many of these heritage walks, we have taken them to the monuments, we have asked them to reflect upon what it is that makes Delhi special, to develop a sense of identity with the city, so that they are not merely users, consumers, but they are also giving back to the city, something that is deeply, consciously spiritual. And they develop a bond with the city. And they feel that what they do will have an impact on the city. If they stop throwing litter around, it will make our city more beautiful. If they don’t scream and shout, it will make our city more civilised. If they put effort into every interaction they have with a stranger, it will make for a happier and a friendlier city. If they are good to an auto-wallah, show compassion to those who have lesser than them, it will make for a humane city. There are ways in which we can intervene every single day, in our personal and our professional life, so that we have an expansive, compassionate, humane city.

Unsurprisingly, in the face of social injustice and poverty in the city, socially sustainable development revolves strongly around responsibility, and is viewed in terms
of a desire to do something for the unprivileged, the poor and the vulnerable, to restore their dignity and power. While expressing their fervent desire to contribute to the betterment of society, they begin to speak in social and spiritual terms almost in the same breath. Sudha Raina says:

There are some touching, human moments to be had in Delhi, as with any Indian city. And I have seen so much suffering – I have been very closely connected with politics, in the area of women’s work – I find that people come trudging all the way here, for miles and miles – seeking redemption since this is the power capital, and seeking some kind of justice – and people in power lie to them. That’s when you really want to do something; something really burns within you to do something to help them. I think that’s when I feel a strong spiritual connection to draw strength to do the needful – the conviction that I am right, the awareness that something wrong is being done here – all this is spiritual. But unfortunately, whoever comes to us with a problem goes back with the same problem. I see very little being done to address their issues. The ones who really can do something have neither the inclination nor the ability to do that. These times I desperately wish there was a God in some form who could help these people.

Prof. Susan Vishwanath says:

Delhi was always a slightly arrogant city. It is both beautiful and wealthy. Desirable city. But this has been Delhi’s downfall too; everyone wants a piece of Delhi. Delhi needs something else to survive. If we go on like this, we risk losing all meaning. We need meaning in Delhi. The conscience of the city’s people has to be awakened to engage fully now, with other people, with the city.

Conscience is arguably part of a critical sustainability mindset, in the case of care for the natural environment, but in the context of a developing country like India, particularly so in the case of social sustainability. The women raise a critical issue, which centrally affects women, and has generally been relegated to the area of feminist studies – the high rate of all forms of violence against women in the city. The ensuing section provides an account of women’s standpoints on this disturbing issue.
Violence Against Women

The sense that social sustainability means the responsibility to eliminate unethical, immoral or illegal behaviour that can vitally harm society is very strong. However, to my amazement, all of the women, without exception insisted that one of the most distressing aspects of social unsustainability in Delhi is the shocking rate of crime and violence against all sections of women in the city. Geeta Dharmarajan was most emphatic about the problem as she said:

The traffic is horrible – we can easily spend 2 hours a day sitting in cars. But that’s not the only ugly thing about cars these days, is it? What about all the rape that is happening inside the cars? What perverts men must be, for one to drive around the city, and eight others to gang rape a young college girl in the back seat. In a country where we are taught to think of women as either our sisters or mothers. This maniacal urge to dominate and have power – we must investigate that. They obviously feel powerless somewhere, so they take it out on women. India has the worst rate of violence against women, even pregnant women. At these times, I think we are a third rate people and will always remain a third rate country. At the same time, we are capable of some of the finest qualities you will see. Indians are very protective and nurturing of each other.

Almost all the women have an eerie tale of violence to relate, even though it must be noted that they were not the victims in all these stories. Development worker 3 who is a rural research officer in an international organisation says:

My husband and I were driving along Aruna Asaf Ali road...this was last year [2003], the construction was not complete. And there was a road accident so we stopped...actually not many people would have even stopped because of police harassment but both of us fortunately have no time for police and their bullying and we stopped. A woman from the labourer juggis [slums] had tried to commit suicide by jumping in front of some car with her three-year-old little girl. Fortunately the driver stopped, she wasn’t run over. She was hysterical...she was being gang raped by all the men in the slum because...can you believe it, there weren’t enough women to go around, and her husband would beat her if she didn’t
obey. And the sex ratio was even down in the first place because of murdering their women, either infanticide or bride deaths or something, I am sure of it. Happens in these Haryanavi jat\textsuperscript{114} castes. They started to beat her child and you could see the bruises and the terror — so she tried to kill herself. I don’t even want to think about what happened, we yelled and shouted at the men and threatened to call the police, which was probably the weakest empty threat. We left some money with the woman...we just didn’t know what to do. The woman must be still suffering, if she is still alive. The men know that the police won’t do anything, and we can’t do anything without police help. So there is nothing to stop the men from doing what they want.

Sucharita Sen shares her own story of sexual harassment:

I was standing at the bus stop with three others mind you, not even by myself, but all women though. It was terribly crowded, evening rush hour, the stand was just swarming with people. And this guy comes past...you know how we are all on red alert in crowded places anyway...but people manage to brush past you deliberately, grope anyway. But this guy...he brushed past but suddenly, totally unexpectedly, he punched my breasts with full force and sprinted. I nearly blacked out, you will not believe how blinding the pain is, but I was so furious, we returned home and I must have wept the whole evening, in anger, mind you. There was nothing we could do, he lost himself in the crowd immediately and we were just stunned. For literally no reason he did that. And I had to get over it because what happened to me was nothing compared to what might have been. I should count myself lucky, I suppose.

The interviewees point out that violence is aimed at all sections of women, including the elderly. In India, the aged are traditionally cared for at home within the safe and warm confines of a joint family system. However, with the breakdown of the family into smaller and smaller units, mainly through migration of the younger generations to other

\textsuperscript{114} Reference to the jat or the labourer caste from the neighbouring state of Haryana. These castes have a recorded history of 'sharing' their womenfolk because of a low sex ration caused mainly by infanticide and foeticide. Development worker 3 is essentially guessing that the victims were Haryanavi jat; however, it is likely to be a correct assumption because of the steady rural migration to Delhi from the neighbouring states, of which Haryana is one.
cities and countries for education and employment, the elderly in Indian cities are suddenly in a vulnerable situation of having no carers or protectors. Dr. Promilla Bhutani says:

There is something just sick about a society where even the old people are beaten to death and murdered for money. I feel very furious because my mother is old but very agile and active in her mind. She is curious and I can see that it is frustrating for her to be restrained all the time, even from simple things like going for a walk in the park alone. I can never allow her to go alone and I am not always able to go with her. The elderly have so much wisdom to offer, always in Indian culture, the grandparents are at the forefront of the family.

In the face of so much violence, for the first time, Geeta Dharmarajan wonders how any spiritual method is possible in such a city, for she sees violence and spirituality as inherently incompatible. She says:

There is just so much violence against women in Delhi, it is hard to think people are even human, let alone spiritual. They behave like animals, only human beings are capable to being spiritual. Most of my staff are women as you can see, and they are young or not so well-off, which means they all have a horror story to tell of the buses every single day, somebody groping, somebody molesting.

Dr. Promilla Bhutani makes a poignant point as she says:

This spirituality that we are talking about, how will it happen when our elderly are terrorised? If our old people are content and safe emotionally and physically, then spirituality will automatically thrive. Otherwise, there is no spirituality in Delhi, only vulgarity!

Most classic sustainability analyses would not examine violence against women as an explicitly sustainable development problem. However, the women have raised this issue clearly in the context of their viewpoints of sustainable development in Delhi. Traditionally, issues of violence against women have been mainly raised by feminists and as such, generally get relegated as a ‘women’s problem’, and sidelined, along with
other gender-specific agendas, from *development* problems. In the interests of equity and gender justice, this issue clearly deserves attention as a problem of *sustainable development* as well. In the interests of equity and gender justice, this issue clearly deserves attention as a problem of sustainable development as well, and I will return to this point in the following chapter where I will also consider what a connection between spirituality and sustainability might offer.

5.5. Two Innovative Spiritually Based Sustainability Solutions

What is clear is that the issue of violence against women and other sustainability problems need to be addressed through a fundamental shift in consciousness. In returning to the interviews with the women, we find a couple of helpful examples where two women addressed two old and endemic development problems with new and innovative means. Below, I show how Dr. Madhu Kishwar and Sushma Aggarwal used spiritual approaches to assist them in some of their important projects. In both instances, a spiritual strategy evolved organically as a natural response to the issue, and was not the outcome of any premeditated planning to ground sustainable development in spirituality.

*The Urban Cleaning Goddess*

Dr. Madhu Kishwar offers an exemplary example of how spiritually-based innovations were used to address the High Court’s ruling against the city’s street vendors’ right to hawk their wares in demarcated public spaces. In March 2005, a new goddess was born to add to Hinduism’s already exhaustive pantheon of colourful divine images. Manushi Swachha Narayani, literally translatable as the Goddess of Cleanliness, acquired a human form through the efforts of *Manushi*, a leading Indian socio-academic journal on women and society with a strong social conscience.115 *Manushi* had taken on the crusade to protect the Delhi street vendors and small-scale pavement businesses from “routine human rights abuses, humiliation, assaults on their livelihood and huge extortion rackets legitimised by archaic laws which treat this legitimate occupation as an

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115 This section has received considerable verbal input from Dr. Madhu Kishwar and her staff. However, using the published work of Dr. Kishwar’s more easily facilitated academic explanation of the background.
‘illegal activity’ despite the fact that the city cannot function without street vendors” (Kishwar 2005b: 7). In addition, this large section of the poor urban self-employed does the government a double favour by saving them the disgrace of unemployed citizens, as well as by removing the burden of their unemployment from their shoulders (Kishwar 2005b).

However, these citizens face extortion and violations of their dignity and human rights on a daily basis (Kishwar 2001). Manushi has been involved with the task for safeguarding the interests of street vendors for several years now, against demonic practices of corruption (Kishwar 2001). These practices include confiscation of their goods upon non-payment of exterxtion or bribe, imposing a fine for “encroachment” when there are no other legal spaces provided for their businesses, and beatings (Kishwar 2001: 4). These citizens fall way below the minimum tax threshold and technically earn non-taxable income; however, Kishwar (2001) writes that approximately five million street sellers are forced to pay up nearly 40 million rupees a month to corrupt officials as bribes!

An important part of Manushi’s efforts to empower the street vendors against this sort of brutality was to inculcate a sense of self-esteem and power through a cleanliness drive. A particular challenge, writes Kishwar (2001), was to remove the prejudice of influential citizens and the officials that the street vendors were responsible for the squalor, filth and chaos in Delhi. In the process of motivating the hawkers to take responsibility for maintaining cleanliness and cultivating respect for their physical and natural environment, Manushi started the practice of revering and worshipping the lowly broom in December 2001 (Kishwar 2005b). The broom signified both the determination to clean the physical and natural environment and create surroundings where the human spirit can thrive, as well as a community’s resolve to cleanse the government, which has acquired all the ugly colours and taint of corruption, arrogance, sloth and oppression.

The deity acquired a divine-human form over the next four years, resembling Goddess Kali, with 10 arms, each holding a symbol of development, both for the individual and the community.
Manushi Swachha Narayani, the Urban Cleaning Goddess spring-cleans Delhi

Named Manushi Swachha Narayani, her worship involves more than just a tribute to cleanliness. The other symbols [and their significance as they pertain to various aspects of sustainability] in her ten hands include the following:

1. The broom to represent reverence for a clean natural environment, and the determination to clean up corruption.
2. A clock to symbolise the need to change through the new lens of introspection, to keep up with the changing times and to remove archaic laws and customs that cause the continued exploitation of the people, particularly the poor.
3. A coin in her palm emphasises that all people should be allowed to earn a livelihood with dignity.

4. A *diya* or an earthen lamp to dissipate the darkness and hopelessness from the lives of the vulnerable.

5. An account book that symbolises maintaining honest accounts

6. A weighing-balance that communicates commitment to social justice.

7. A video camera, since this equipment was used to capture several instances of municipal harassment of the vendors on tape. Kishwar credits video footage for many of their successful campaigns.

8. A pen to emphasise the resolution to spread literacy and education, as well as to communicate the message that the pen is mightier than the sword

9. A conch shell to represent purity, as well as to serve as a clarion call to citizens for collective self-organisation, so that they can truly participate in a democratic system of governance

10. Barley stalks to indicate prosperity as well as the spread of the message of the Broom Goddess. Just as one seed reaps innumerable grains, it is hoped that this initiative would launch numerous others.

The debut worship of the Broom Goddess was at Sewa Nagar, where *Manushi* had established a Model Market to demonstrate how street vendors and pavement businesses can be integrated with the local economy in an efficient and aesthetic manner (Kishwar 2005b). The statue of the Goddess was taken to Sewa Nagar with joyous celebrations and fanfare marking the journey, to the sounds of the *shehnai* and the *dholak* [drums]. Kishwar (2005b: 4) writes: “This proved a tremendous morale boost for the terrorised vendors. Call it coincidence or a miracle, the situation started improving rapidly after Devi Swachha Narayani positioned herself in Sewa Nagar...”

The Swachha Narayani is an intelligent, highly creative way of associating images of divinity with contemporary meanings. Through the Broom Goddess, who stands for the moral and legitimate rights for a section of the road users who are vulnerable to tyrannical “government controls”, *Manushi* also hopes to cause a shift in consciousness in the urban middle classes who depend on the street vendors, and to “move out of the Third World mindset that accepts dirt and squalor as the inevitable fate of our citizens” (Kishwar 2005b: 11). The Broom Goddess is also a reminder that Indian cities have to
be sensibly and sensitively planned in accordance with “the actual requirements of our citizens and their income levels” (Kishwar 2005b: 11).

Most significantly, ahimsa or non-violence is a central principle behind the symbolism of the Broom Goddess. She has ten arms like the fierce Durga [goddess of power]; however, none of the symbols she carries are suggestive of violence. Manushi Swachha Narayani stands for the peaceful resistance to oppression of the vulnerable. This is particularly interesting in the face of the threats of violence and murder that the Manushi team has received from the thugs who work for the local politicians. The local politicians are fiercely resisting Manushi’s efforts to empower the street vendors, because the pavements merchants are an easy source of bribe and blackmail money (Kishwar 2005b). At the time of this interview, Manushi was expanding its efforts from merely resisting, to planning a Model Hawkers Market “to show by example how vendors can be accommodated in the city in an aesthetic and orderly manner” by being attentive to the ten symbols of the Broom Goddess (Kishwar 2005b: 11). While they have managed to get land space from the MCD [Municipal Corporation of Delhi] for the project, they have thus far been unable to execute the project because of fierce opposition from some powerful sections within the MCD, as well as continued threats and intimidations from the local political parties. Madhu Kishwar, however, is determined to see the project through. She has also set up partnerships with other NGOs in cities such as Kolkata and Mumbai, so that this issue may be treated as a matter of national urban importance.

We Two, Ours Two; We Two, Ours One; We Two, Ours None??

Population explosion is unquestionably one of India’s greatest impediments to sustainability. Sushma Aggarwal, chairperson of the Arpana Trust NGO gives an example of how her organisation was able to bring about a small, but nevertheless vital shift in consciousness in the people of the resettlement slums by addressing the sensitive issue of birth control using spiritually-based strategies.

Arpana Trust was founded as a result of the vision of Param Pujya Ma [most revered mother], who lives in an ashram in the Himalayan foothills in the nearby city of Dehra Dun. The staff members describe the Mother as charismatic, generous and endlessly
loving. The NGO relied almost entirely on funding from generous civilian donors for several years, until 2002, when it was finally successful in securing a series of grants from the UNDP. Sushma Aggarwal talks about their arguably amazing breakthrough in stabilising the population of these massive slums:

We are an NGO that has adopted two huge slum resettlement colonies in Molar Bund and Ali Gaon. They have a population of 45,000 and 60,000 people respectively. Believe it or not, we have achieved a population rate of zero per cent in these colonies…and this is Delhi, not an educated, literate state like Kerala! The growth rate would normally be as high as at least 15 per cent. We really believe that this has been possible because we have made spiritual appeals, talked in a language, emotion and sentiment that these people understand.

Sushma Aggarwal explains that such an approach was not the outcome of a planned strategy. She and her close colleagues of nearly two decades [consisting of retired general practioner Dr. Ajay Vohra, social workers Mitali Kumar, Anubha Pandey, Komal Das, among others] had been as concerned about the rapid population rise in the slums they had adopted, as much as battling issues such as endemic tuberculosis, unemployment, illiteracy, and the constant threat of eviction and ‘resettlement’ by the government. The slum dwellers were amongst the large numbers of poor rural migrants to Delhi city, and prior to their transfer to the big city, had lived and maintained traditional lifestyles in their villages. Sushma Aggarwal explains:

See, they are primarily rural people; they have migrated from villages of Rajasthan, Bihar, Haryana. They are originally farming communities, are very spiritual, they have so many rituals and customs about worshipping the rain god, wind, monsoon, earth. Mainly, we have a woman like Param Pujya Ma as our inspiration. She is unmarried, childless but has no dearth of children in all of us; she exemplifies motherhood. She is an example to these people that mother fulfilment need not be achieved only through biological children…it’s as practical as that.

The populations of the slums rose as much because of a high birth rate, as because of continued migrations. Not surprisingly, the tendency of Arpana Trust, as like most other
NGOs, had been to encourage women to use contraception. A vasectomy clinic was available as part of Arpana Trust’s health dispensary; however, the focus continued to be women. The shift in consciousness occurred in a rather dramatic and unexpected fashion over the course of Param Pujya Ma’s visits to the Molar Bund and Ali Gaon slums. Her appeal was directly to the men, and her discourses dwelt at length on the sacredness of motherhood. She spoke rousingly about the physical and spiritual harm inflicted on women, in the name of making them mothers. Sushma Aggarwal says:

And in our culture, the men, the sons have an inviolable sacred duty to their mothers, so our men understand being mothered, they understand what she is trying to say. Men seem to cooperate much more easily when persuaded like this. Indian men are very spiritual too. In fact, we have a sterilisation clinic in the colony, and believe me, there is a clamour, and there is such a rush from men to register themselves for the operation! Every other family planning scheme has failed in our country because they treat men and women like animals, they are made to feel ashamed and that does not work. Here it is done with respect and service.

Sushma Aggarwal is emphatic that such an approach worked because it made “spiritual sense”.

Indian people are spiritual; we have to do development keeping this in mind. If something feels right spiritually, people will not hesitate to do something here. If it makes no spiritual sense, why will they do it? People will always understand a spiritual language, I think, literate or illiterate, men or women, rich or poor.

Because ultimately we are all trying to find the answers to the same questions, no matter who we are.

These approaches were successful because they were both effective in causing a fundamental shift in consciousness. These methods arose naturally to address specific local requirements and may by no means be applied universally, even within Delhi. However, if Sushma Aggarwal is correct in assuming that development has to make “spiritual sense” in India for to be successful, then it is worth exploring in the interests of sustainability, the means to facilitate this shift in consciousness and realisation.
5.6. Conclusions

Admittedly the prospect of grounding sustainability planning and implementation in spirituality had not been explored in an explicit and considered manner by these twenty women of Delhi; however, the sense strongly emerged that they considered such a viewpoint and approach to be natural to successful sustainability in the city. Several of them did not see any distinction between sustainability and spirituality at all; others argued that there was merit in creating space for spirituality within the complexities of urban life in Delhi.

However, the awareness that spirituality and religion are vulnerable to being misappropriated by vested interests is all too clear. Sudha Raina points out that Delhi is not immune to the concurrent sense of alienation and rootlessness that is plaguing urban communities around the world. She believes that the cause of this is the loss of a positive and warm spiritual cohesion, which has been replaced by a separatist and aggressive brand of spiritualism that embraces individualism and exclusiveness:

We used to go towards the ideal of one and we always believed the old Hindu concept of “vasudev kutumbhakam” [all the world is one family]. Everything was assimilated into Hinduism, and now everything has become fundamentalist, we are now talking of a militant approach, and being individuals. Earlier we welcomed everybody who came to our homes – this is very Indian to me, and I have not been used to this anywhere else. Now divisions have come about even here. The more kind of people we are, we can live in greater security [in a diverse city] – in Hindi there is a saying, “hum ek dusre ke zamanath hote the” – all stood up for each other and became one. But now we are getting marginalised.

Likewise, others like Geeta Dharmarajan feel the need to provide a word of caution. Sudha Raina, while endorsing the beneficial aspects of Hinduism to sustainability in Delhi, had warned against taking a “militant approach”. Geeta Dharmarajan says that similarly spirituality also needs to strip itself of mere ritualism in order to be truly meaningful. She says:
Yes there is space for spirituality, but I think it has to be accompanied by maturity. Blind faith won’t work. A spiritual being has to know that taking a few hard knocks is part of the deal. It’s a necessary part of the deal. Spirituality is not about meditating on a mountaintop. It is about being honest and dedicated, letting yourself be vulnerable to pain. That’s what you get from Gandhi. But spirituality can help you overcome that pain – the pain that must necessarily come from participating in life fully.

Interesting and critical insights thus emerge from the conversations with these twenty women. The women feel that both spirituality and sustainability need to be developed and refined in the context of contemporary lifestyles in Delhi. They support my hypothesis that spirituality may be a useful and effective way of animating a sustainability consciousness in Delhi. Above all, these conversations point to the need to localise spirituality in relation to sustainability. In the next chapter, I will examine the potential for one particular spiritual tradition, i.e. Hindu spirituality, to arouse sustainable development in Delhi.
6. Reflections

6.1. Introduction

I have argued thus far that spirituality is a vital force in interpreting and animating the notion of sustainable development. I have shown that spirituality may be the vital means by which commitment to sustainability operates, and proposed that a spiritual grounding of sustainability may offer a successful and meaningful alternative to the reductionist and mechanistic resource regeneration approaches, capital-oriented notions of growth, and to social development that is grounded in exploitation and deprivation. In particular, I have proposed that a spiritual means of enlightening sustainable development will be particularly useful in my chosen case study, the city of Delhi in India. My interviews with twenty professional women, associated with various aspects of sustainable development in Delhi confirmed my hypothesis that spirituality might be a vital means of enabling sustainable development in the city. I have argued that there is a need for sustainable development discourse to make room for the articulation of its spiritual resources. The interviews with the women served as an indication of how sympathetic they were to the notion of grounding sustainable development in spirituality.

Religion and spirituality play a central role in the lives of most Indians. According to the Census of India (2001b), there are 2.4 million centres of worship in the country, as compared to 1.5 million schools and less than a million hospitals. According to an ORG-MARG poll conducted in 2001 in Delhi, 94 per cent of young adults below the age of 30 believe in God, 62 per cent pray regularly and 35 per cent make a weekly temple pilgrimage (Holistic Living 2001). The Art of Living (2004) organisers, who teach meditation and spiritual life skills, say that over 16,000 people took their course in Delhi in 2003 alone, as compared to about 2000 people a year in preceding years. Women spiritual leaders in India like Mata Nirmala Devi and Mata Amritanandamayi, the ‘mother who heals with a hug’ routinely draw crowds of thousands each year.

These are fairly telling statistics, even for a traditionally religious and spiritual country. If these statistics provided above are representative, they suggest that Indians are far
from a secular people. What is the reason for this longing? Why are people collectively seeking an alternative to the existing social situation? Why are they seeking to reacquire the sacred and take refuge in its mysteries? And lastly, how may this impulse be intelligently channelled to ensure an actual change of effort towards sustainable practices?

I undertake in this chapter to explore the kinds of spiritual resources that modern Hinduism might offer for the enrichment of sustainable development in the context of Delhi. My focus on Hinduism is because of its central role in Indian society, culture and political life. Hinduism is certainly by far the dominant religious tradition in India, although not the only one. Hindus form an absolute majority of the population of India at 85.06 per cent (Census 2001a). Hinduism arguably pervades the culture of Indian society. Scholars have noted the ‘encroaching quality’ of Hinduism on Indian lifestyles in general (Frawley 2003; Smith 2003). For example, Ashby notes (1974: 92):

> There are few, if any, issues that do not arouse a ‘Hindu’ response. The fact that to many Indians and non-Indians there appears to be no specifically religious factor involved in a particular problem does not remove the presence and pressure of a specifically Hindu religious attitude towards it and clamour about it. Despite India’s claim to being a secular state, religion’s involvement in politics is a central aspect of Indian national life, and it appears to some observers to be an increasing rather than a diminishing factor at both the local and national level.

It is beyond the scope of this study to consider the different forms of spirituality represented by other religious traditions. It is to be hoped, nevertheless, that the kind of analysis developed in this chapter by examining the spiritual resources offered by one particular tradition, can be applied to other such traditions, and thus encourage a form of inter-religious dialogue about sustainable development that is well and truly grounded in the pressing sustainability issues facing contemporary human society.

It is also possible that in studying Hinduism in relation to sustainability, the potential for some important affirmative comparisons with other religious and spiritual traditions may well emerge, paving the way for another argument [to be explored as a separate study] that connections such as conversations between various religious and spiritual
thoughts may serve to meaningfully inform more comprehensive notions and practices of sustainable development in increasingly culturally, religiously and nationally diverse contexts.

The chapter is structured as follows. In the next section, I provide a descriptive account of Hinduism, particularly as relevant in a contemporary urban context in India. I refer to some of the enduring ideologies of Hinduism, and argue that in spite of the emerging nationalist fervour of some right-wing political parties, it is still useful to consider the Hindu spiritual dimension to sustainable development in India. In the third section, I explore some Hindu spiritual philosophies in greater detail, as they relate to, complement and support sustainable development. In the fourth section, I examine three issues of interest to sustainability, that arose out of the findings in Chapter 4, as well as the interviews with the women in Chapter 5, namely, middle class apathy to sustainability issues; the phenomenon of corruption; and lastly, violence against women. In this section, I demonstrate that these issues are as much spiritual concerns as they are sustainability problems. However, as noted in the last chapter, gender violence does not usually occur as an important area of analysis in most sustainability discourses. Hence, in this particular site, I will first examine violence against women as a sustainability issue, and then proceed to argue that this problem, as the others, needs to address a deeper spiritual dimension. In the final section, I provide my assessment of the capacity of modern Hindu spirituality to infuse and enrich the project of sustainability in Delhi and India.

6.2. Descriptive Account of Hinduism

Broadly, in India today, there is the traditional version of Hinduism as practised in the villages, which is largely free of Western influences (Michaels 2005) and a post-secular Hinduism of the cities, that is arguably a product of Western philosophical thought (Larson 1995). My thesis is concerned with the urban genre of Hinduism as it relates to sustainability. While it is useful to have a brief account of Hinduism in its ‘entirety’, since it points to the complexity of the task that is undertaken in this thesis, I am conscious that to describe Hinduism without contextualising it in a region would be “careless” (Chaudhri 1979: 122). The diversity of Hinduism is most easily identified
based on its geographical locations (Chaudhri 1979). Therefore, I shall generally limit my account to urban-centred Hinduism.

What is ‘Hinduism’? Here, it is useful to be guided by Gerald Larson’s (1995: 142-143) astute observation that the religious narrative in India is a cacophony of several complex layered conversations, some of which even contradict each other. One therefore constantly encounters the problem of “incoherence” while attempting to understand the extent to which spiritual life informs and critiques “ordinary culture” in India (Larson 1995: 142). There no longer remains the ‘pristine’ and ‘idealised’ version of the earliest religion of India, namely, Hinduism; Larson argues (1995: 279) in fact, that even the term ‘Hinduism’ for instance, is a “theoretically vacuous expression”, because to organise reflective Indian religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism as world religions is conceptually meaningless and misleading. Larson (1995: 279) argues that it only serves “administrative or journalistic convenience.”

In a fundamental sense, Hinduism entertains no difference between spirituality, philosophy and religion (Swami Prabhavananda 1979). Hinduism is generally regarded as “the grand synthesis of all spiritual ideals” informing “a way of life”, rather than as a dogmatic institution (Swami Vireswarananda 1983: 117). As Radhakrishnan (1936: 475) points out: “In India, philosophy has been interpreted as an enquiry into the nature of man, his origin and his destiny.” Raju (1967: 183) writes:

> For any religion that is not denominational and that considers itself to be a way of life and every man a wayfarer, all values of life – ethical (including the social and political), intellectual and aesthetic – are spiritual, provided they are recognised and realised as oriented towards the innermost spirit.

Therefore, making a rigorous distinction between spirituality and religion in the context of Hinduism can be misleading, since the ultimate purpose of the Hindu way of life is self-awareness. Colonisation admittedly had a definitive role in organising the Hindu way of living as a religion. Hinduism centres as much as other religions on the notion of

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116 The Hinduism as practised and understood in the north and south of India can often be different (Chaudhri 1979). North India was geographically more vulnerable to colonial invasions, and the south therefore grew to have a greater intellectual ownership of Hinduism, particularly during the centuries of Muslim rule.
divinity [or several divinities]. However, it is possible to talk of a Hindu spirituality in Hindu religion, if one takes the view that developing self-awareness through the prescriptions from the ancient texts is a central dimension to living meaningfully. In such a context then, even the realities of contemporary life are grounded in traditional values. Spirituality and religion thus become inseparable, and mutually reinforcing.

In providing a descriptive account of Hinduism, it is beyond the scope of the thesis to describe the historical development of Hinduism, though I will refer to some of the great Hindu leaders and reformers who played a critical role in shaping Hindu thought and practices. I will provide a brief overview of Vedanta philosophy and particularly the principle of dharma, because it is arguably one of the fundamental bases of Hindu religion, and also of interest to a study on sustainability and spirituality. My interest is not so much in the ideal or aspirational form of Hinduism, or as it should be (Chaudhri 1979), but in the pragmatic realities of contemporary practice and popular belief. Lastly, I will examine the issues of Hindu fundamentalism that is evident, not only in Delhi but also in several of the other important cities of India. I will argue, however, that Hinduism is demonstrably important in Indian lifestyles in other essential, positive ways, and hence, despite the emergence of a fundamentalist strand, Hindu spirituality is an important dimension to consider while studying sustainability in India.

Undertaking to ‘describe’ Hinduism can be daunting for many reasons. One of the main problems that Western scholarship generally has with Hinduism is its seeming lack of definition, form or conceptual clarity (Michaels 2005). Axel Michaels quotes Goethe from a letter (1824, in Michaels 2005: 3): “I am by no means averse to what is Indian, but I am afraid of it because it draws my power of imagination into formlessness and deformation.” Michaels (2005: 3) himself admits: “Hinduism is not a homogeneous religion at all, but is rather a potpourri of religions, doctrines and attitudes toward life, rites and cults, moral and social norms.” However, he points out that Hinduism only lacks the form that is associated with monotheism: for instance, “there is neither one founder of the religion nor one church nor one religious leader. Nor is there one holy book or one doctrine, one religious symbol or one holy centre” (Michaels 2005: 3). In fact, he argues, religious postmodernism may be best exemplified in India where “anything goes” (Michaels 2005: 4).
However, while Hinduism has several important sects, books and interpretations, the Vedanta school of theology has been Hinduism’s most dominant philosophical tradition, oftentimes extending its influence to other religions in India as well (Flood 1996). Gavin Flood (1996: 238) calls Vedantic theology the “philosophical paradigm of Hinduism par excellence”. Of particular interest to this thesis is that Vedanta philosophy is markedly different from modern science as regards nature: Vedanta reflects on “what nature is in relation to consciousness, modern science wants to find out how it works” (Klostermaier 1989). The three most important developments of the Vedantic exegetical traditions are Advaita Vedanta or non-dualist Vedanta, which emphasises the validity of “the one over that of the many”, as well as non-difference between the self and the absolute; Visistadvaita or ‘qualified non-dualist’ where such monism is resisted, especially in the wake of the growing popularity of theism; and lastly, Dvaita Vedanta or ‘dualist’ Vedanta, which argues for a distinction between the self and the absolute (Flood 1996: 238-246).

Central to all these traditions, however is the principle of dharma, which as Flood (1996) explains, has been central and constant in Hindu thought through classical, medieval and modern times, and in both the domestic and the political realm. The term is not given to exact translation in any Western language, though it has been variously described as “duty”, “justice”, “ethics”, and “right” (Flood 1996: 52). Flood describes dharma as an “all-encompassing ideology” to govern ritual and moral behaviour. The Hindu code of law, the Dharmaśāstra, provides a set of regulations to govern individual behaviour. Dharma, with its emphasis on ethics, may also loosely be interpreted as law, albeit spiritual law (Donald 2007). Donald (2007: 333) writes:

Dharma in Dharmaśāstra encompasses the prescriptions for, the acts of, and the effects of ritual, purification, diet, statecraft, and penance in addition to rules for legal procedure, contracts, property, corporations and partnerships, inheritance, marriage, and crimes of various sorts. However, no distinctions are made between these rules and acts that would correspond to a distinction of law and religion – they are the same; they are dharma.

No reward could be expected for following dharma because it is one’s duty to do so; however, the consequences of not following dharma may manifest as suffering. Reward
for following dharma could only come from complete non-expectation of fruits from such labour (Flood 1996). However, at that state of consciousness, the seeker would be balanced and hence unshaken by the reward or lack of it. Achieving such super consciousness or supreme awareness of the self is believed to be the ultimate endeavour of every individual. Frawley (in Mehrotra 2003: 93) notes:

I feel that the view of consciousness, science of consciousness, consciousness as the supreme reality, human life as a species for the evolution of consciousness is unique to the Indian ethos. India has nurtured the culture of consciousness in all its forms without clashing with, or contradicting, the diversity of religions, philosophies, spiritual practices and lifestyles, which are integrated into the culture.

In the decades since independence, however, Hinduism has experienced several unsettling impacts from powerful political and economic influences, as well as the growing presence of Western culture in India (Chaudhri 1979). This impact is most obvious in the cities; the villages remain relatively untouched, and rural-based Hinduism is “still living and strong, but very simple” (Chaudhri 1979: 103). However, the strong pre-colonial, pre-secular Hindu religious predominance in the cities has experienced some corrosion (Chaudhri 1979).

The city itself is an important site in Hindu religion. While Gandhi instinctively identified with the villages of India, he was clear that he essentially rejected the technology-oriented model of cities, and pointed to Ayodhya, which was believed to be the kingdom of Lord Rama or Rama-rajya in ancient times, as the ideal, perfectly governed city. The Ramayana, the classical epic text celebrates Ayodhya as the “ideal Hindu city” (Smith 2003: 31), which had every sort of profession, trade and artisan, where everyone had jewellery, and well-ordered, closely located houses.

Like the other historic cities of India, Ayodhya has also been invaded numerous times, and is today a “reconstructed” city (Smith 2003: 31). Ayodhya was revived in the national consciousness in the 1980s, when the national television Doordarshan aired the Ramayana as a year-long, weekly feature (Smith 2003). Most recently, Ayodhya was the site of communal riots between the Hindus and Muslims in 1992 when Hindu
fundamentalists destroyed a 500-year-old mosque in the city on the grounds that it stood on the exact birth spot of Lord Rama.

Smith (2003) explains that the Western philosophical tradition interacted, debated and collided most with traditional Hindu religion in the four great cities of India, three of which were built by the British [Chennai (Madras), Kolkata (Calcutta) and Mumbai (Bombay); while the fourth, Delhi, was adopted by the British\textsuperscript{117}]. While the British-inspired modern city was “designed to flaunt the superior rationality and power of the Raj…it remained external to the life of the society” (Smith 2003: 28). The people most seduced by the “modern mentality” were the bhadralok or the English-speaking upper classes of Calcutta, which was also the city where most of the neo-Hindu reform movements were born (Smith 2003: 30).

Hinduism emerged as a world religion because its urban reformers in the British colonial era were interested in restoring it to its classical greatness, having become concerned about the extent of decay and superstition that had begun to characterise it (Flood 1996). They were also simultaneously interested in abolishing several of the unethical social practises conducted in the name of religion, such as widow-burning, child marriage and caste-related exploitation (Flood 1996). Reformers such as Swami Vivekananda, who is credited with making the most impressive introduction of Hinduism to the West [in the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1913], emphasised that Hinduism is “pluralistic and accepts all religions as aspects of one truth” (Flood 1996: 258). Vivekananda was the first to clearly define Hinduism as a ‘world religion’, and his views found and continue to find favour with upper class, English-educated, urban Indians (Flood 1996).

Of all the great reformers, however, the most enduring legacy nationwide was left by Gandhi, who himself was also significantly influenced by Vivekananda (Flood 1996). Gandhi had thoroughly studied Hinduism, and had left almost no part of its vast scriptures uncommented (Kumarappa 1950). While he constantly called on people to remain true to their religion of birth, he was also clear that one should not be held hostage to the scriptures if they were contradictory to the truth (Kumarappa 1950).

\textsuperscript{117} The British built a section of Delhi as New Delhi as the capital of British India. However, the city itself was already a thriving urban centre prior to British occupation.
Bharatan Kumarappa wrote soon after Gandhi’s assassination by a Hindu fundamentalist in 1948 (1950: ix):

If Hinduism has a future, it is Hinduism as presented by Gandhiji that has it in certain and abundant measure. Gandhiji’s Hinduism is the Hinduism of old in all its pristine purity, reborn and practised under modern conditions. Hindu doctrines and terminology, which at times appear to us of today as strange, outmoded and unintelligible, disclose new meaning and value as interpreted by Gandhiji. In him, Hinduism speaks to modern man in his own language.

Gandhi was a firm advocate of Advaita Vedanta or non-dualist Vedanta, and believed that Truth was God, which represented both the Supreme Being as well as the self (Flood 1996). For Gandhi, ahimsa or non-violence was an extension of the Truth, and he was firmly convinced of its practical relevance to all forms of social and political life (Flood 1996). Gandhi (1946: 432) wrote: “Ahimsa, which to me is the chief glory of Hinduism has been sought to be explained away by our people as being meant for Sannyasis [ascetics] only. I do not share that view. I have held that it is the way of life.”

In Gandhi’s political and social reform activities, he found religious scriptures immensely useful and a personal source of strength (Gandhi 1949). He was interested in removing the ills wrought by colonialism, but was also concerned with reforming social life more generally. Above all else, he was devoted to his personal self-actualisation, and encouraged the same of his followers. Gandhian philosophies and strategies for political and social reform are richly attractive to development workers, because they offer pragmatic methodologies for translating the motherhood ideals of religion into action.

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118 Nathu Ram Godse shot Mahatma Gandhi because he was of the opinion that Gandhi was excessively pandering to Muslim interests during and after Partition. However, views comparing Gandhi to the great misunderstood prophets such as Jesus, Buddha and Mohammed are common. Kumarappa (1950) is of the view that as religion degenerates over time, its followers generally tend to attach themselves to the outer, superficial, dry form of religion, and are ignorant of, or dismiss, the pure version of the religion as exhorted by the prophets. When such a prophet does come to reawaken the masses, he says, orthodox followers are suspicious of them, and seek to eliminate them. Thus, argues Kumarappa (1950), the prophet is more often than not, humiliated and killed by his [or her] own people.
In stark contrast to Gandhi’s Hinduism is the fundamentalist version of Hinduism that has become influential in recent years. The major cities of India particularly, have been stages for violent conflict between Hinduism and Western modernity (Smith 2003). The proponents of the Hindu right, notably the Bharatiya Janata Party [BJP or the Indian Peoples’ Party], the Vishwa Hindu Parishad [VHP or the World Hindu Council] and the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh [RSS or the National Volunteer Organisation], hark back to the romantic notion of India as a Hindu state, based on the ancient model of an idealised Hindu India, before the first ever colonial invasion. In contemporary politics, Hindutva [or ‘Hinduness’] has become a political agenda to counter the threat faced by Islamic fundamentalism and international terrorism. The terror spawned by political parties who use Hindutva to perpetuate a policy of exclusion is most clear in the state of Maharashtra, where the state political party Shiv Sena was intent in the 1990s on creating a “Mumbai for Mumbaikars” – a Mumbai which would neither have non-Hindus or even non-Maharashtrians.

In recent years, India has also gone through a frenzied process of renaming its major cities, based on the argument that it is taking decolonisation to its logical end. Calcutta has been renamed Kolkata, Madras is now Chennai, and Bombay has been renamed Mumbai. There is a strong party demanding that India itself be called Bharat. However, the purpose seems as much de-Islamisation, as much as decolonisation (Mehta 2004). According to Mehta (2004: 140): “The idea is to go back not just to a past but an idealised past, in all cases a Hindu past.” While they appeal richly to large groups, particularly in the face of the threat of global Islamic terrorism, these groups have also been called Hindu reactionaries, communalists or fundamentalists by secularists, sections of the media and a significant majority of the country’s middle and upper classes, regardless of their religious affiliation (Mehta 2004).

Scholars however continue to point to what they view as the ability of Hinduism to encourage peaceful co-existence with other religions. More than twenty years ago, Derrett (1986: 79) had said of Hinduism’s remarkable resilience in India: “A balance of forces is still needed and because it favours it, Hinduism still dominates.” Hinduism continues to prevail in India, and it is arguable that its numerical representation is only one important reason. During colonial rule, scholars like Max Mueller had predicted the extinction of Hinduism and had concluded that the religion, unable to withstand the
impact of foreign rule, was either already dead or dying (Chaudhri 1979). Other are
convinced that Hinduism, while alive, is stagnant, although this, Chaudhri argues (1979:
120), is a typical belief reinforcing the idea of “an unchanging East”. This standpoint is
particularly characteristic of scholarship on caste, Hindu joint family kinships and
Hindu women (Chaudhri 1979). Chaudhri (1979: 120) argues that the real state of
Hinduism is that “the more it changes, the more it remains the same thing. So, it creates
the impression of staticity, and perhaps even of stagnancy.”

Above all, he points out, the vitality and resilience of Hinduism should be evident in its
ability to constantly adapt to foreign domination, and yet survive, even without any
support from organised secular or even spiritual organisations or leadership (Chaudhri
1979). However, Swami Nikhilananda (1967: 217) observes:

Loyalty to certain spiritual concepts has preserved Indian society during the many
centuries of foreign domination. During the darkest period of Indian history, great
thinkers, saints and prophets never failed to exhort the people to perform their
social duties, face misfortune calmly, cultivate patience, and keep faith in the
ultimate triumph of righteousness and truth…spirituality has preserved the
country’s vitality up to modern times…

The “psychological hold” of Hinduism in India, Chaudhri (1979: 120) concludes, is no
less powerful than that of the nation-state. It should seem but natural then, that such a
hold should extend itself to exercising a significant influence on the other important
forces that impact human lifestyles in India, among them a need to create a
consciousness of sustainable development. In the next section, I make a more detailed
exploration of particular Hindu spiritual traditions that lend themselves to enlightening
the concept of sustainable development.

6.3. Hinduism and Sustainable Development: A Conceptual Connection

Nirad Chaudhri (1979: 1) makes the valid observation that scholars understandably have
trouble writing about a coherent view of Hinduism because of its mind-boggling
diversity, and generally rescue themselves by identifying “only those features which in
their view contain its religious messages.” Chaudhri (1979: 1) objects to such
approaches because they “falsify” and “divide” a religion, whose very character is its kaleidoscopic and psychedelic personality. Therefore, he recommends that Hinduism may be explained in its entirety as a summary, on a “small scale”, instead of selective analysis because Hinduism has to be “met on its own terms”.

However, while such an approach may be commendable while writing only about Hinduism, in this thesis I am writing about Hinduism as it relates to the concept of sustainable development. As discussed in Chapter 2, while sustainability itself is a flexible term, certain key features of the notion are easily identified. It is necessary for me therefore, to similarly identify those particular features of Hinduism that in my view best supplement and strengthen the understanding and practice of sustainable development. Therefore, my discussion on how particular principles and practices within Hinduism are relevant to the shaping of a more spiritually grounded ethos of sustainable development in India will focus on two broad aspects: the four-fold path as contained in the Purusharthas, and on Gandhi’s emphasis on the need to recognise the larger spiritual horizon of political and economic endeavour.

Before elaborating on how specific aspects of Hindu spirituality could enrich a notion of sustainability in the context of Delhi, it is necessary to pause and consider the scope of sustainability itself. Is it largely about meeting the physical standards of environmental, social and economic development [as it may be broadly understood], or does it aim at something larger? Here, it would be useful to refer back to Gandhi’s (1949) consistent and unshakeable conviction that beyond independence from British imperialism, the enduring quest of the Indian people should really be to achieve independence from the self. He was consistent in his belief that freedom from colonial rule alone would be meaningless without authentic freedom or self-liberation and he was no less disciplined with himself in his quest to that end. For Gandhi, freedom or swaraj had four dimensions: national freedom, human freedom, economic equality, and above all, self-development (Hunt 2003). It is worth recalling Gandhi’s words from Chapter 2:

What I want to achieve – what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years – is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain moksha [self-liberation]. I live and move and have my being in pursuit of that goal. All that I do
by way of speaking and writing, and all my ventures in the political field, are directed to this same end.

It is similarly a useful exercise to reflect on what exactly would be the sustainability ideal. Assuming the physical requirements of sustainability were achieved – a paperless world running efficiently on renewable energy and so forth – what next? Can it be understood that meaningful sustainability has truly been achieved without attention to the spiritual dimension of life? What may constitute truly sustainable human lives? In visualising India’s future, religious thinkers have had a different vision from development planners; they clearly saw a spiritual dimension to any notion of progress. Swami Nikhilananda says (1967: 217):

If India abandons her spiritual heritage and takes exclusively to politics, science and technology to build her future, she will be courting disaster: this is the lesson of India’s past. But the spiritual truths of Hinduism must be reformulated with the help of science, technology and a modern philosophy to suit the conditions of our age.

I attempt here to make these connections between Hindu spirituality and sustainability principles. I propose that what a spiritual philosophy essentially needs to do is to create a sustainable mindset or an attitude or a constant state of being sympathetic to sustainability. Something of a ‘before’ and ‘after’ [true sustainability] syndrome begins to inform such a concept; in other words, such a mindset is required both to be mindful of the restraints and requirements necessary to achieve a physical ideal of sustainability, as well as transcend the physical and material realm to a greater self-awareness that may keep the ongoing commitment to such sustainability meaningful.

Ancient Indian saints have attempted to understand the fundamental values of life, which may guide both individuals and the community to live their lives such that they may individually and collectively serve human purpose. Hinduism has often reduced scholars to despair with its range of principles and prescriptions, which are often seemingly contradictory. However, Hinduism is consistent offering a realistic recognition of human nature and emphasising that both want and need are legitimate desires (Swami Atmananda 2000). The disconnect between want and need is arguably
one of the main fundamental tensions of sustainable development, which has to constantly address the question: how much is enough? ‘Restraint’ has been the battle cry of environmentalists for instance, as opposed to the tendency of capital-oriented groups to consume more.

From a religious perspective, Hinduism is a pragmatic religion and recognises such fundamental tensions. In its four-fold path to self-actualisation, which is elucidated in the four Purusharthaśs – which literally means, “that which is sought by human beings” (Kuppuswamy 1977: 49) – it prescribes methods to address such conflicts within individuals. The ultimate aim of the Purusharthaśs is to lead the seeker to self-liberation or self-actualisation through a process of self-awareness. Swami Atmananda (2000) explains that just as it is necessary to be clear about one’s destination while travelling, so it is important to be clear about one’s goals while embarking on any mission, be it spiritual or worldly.¹¹⁹

The four milestones in this journey to self-liberation are: artha, pursuit of material wealth and power; kama, the preoccupation with sexual pleasures and physical experiences; dharma, the commitment to conscientious living and finally, moksha, or liberation from the self²¹² (Kuppuswamy, 1977: 52-57). Hinduism explicitly permits the enjoyment of worldly pleasures; its philosophy specifically gives materialism legitimacy. It recognises that the realities of the material world have to be acknowledged realistically. However, pursuit of artha and kama does not justify exploitation of social, economic or environmental resources.

For example, in respect of artha, the Purusharthaśs clearly explain that the wealth may be pursued only as a means to self-realisation (Swami Atmananda 2000). Similarly, with regards to kama, Chaudhri (1979) notes that Hinduism makes no distinction

¹¹⁹ Gandhi believed however, that once the goal was clear, it was more important to focus on the means used to reach the goal. This message is also implicit in the Purusharthaśs.

²¹² In the twentieth century, psychologist Abraham Maslow (1968) arrived at similar conclusions by identifying a table of needs, where higher needs such as self-actualisation or ‘the peak experience’ may be achieved only after fulfilling the base needs such as food, shelter and security. Maslow’s table of needs (1968) argues that all human needs and wants are organised into a hierarchy, where realisation of lower level requirements that are physiological are a precondition to the experience of higher and more sublime levels of satisfaction, like inner peace, ‘love and belongingness’, ‘high self-esteem’, and finally, ‘self-actualisation’ (Maslow 1968).
between the flesh and the spirit, and believes that experience of sensual pleasure may be essential to self-liberation. In the 10th chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna says: “I am omnipresent, but in the human body, I take the form of desire, particularly sexual desire” (Radhakrishnan 2005: 264). There have been celibate Hindu philosophers such as Gandhi who believed in absolute abstinence, and expected the same of his followers. Nonetheless, Hinduism believes that both experience and denial are valid paths to self-actualisation and it takes the view that experience, as opposed to denial is the pathway for most people (Chaudhri 1979). Gandhi himself took the path of experience as a householder, and embraced celibacy subsequently.121

The ancients believed that wealth and sensual desire are likely to strongly retard the process of self-realisation and distract the seeker; therefore, their experience is necessary for the seeker to be able to revert his or her consciousness back to the main goal of moksha or self-liberation (Swami Atmananda 2000). Kuppuwamy (1977) explains that moksha is not a state of freedom that one experiences posthumously, but something one strives to attain in living itself. However, to ensure that artha and kama are not used to justify untrammelled consumption and self-indulgence, the third guideline, dharma provides a critical check. In fact, where there was any apparent discord between the Arthashastras [laws governing artha] or the Kamasutra [laws governing kama], and the Dharmashastras [laws governing dharma], the latter always prevails (Vittal 2001). Viewed in this context, the Purusharthaśas recommend neither self-indulgence, nor self-mortification; rather, they suggest a balanced middle path to livelihood, conduct, aspirations and rapture, and view self-actualisation as a fruit of sustained self-development, rather than divine grace.

The state of moksha may be best described, not as a state of “beatitude” but of “power”, of complete self-awareness and self-control (Chaudhri 1979: 314-315). Furthermore, moksha is a dynamic state of being as are the other three stages of the Purusharthaśas: they all have an “introvert expression” and an “extrovert expression” (Chaudhri 1979: 316). These expressions are the Jnana Marga or the Way of Knowledge and the Karma Marga or the Way of Action respectively (Chaudhri 1979). They are both steadfast in their pursuit of “the desire to overcome the [physical] limits to human existence” so that

121 This has also been the path of Gautama Buddha, an apostle of enlightenment in the Indic religious tradition.
they may attain a spiritual experience based on non-attachment (Chaudhri 1979: 316). One of the most beautiful verses in the *Upanishad* scriptures calls thus (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 3.28):

Lead me from non-being to being;
Lead me from darkness to light;
Lead me from death to immortality.

Inherent in the quest for immortality and indestructibility is the recognition of the interrelatedness of all things. Immortality in this context does not imply the continued life of the physical body. Rather, it refers to the consciousness of one’s ‘oneness’ with the cosmos and thus indestructibility at some fundamental level. The entire cosmos, and the state of *moksha* or supreme self-awareness, are thus mutually dependent (Chaudhri 1979). Indestructibility or immortality was possible based on the following premise, which according to Chaudhri (1979: 317) was subsequently validated by modern physics:\(^{122}\):

[Hindus believed] that behind all manifested phenomena which were subject to change and therefore also to destruction, there existed, consubstantial with them and yet inaccessible to the senses, an unmanifested, attributeless, unchangeable and all-pervasive element which was eternal and indestructible. They also formulated the corollary that phenomena were only parts of a general and absolute reality.

How then might the conversation between the concept of sustainability and these spiritual principles begin? Can a Hindu worldview lend itself to creating a spiritually-enlightened *sustainable mindset*? One impediment that immediately springs to mind is that the four-fold path, in its quest for human self-awareness, appears very human centred. Where is a Hindu concept of nature, and of human beings’ relationship to nature, that is so central to the sustainability concept? A second concern is that at some level, the four-fold path seems to authorise unrestrained consumption and wealth generation, even if it only does so as a learning experience, as an opportunity to

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\(^{122}\) Physics explains the same in the following way: ‘matter can neither be created nor destroyed’.
discover how fundamentally unsatisfying it is. At the same time, the movement towards enlightenment and self-realisation, and the notion that adherence to conscious and self-conscious living is the route to moksha has clear resonances with the concept of achieving sustainability through self-conscious utilisation of the earth’s resources in a judicious manner, preserving the earth, exercising restraint and behaving in a socially equitable and just manner. In the remainder of this section, I would like to explore these concerns.

Ancient Hindu poets and seers demonstrated a remarkable awareness of nature. In the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata, the vast numbers of flora and fauna in the forests where Rama and Sita were exiled are described in painstaking detail; the great Himalayas and the Vindhya mountains are eulogised, and the peace and tranquillity of the ashrams [hermitages] in natural surroundings are exalted (Klostermaier 1989).

The central perception of nature in Hinduism is interwoven with the goal of self-realisation. The human relationship with nature is that of the sishya or the disciple, to the guru or the master: “nature acts precisely as the human guru does; proposing through words and by example a path leading to insight and realization”123 (Klostermaier 1989: 320). The pursuit of self-realisation thus inherently encompasses the relationships of human beings to nature. An authentic and true awareness and understanding of nature is believed to deliver the individual from “any need to transform nature into consumer goods” (Klostermaier 1989: 320). The Patanjali Yoga Sutras, for example, speak of the reality of the human condition and its possibilities by meditating on “the nature of nature” (Klostermaier 1989: 333). Yoga may be described as the means of “fitting into the universe”; “the true yogi is a person who ‘fits’ into the whole and thus is at peace with himself [or herself] and the world” (Klostermaier 1989: 333).

123 The following story (Klostermaier 1989: 320) illustrates this. In the Bhagavata Purana (11.7.9), the young saint Dattatreya describes how he achieved self-awareness by following twenty-four gurus, all of whom were from nature. The Earth guru taught him for instance that “existence in a body is a being-for-others to be lived out in humility and forbearance”; the Fire guru was an example by “being full of splendour...not sullied by what is consumed...sometimes hidden, sometimes visible...burning up past and future sin”; even the honeybee guru teaches him to “collect the essence from all the scriptures”. The last guru was Dattatreya’s own body, which vulnerable to both life and death, teaches him to contemplate transience, and makes him realise that the body is only meant for the service of others. These lessons make Dattatreya aware of the “the true nature of things".
Hinduism’s contribution to sustainability comes from the fact that it locates human beings within nature. Ecofeminists and ecophilosophers have long complained that human beings tend to disassociate themselves from the natural environment as ‘superior’ to it (Shiva 1993). However, as part of its spiritual practice, Hindu spirituality, in fact, elevates nature to a higher status than humans [as their guru], and thus makes care and respect for nature a spiritual duty.

Out of the four stages of the Purusharthas, the stage of dharma or the prescriptions for righteous behaviour is arguably instrumental in encouraging a sustainable mindset, and provides a check on the excesses that may be justified in the pursuit of artha and kama. The stage of dharma is where the most profitable connections between Hinduism and sustainable development might be made. Moksha is an ideal state of mind and being, and that is the ends to which obedience to dharma is the means. Dharma is essentially focused on ensuring the welfare of both the individual and the community; to this end, the extensive texts on dharma prescribes the standards of good conduct for all individuals, with particular advice for persons responsible for peaceful societies, such as rulers (Nigam 2002 et al).

In proposing pragmatic methodologies for translating the Purusharthas into action, I put forward that it is useful to be guided by Gandhi’s understanding of the principle of Sarvodaya, or the welfare of all, and ahimsa or non-violence. The welfare of all, according to Gandhi, depended on accepting the unconditional equality of all human beings, from the king to the labourer (Gandhi 1954). It also depended on the commitment to the ‘right means’. Gandhi (1951) was convinced that the right means would necessarily lead to the right ends; for this very reason, he spent no time on elaborating on the details of an ideal society, and was devoted entirely to the means by which such a society might be achieved. Gandhi (1951: 5-6) wrote:

The clearest possible definition of the goal and its appreciation would fail to take us there, if we do not know and utilize the means of achieving it. I have, therefore, concerned myself principally with the conservation of the means and their progressive use. I know if we can take care of them, attainment of the goal is assured. I feel too that our progress towards the goal will be in exact proportion to
the purity of our means. This method may appear to be long, perhaps too long, but I am convinced that it is the shortest.

Viewed in such a context, the Purusharthas, particularly artha and kama may only be pursued using the right means, namely, with devotion to dharma [duty or ethics]. Gandhi’s insistence on eschewing material and aesthetic pleasures completely to the cause of self-development has been regarded by many as “Gandhi’s Utopia” (Hunt 2003: 194). However, by understanding the wisdom of the Purusharthas in this manner, the material realities of human existence continue to be acknowledged, but in a manner that only permits their enjoyment in obedience to the laws of duty.

Gandhi (1954) was also convinced that ahimsa or non-violence was a fundamental pre-requisite to attaining moksha or the complete awareness of the Truth; for him, the two were intimately interwoven. Gandhi (1954: 8) wrote:

Without Ahimsa, it is not possible to seek and find Truth. Ahimsa and Truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like the two sides of a coin, or rather of a smooth unstamped metallic disc. Who can say, which is the obverse, and which is the reverse? Nevertheless, Ahimsa is the means, Truth is the end…and so Ahimsa is our supreme duty.

Ahimsa forms one of the main tenets of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. However, for centuries prior to British rule, ahimsa remained strictly within the purview of individual spiritual journeys, as a way of ultimately achieving salvation (Hunt 2003). Mahatma Gandhi revolutionised the notion of ahimsa for the first time by using it as a very practical and strategic institutional tool against British oppression. Internalising the spirit of ahimsa or non-violence, according to Gandhi (1949), was instrumental in achieving self-realisation. Ahimsa was thus both a value and a strategy for Gandhi. For sustainability too, viewing ahimsa as both value and strategy is useful because it

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124 The notion of ahimsa is perhaps stretched to its limits in Jainism. For instance, Hinduism and Buddhism condone meat consumption under certain circumstances; however, Jainism completely forbids non-vegetarianism. Jainas are required to ensure that their breath does not kill even micro-organisms by covering their noses, and they believe that even ostensibly lifeless objects such as stones and rocks do, indeed, feel pain.
foregrounds integrity in the *means* to be sustainable. Gandhi (1954: 8) explains *ahimsa* thus:

> Not to hurt any living thing is no doubt a part of Ahimsa. But it is its least expression. The principle of Ahimsa is violated by every evil thought, by undue haste, by lying, by hatred, by wishing ill to anybody. It is also violated by our holding on to what the world needs.

In pragmatic terms, translating the wisdom of the scriptures into action in the context of sustainability may not necessarily be complex; I propose that it calls more on cultivating a strong sense of discipline and commitment. Sustainability, like spiritual self-knowledge, arguably requires meticulous attention to right action, deed and thought. Here, it is relevant to refer to some Gandhian strategies to arouse and strengthen the individual and collective conscience. A theme that is quite at the centre of the strategy to *be* sustainable is Gandhi’s notion of ‘will power’. Gandhi firmly believed that the human will power was one of the most important instruments available to humanity to enable it to achieve self-liberation (Varma 2006). Varma (2006: 15) thus defines Gandhi’s notion of will power:

> Having chosen what he [or she] desires from among alternative ends or means, the human being focuses his [or her] mind, speech and action exclusively on what he [or she] has chosen, not allowing his [or her] mind to stray or waver, ensuring that all the material, intellectual, moral and spiritual resources/powers at his [or her] command are used to pursue the goal, or confine himself to the ends that he [or she] has chosen.

Gandhi believed that this ‘will power’ lies within every human being and could be employed to advance human beings in both the mundane, as well as in the spiritual realms (Varma 2006). To this end, Gandhi’s supreme tool was the vow[^125], which he demonstrated could be used to overcome both individual and collective struggles. Gandhi specifically promoted the vow as a means to overcome human weaknesses and

[^125]: Mahatma Gandhi launched each one of his mass movements advancing *satyagraha* [truth-force] after undertaking a vow (Varma 2006). In mass movements, this vow was collectively undertaken by tens of thousands of his followers; in his personal life too, Gandhi resorted to the vow to assist his spiritual self-discipline (Gandhi 1949).
temptations through use of will power, and is a useful design in committing with
devotion and integrity to the cause of sustainability.

Gandhi’s position on the vow was one of disciplined non-compromise. He explains the
vow thus (1950: 246): “Taking vows is not a sign of weakness, but of strength. To do
something at any cost, something that one ought to do constitutes a vow. It becomes a
bulwark of strength.” He emphasised that the value of vows in assisting self-realisation
should never be underestimated (Gandhi 1950). While taking vows, he specifically
cautioned against adding the caveat ‘as far as possible’ and called such a clause “a fatal
loophole” (Gandhi 1950: 246). God himself, he said, would be God no more if He
swerved from His laws by even the breadth of a hair. Gandhi (1950: 246) pointed to the
Sun as an example of “the great keeper of observances”, who obeys his own laws
tirelessly without wavering for an instant.

A vow may be most easily and meaningfully fulfilled when there is accord in thought,
verbal speech and action (Gandhi 1950). Such harmony required constant alertness, the
ability to learn through failure and to renew the sense of commitment, and complete
devotion to the truth of what is (Gandhi 1950). Of the several vows that Gandhi and his
followers lived by126, he placed the greatest emphasis on truth.

The Purusharthas are thus useful in serving as a pragmatic guideline for sustainable
living; however, it is important to be alert to the risk that its proposals on the pursuit of
wealth and other pleasures are not misappropriated to support unsustainability.
Particularly, the ethic of “introverted” expression needs to be engaged with in the
pursuit of artha and kama, and the “extroverted” expression is important while
practicing dharma. The Purusharthas also provide the space and knowledge-based
resources for on-going intelligent introspection. Notably, Gandhi’s method of using the
vow as a means of self-discipline is a useful tool in initiating and maintaining both
individual and collective commitment to living sustainably.

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126 In his Ashram, Gandhi asked his followers to take eleven vows (Gandhi 1950). These were:
Truth, Non-violence, Chastity, Non-possession, Control of the Palate, Non-stealing,
Fearlessness, Removal of Untouchability, Bread Labour, Equality of Religions and Swadeshi
[self-reliance].
In Chapter 2, I argued for the potential of spirituality in effecting change in relationships with the community and the environment, empowering and inspiring people to commit to new methods of living, and developing greater positive leadership. In the next section, therefore, I examine three sustainability issues in Delhi that arose out of the literature survey in Chapter 4 and the interviews in Chapter 5, and explore how these may be addressed using spirituality as an animating means.

6.4. Three Sites Exploring Hinduism and Sustainable Development

I have argued that what motivates one to change belief, what underpins and supports a deep commitment to changing how one lives and behaves, and creates the sense of voluntarily seeking the right path, is a deep spirituality. Without engendering devotion to sustainability, the concept and all the years of carefully accumulated wisdom since the Brundtland Commission report, are in danger of being lost. The mere knowledge of the need to be sustainable would be rendered ineffectual without exhibiting devotion to that knowledge through practice. It is useful here to refer to the eminent Indian statesman and philosopher C. Rajagopalachari’s summation of the Vedantic approach to knowledge (1970):

The ray of devotion is not different from the ray of knowledge called gnana. When intelligence matures and lodges securely in the mind, it becomes wisdom. When wisdom is integrated with life and issues out in action, it becomes bhakti [devotion]. Knowledge, when it becomes fully mature, is bhakti [devotion]. If it does not get transformed into bhakti, such knowledge is useless tinsel. To believe that gnana and bhakti, knowledge and devotion, are different from each other is ignorance.

In the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, injunctions for the practical application of the scriptures through yoga are provided (Swami Ranganathanda 2003). Yoga is frequently misunderstood as merely the physical asanas or the stretching exercises; however Swami Ranganathanda clarifies (2003: 117): “The profound definition of yoga is ‘efficiency in action’.” The Gita identifies two types of efficiencies: “productive efficiency” and “equanimity in all situations” (Swami Ranganathanda 2003: 117). By
focusing only on the former, human beings tend to become mechanical; therefore, the efficiency of the human spirit or nature deserves equal consideration.

In Swami Ranganathanda's (2003) analysis of the Indian bureaucracy for instance, he notes that the institutions invested with the responsibility for the highest social good in India such as the Indian Administrative Services [IAS] have, in fact, formally adopted the "profound definition" of yoga as their dictum. However, he goes on to point out, the failure of most of the public officials to manifest wisdom into action has led to the rapid decline of the IAS into a corrupt organisation. In a similar way, while the motherhood ideals as enunciated by Hinduism are arguably known in India, their practical application is poor – wisdom is not manifest into action. These principles deserve more critical application in integrating them in daily living. The secular structures of modern India have been quite effective in weakening the practical application of the spiritual and the religious in the public and official life. It may be noted, nonetheless, I am going to focus only on the way the spiritual principles may be applied at the level of personal and inter-personal behaviour. It is beyond the scope of the thesis to address the longer processes of institutionalising such norms.

However, for sustainability to be meaningful and vibrant, I have broadly argued that both the understanding and the practical application of spiritual principles to the notion of sustainable development are useful. In the ensuing sections, I identify three sites of interest in the context of sustainable development and spirituality in Delhi, which emerged from both the literature review in Chapter 4 and the interviews with the women in Chapter 5. These are: the middle class indifference, the phenomenon of corruption, and violence against women. Given the discussion on how Hinduism can meaningfully inform sustainable development, I now explore how these connections can be pragmatically applied to encourage a shift towards a sustainable mindset in Delhi. It is important to note, of course, that observations and conclusions that arise out of such explorations are purely tentative and exploratory. However, as argued below, they are worthy of consideration.
Middle Class Indifference and Lack of Empathy

The middle classes in rising India are happily obeying the global economy’s exhortation to spend and consume. Chapter 4 had dwelt at length on the adverse impacts on sustainability of this profligate tendency of the growing consuming classes, and the women in Chapter 5 subsequently echoed these concerns. In the context of this thesis, it is necessary to first address the fact that this dizzy state of affairs in Gandhi’s India is further supported by skewed and convenient misinterpretations of religious principles. From a Hindu spiritual perspective, the problem of excessive consumption is not merely one of profligate use of resources – it also expresses a distortion of spirit.

According to the Purusharthas, the seeker who disregards the principle of artha violates the means of achieving an ideal state of being. Moksha is a natural consequence of following artha and kama according to the principles of dharma. However, artha is to be treated as the means to an end, instead of as the end in itself. When artha is treated as a divine sanction to engage in untrammelled consumerism, it leads to a complete disregard for the environmental and the society.

Nevertheless, there is a strong tendency, particularly within the media, to represent the notion of artha as an injunction to spend. For example, eminent columnist Jug Suraiya (2007) advises his middle-class readers to go on a “gilt trip”, rather than a “guilt trip” in the weeks leading up to Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights. He insists that austerity is the core belief of Semitic religions; he writes (2007): “In the Indian tradition, on the contrary, far from being a sin, wealth is a goddess, Lakshmi, to be rejoiced in and not shunned.” He reassures his readers that they are only doing their “bit for Lakshmi” by indulging in hedonistic behaviour.

What role then in real terms, does spirituality play in the life of middle-class Indians? Ashis Nandy (1983: 81) writes: “Spirituality is hardly the overwhelming aspect of Indianess, yet there remains an irreducible element of spiritual concerns which inform the toughest materialism in India.” Varma (2004: 102) echoes this argument: “Materialism and spirituality coexist in India in ways, I suspect, that strengthen the former without eroding the hold of religion.”
There is danger of spirituality itself becoming a consumerist commodity. The term ‘microwave spirituality’, for instance, refers to spirituality for the fast-food customer, who pops the product in the oven for a few seconds and expects to see the results immediately (Larios 2005). In Delhi, there is evidence of spirituality being made sexy and saleable: enlightened materialism, chanting-while-cooking, yoga-while-showering and Zen-while-shopping all seem to be the among the new, confused potpourri mix of contemporary spiritual practices, along with temple pilgrimages, weekly fasts, private bargains with God and service to the needy.

Therefore, as against Varma’s argument (2004), I take the view, that in fact, the “hold of religion” over middle-class India has considerably “eroded”, for there is seemingly no mature grasp of Hinduism’s principles on materialism. Further, it is provocative but useful to consider that the middle classes are probably quite aware of this. Burke (not dated: 1) examines the causes behind endemic social and environmental problems and concludes that people “know” the adverse impacts of their behaviour “but do it anyway”. In his ‘Myth of Hindsight’ theory, he “refutes the notion that ‘if we had known better, we would have done it differently.’” He argues that we be wary of ‘Hindsight’ – that we see it as a myth and that in assessing endemic problems that are not new but not resolved either, we “distinguish between a legacy that is caused by ignorance and/or circumstance, and a legacy that is a result of arrogance” (Burke not dated: 1). He argues (not dated: 1), “A legacy or inertia that is the result of arrogance requires a different policy approach than one caused by ignorance or circumstance. Basically the ‘myth of hindsight’ tells us that many of our persistent problems are not due to information deficit.”

Interestingly, the problem of arrogance in India may also have spiritual roots [and hence the need for spiritually-based solutions]. Varma (1998) correctly notes that in India, the concept of karma or destiny tends to promote a sense of fatalism amongst the lower classes, and a sense of smugness or complacency amongst the middle and upper classes. Karma, in fact, is primarily an ‘active’ notion, for it calls on the seeker to be attentive to taking the path of righteousness in the present life so as to ensure a happy destiny in future lives (Varma 1998). The notion of arrogance, and the reasons for such behaviour, is complex and ambiguous. However, these are theories that are worthy of further exploration.
While the above trends may seem to serve as reasons against using spirituality as a useful resource for enabling sustainability, I agree with Lyn White’s (1967) argument that if the cause of environmental problems lies in religious ideologies, then the solutions must rise from the same source. Given that Hinduism is seen particularly as approving rampant consumerism, the check on such unlimited greed must also come from Hinduism. The sustainability issue arises out of the fact that religious messages are selectively institutionalised. In a particular global context, these messages then become narrowly interpreted and discriminatively adopted, thus leading to problems, instead of solutions. The middle classes in Delhi have to be encouraged to become drivers of solutions, instead of drivers of problems.

The message of the Purusharthas is clear. The four-fold path has to be informed by following the dictums of dharma. Donald (2007: 336) explains that dharma may be understood as “law plus religion plus morality”, and offers clarity on the behaviour and intention that should inspire each human act. Based on Lord Rama’s interpretation of dharma from the epic text Ramayana, Donald (2007) explains that it also means the pursuit of righteous behaviour, within the family, community and the country (Donald 2007). In contemporary and pragmatic terms and in the context of the socially apathetic middle classes, this may be translatable into convincing them to become proactive in addressing the range of sustainability issues in Delhi.

For instance, Varma (1998) argues that the very nature of reaching out to the ‘other’ India that exists along the soft lights and air-conditioned palatial townhouses is a transforming one. Promoting the value of “hands-on involvement” in breaking down the isolation that supports self-absorption, Varma writes (1998: 210):

For instance, a volunteer who has once made an illiterate person read and write can never again be completely oblivious to the realities that exist on the fringes of the good life. The very nature of such a venture is a transforming one. Illiterate people don’t live in affluent residential areas. In reaching out to such an individual, a person comes directly in contact with the textures of the ‘other’ India.
The oft-neglected message of the *Purusharthas* is also the simplifying of one’s life as one goes through the four-fold path. Such simplification, in fact, is essential, for *moksha* based on non-attachment will not be possible otherwise. Gandhi (1954) advocated simplifying one’s affairs as much as possible – he declared that this required no retreat from the world, and in fact, made living in the world more peaceful. He said (1905, in Fischer 1962: 72):

> Happiness, the goal to which we are all striving is reached by endeavouring to make the lives of others happy, and if by renouncing the luxuries of life we can lighten the burdens of others…surely the simplification of our wants is a thing greatly to be desired! And so, if instead of supposing that we must become hermits and dwellers in caves in order to practice simplicity, we set about simplifying our affairs, each according to his convictions and opportunity, much good will result and the simple life will at once be established.

In this framework, an old trend noticeable in the wealthy classes of developed nations may provide useful foresight in the context of middle class Delhi. Since the 1970s, resistance to the mass consumerism of capitalistic societies in the West had produced a counter-movement in the form of voluntary simplicity\(^{127}\) (Etzioni 2006). Etzioni (2006) notes that Mahatma Gandhi, in fact, was one of the chief inspirations of the voluntary simplicity movement. The subscribers of voluntary\(^{128}\) simplicity “sought a lifestyle that both consumed and produced little, at least in terms of marketable objects, and sought to derive satisfaction, meaning and a sense of purpose from contemplation, communion with nature, bonding, sex and inexpensive products” (Etzioni 2006: 159). Etzioni (2006) notes that in the face of increased consumption worldwide, “a re-examination of this aspect of mature capitalism is particularly timely and needed. Indeed, the current environment of rising and spreading wealth might be particularly hospitable to moderate

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\(^{127}\) Richard Gregg (1936), one of the earliest advocates of the voluntary simplicity movement took his inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi. Several noteworthy inspirational individuals like Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore and Saint Francis of Assisi claim spiritual reasons for their desire to lead materially simple and minimalist lives. The prophets of several religions such as Jesus Christ, Mohammed and Gautama Buddha encouraged simple lifestyles.

\(^{128}\) It is relevant to note that the notion of voluntary simplicity may be advocated only for the wealthier middle and upper classes, and not for the poor working classes who live a life of involuntary simplicity because of poverty and deprivation. However for Delhi’s rich classes, to whom much of the city’s unsustainability can be attributed, voluntary simplicity may be an effective strategy.
forms of voluntary simplicity.” Voluntary simplicity can significantly address concerns for the environment as well as social equality (Etzioni 2006; Elgin 2006, 1981).

These are some of the ways in which an attention to spiritual principles may be usefully applied to contain the self-interested agendas of the Indian middle classes. Varma (1998: 214) notes:

No intervening miracle of technology, or revolution in productivity…will be able to bridge the widening and self-defeating gap between the two Indias – the upwardly mobile and the pathetically deprived. The only factor that can make a difference is a change in attitude…of the privileged themselves.

The Indian middle class, which had a critical role in the birth of the nation, now has a greater role in preserving it. And the same spiritual resources that Gandhi used then need to be revived again. Essentially, the four-fold path needs to be applied holistically and intelligently, not selectively. Moreover, it is worth considering that the Purusharthas, when correctly applied, may actually reverse the patterns of excessive consumption and challenge the culture of contemporary consumerism.

**Countering Corruption**

Contemporary Indian folklore may be said to consist of some of the most fantastic tales of corruption. In his study on the narratives of corruption in India, Akhil Gupta (2005), in fact, suggests that the hold of corruption on the Indian imagination be taken seriously, for so prevalent, he says, is its influence on several aspects of Indian life, including social life. As noted in Chapter 4 and reinforced by the women in Chapter 5, the phenomenon of corruption is deep and widespread in India – at the level of government, legislature, judiciary and bureaucracy – and it has permeated into society as well. Corruption adversely impacts the poor and vulnerable the most, and is a major impediment to the achievement of major sustainability aims, such as the Millennium Development Goals.

In exploring spiritually based approaches to address corruption, I find two principles particularly useful – the notions of Sarvodaya as interpreted by Gandhi, and dharma.
Gandhi (1954) explained *Sarvodaya* as ‘welfare of all’ based on truth and non-violence. Viewed within this context, corruption, even in the ‘interests’ of public service, is unacceptable. Gandhi (1954) believed that the effects of unlawful\(^{129}\) means would ultimately ricochet on the perpetrator, and that the most prudent approach would be to appeal directly to the conscience of the oppressor and make them a voluntary ally of the new social order. While this method may seem ludicrously naïve, it has had spectacular successes in India, both in Gandhi’s lifetime [with India’s non-violent decolonisation] and after. For instance, one of Gandhi’s disciples, Acharya Vinobha Bhave, set out in 1951 to address the highly exploitative and oppressive *zamindari* system, whereby rich landlords would use poor bonded labour for generations (Kumarappa 1953). He made impassioned appeals to the landlords to part with large tracts of their land as *Bhoodan* or land gift, and reserve for themselves only the proportion of land that they needed. In six short years, more than 50 million acres of land had been thus secured for 50 million landless labourers (Kumarappa 1953).

Gandhi had been clear that separation of religion from society would result in “corruption, greed, competition, power mania, and the exploitation of the weak and poor” (Kumar 2001: 213). He was emphatic that religious and spiritual values provided the core support systems for sustaining all human activities in life, and was convinced that isolating religion from agriculture, politics, economics, and education was a false and dangerous disconnection. Without spirituality, any institution or society would be hierarchical, exploitative, and without grassroots support. Gandhi’s solution for corruption, hypocrisy and exploitation was clear – that through identification with the poorest of the poor, the honest answer and action would be clear. He gave us a ‘talisman’ towards this purpose (Gandhi 1958: 65):

I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead

\(^{129}\) Gandhi (1951) extended to the definition of unlawful to divinely ordained laws, which he largely sourced from the *Bhagvad Gita*. 
to swaraj [freedom] for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and your self melt away.

Gupta (2003), in his research in the state of Uttar Pradesh, provides examples of rural citizens, for instance, approving corrupt acts by local government officials when funds are misdirected for public good, because lawful sanction from the state government can take an eternity to be approved. This is undoubtedly a correct observation, and arguably, in Delhi as well, corruption is often a desperate means to access rightful ends. However, the Gandhian solution would be to directly address the system that allows ‘rule of law’ to be subverted, rather than in contravening right means.

However, N. Vittal (2001), India’s Chief Vigilance Commissioner points out that even the ‘rule of law’ is inadequate. With British colonialism, the ‘rule of law’ replaced the ‘rule of dharma’, which “embraces every type of righteous conduct covering every aspect of life essential for the sustenance and welfare of the individual and society, and includes those rules that guide and enable those…to attain moksha” (Vittal 2001: 8). As observed earlier, dharma eludes precise definition – however, in the context of correct governance, it may be understood as the duty of the king to follow “the principle of doing right things”, because “the welfare of all is the happiness of all” (Vittal 2001: 7).

An interesting insight into the cause of corruption in India is that it is a society more preoccupied with the material displays of achievement, rather than morality. Mehta writes (2002: 12):

In a society like ours, where the equal moral worth of individuals is rarely affirmed, one of the ways in which people affirm their own worth is by being able to exercise discretionary power over others. Corruption is as much about the allure of power as it is about the allure of money, and the intensity of competitive frenzy for power in this society is largely due to the fact that without power, your moral worth will not be affirmed. Corruption is a form of exercising that power.

In the previous chapter, Mrs. Sudha Raina had pointed to the impatience with which “lack of material success” was received in Delhi society. Material standards have largely become the benchmark for success. In the context of sustainability, the challenge
lies in institutionalising the spiritual principle of Sarvodaya. Gandhi’s insistence on the right means arose out of a commitment to self-development. It is clear that endemic institutional corruption leads to aggression, greed and exploitation. The value of spiritually-oriented ways of being, rather than materially-oriented ways of doing, needs to be centrally revitalised at different levels of society and the state. The path proposed by Gandhi offers a markedly different alternative, where self-sufficient individuals and communities will be guided by a mindset that is concerned with service to others, rather than self-service.

As an important way of battling corruption, Pavan Varma (2004: 210), like others before him, argues that, “incorruptible technology must replace corruptible human beings much more rapidly.” However, besides the fact that human genius is capable of mastering even seemingly “incorruptible technology”, such an approach indicates despair and lack of trust in the individual and society. Within any approach that negates the value of trustworthiness, trust itself is devalued as gullibility (Letki 2006). In Chapter 2, several scholars had noted that trustworthiness was a central ingredient of wholesome sustainable societies. Moreover, technology cannot replace the sense of equity and justice that are arguably fundamentals of a good society. In fact, in Taylor’s (2003: 209) view, justice is “a basic human need”. It is only a society with integrity and a strong sense of attachment to spiritual values that can meet these basic needs.

To this end, Vittal (2001: 20) provides two solutions for a corruption-free state, which are sourced from the Hindu scriptures. First, the laws of dharma have to be religiously followed, without compromise. This will additionally ensure that criminals and law-breakers are not allowed to become rulers. In practice, this may mean a synthesis with the more secular, British-derived ‘rule of law’, such that it may be augmented, endorsed or interpreted in terms of dharma. Secondly, he says, the system must have two public leaders – one with the vision of Lord Krishna, and another like his disciple Arjuna who possesses “skilled competence in action” (Vittal 2001: 20). When these are combined, he says, dharma will automatically become the rule of law and a just, well-governed society may thus be established. This is arguably in the best interests of sustainable development.
Violence Against Women: Exploring a Gender-Sensitive Sustainability

The high rate of crime against women was brought up by the interviewees as one of the major problems of unsustainability in Delhi. As signalled briefly in Chapter 5, this issue has not received the attention it deserves in the context of sustainability for all that it is a serious problem with significant effects. Therefore, before considering how spirituality might encourage more sustainable gender relations and address the problem of gender-based violence, it is appropriate to digress briefly to consider this issue from a sustainability perspective.

In 2004, the Delhi Police reported that at least one woman is raped every 24 hours in the national capital (The Times of India, 2 July 2004). A Delhi Women’s Commission (1997) report observes that women and girl children of lower socio-economic groups are more vulnerable to rape though even the ‘protection’ that is afforded to middle class women seems flimsy at best. In August 2002, a Delhi university student was raped on campus by a police constable during business hours, and in a separate incident, an 85-year-old grandmother was gang-raped by three male domestic helpers (People’s Democracy, 2002). In the same month, a forty-year-old woman in a car was stopped by four drunken men who tried to drag her out and rape her. The woman tried frantically to call the police on her mobile, who reached the scene 40 minutes after her first call (People’s Democracy, 2002).

The political capital of India may well be reincarnated as the rape capital of the country. However, other forms of violence against women also occur with alarming regularity. The Hindu (18 June 2004) reports wife battering occurs in more than 26 per cent of middle class urban households in India, and nearly 51 per cent of urban women report psychological torture. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB 2003) makes

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130 Other forms of violence against women are equally in evidence in the national capital. A fifteen-year-old female domestic help was branded with a hot iron and her hands were plunged into hot dal as a punishment for her disobedience in the house of a senior government official in Delhi (Times of India, 2 February 2002). China eliminates one million unborn girls annually as a result of sex-selective abortions; India is expected to overtake this figure in less than ten years (Times of India, 7 March 2007).

131 The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) maintains all records of rape, kidnapping and abduction, dowry harassment and dowry deaths, physical and mental violence and torture, molestation, sexual violence and harassment, sex trafficking, indecent representation and exposure [of men, women and children], child marriage and sati.
the disturbing observation that the gender-based crime rate in the larger cities of India is significantly higher at 18.1 per cent, than the national average of 13.2 per cent. Of this, the city of Delhi alone is responsible for 14.8 per cent of all crimes against women in the country, accounts for one third of the total rape incidents in India, and for an astounding 35 per cent of all cases of kidnapping and abduction (NCRB 2003). The NCRB (2003) also reports that in a significant majority of these cases, the attackers are known to the women and are usually trusted as neighbours, friends or relatives. However, what makes these statistics all the more subduing is that they represent no more than a mere 10 per cent of all the reported crime in the city (NCRB 2003).

In the private sphere, women are no safer. India is one of the few countries in the world, which has a law that explicitly punishes offenders of mental violence against women. However, according to the National Family Health Survey III that was conducted in 2005-06, at least 16.3 per cent of Delhi’s women are also victims of both physical and emotional abuse from their husbands or his relatives. A high percentage of these women had also attempted suicide at some point of their marital lives. Early in 2007, the Supreme Court passed a law that substantially punishes offenders of domestic violence against women and by March 2007, up to 20 convictions had already occurred in the Delhi metropolitan region (Times of India, 10 March 2007). However, Girija Vyas, chairwoman of the National Commission for Women, believes that the official numbers of victims have been under-reported (Times of India, 10 March 2007).

132 It is significant to note here that though Delhi reports one of the highest crime rates against women in the country, communities in Delhi, in fact, report a higher rate of equality for men and women at 37.41 per cent, as against the national average of 25.74 per cent (Singh 1996, xxiv). Singh believes that this may be due to the higher rate of economic independence among Delhi’s women. Nearly 92 per cent of the communities claim that women control expenditure within the household (Singh 1996: xxiv).

133 Section 498 A of the Indian Penal Code declares:

Whoever, being the husband or the relative of the husband of a woman, subjects such, woman to cruelty shall be punished with imprisonment for a term, which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine.

Explanation: For the purpose of this section, “cruelty” means
(a) any wilful conduct which is of such a nature as is likely to drive the woman to commit suicide or to cause grave injury or danger to life, limb or health (whether mental or physical) of the woman; or (b) harassment of the woman where such harassment is with a view to coercing her or any person related to her to meet any unlawful demand for any property or valuable security or is on account of failure by her or any person related to her to meet such demand.
Equity is one of the central concerns of sustainable development, and the Brundtland Commission (1987) spends much time emphasising the importance of inter-generational equity, particularly as regards the future generations inheriting clean environments, and economic equity or the need to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor. Amazingly, the report is silent on gender equity – women’s issues continue to be viewed largely in the context of population control and their role in agriculture (Brundtland Commission 1987).

Yet equity, in the context of sustainability must be related to issues of gender justice (Kelly et al 2005). It must necessarily extend itself to ensuring the safety of women, children and citizens of other minority groups. Viewed in this context, crime prevention becomes one of the most important sustainability initiatives to sustain societies that are healthy and safe places to live (Kelly et al 2005). Kelly et al (2005) in fact argue that sustainability provides a more realistic framework than traditional approaches for addressing the issue of crime in the community. The traditional approaches, which were “project-oriented” and “non-integrated”, failed for much the same reasons that traditional economic growth failed: it removed itself from the complexities of social realities (Kelly et al 2005: 309). Sustainability offers an alternative framework to crime prevention: “one that attends to equity concerns…include[s] an appropriate and flexible definition of community, bottom-up decision-making, a recognition and respect for diversity, and a particularistic orientation directed towards meeting the needs of the local community” (Kelly et al 2005: 311).

A number of the factors that make women vulnerable to assault and other crime are related to various causes of sustainability, for example, urban design. For Bakshi, the urban environment in Delhi presents a constant fear of physical danger. “Travelling through the city of Delhi on foot, by public transport or personal vehicles has always been fraught with sexual danger,” she writes. Bakshi declares (2003: para 9): “What adds to the viciousness of the city is that the urban environment lends itself to creating a rapacious city.” Bakshi (2003) laments that no public development programme of the city seems to consider women’s unique requirements of community in a megacity environment. She writes (2003: para 3):
Each time a slum is demolished and large numbers of people relocated, the issue of the safety of women and girls is neither seriously debated nor considered. When a mall, subway or a multiplex cinema is built, the idea that the urban environment should facilitate rather than impede the safety of women is not given any attention. Even when the Delhi Metro blueprint was being prepared, it did not take into account the increased vulnerabilities for women caused during its execution or by the change in bus routes.

Feminist analyses of gender-based crime view public spaces as “sexualised zones that are seen as permissible spaces” (Bakshi 2003: para 5) or as “gendered spaces” (Domosh and Seager 2001: 44). They call for a redesign of the urban environment [for example, better street lighting], to be more sensitive to women’s safety. However, while such approaches do have merit, Kelly et al (2005) warn that these strategies alone will not be effective, and classify them under ‘traditional’ approaches of making public spaces “unattractive for criminal activity.” Typically, these projects are state-initiated, and top-down in their approach “where outsiders (usually state agents) bring prevention projects to local communities” (Kelly et al 2005: 309). In contrast, Kelly and her colleagues believe that examining what social sustainability means to the local community and how it may be brought about, is vital to crime prevention. They quote Podolefsky (1985: 33):

[the] introduction of structured programs and bureaucratic procedures in the absence of social solidarity is likely to produce indifference, suspicion or outright hostility.

Podolefsky’s concerns are worth examining on two counts. Firstly, it is correct that ‘social solidarity’ is important because in a culturally diverse city such as Delhi, numerous complex social issues are directly related to crimes against women. In her study on the perspectives of the Indian middle classes’ response to the rape issue in Delhi, Jyoti Puri (2006) makes a pertinent observation that racist stereotypes revolve around the victim of such crimes. This makes it more difficult for women of certain ethnic backgrounds to receive both justice and sympathy. There are, for instance, harsh
stereotypes about women from the seven Northeastern states\textsuperscript{134} of India who are represented as being too Westernised and promiscuous in their behaviour and clothing, and who tend to stay out later at night as compared to other Indian women\textsuperscript{135} (Puri 2006). She goes on to note that in general discourse, even among the educated middle class, it is often automatically assumed that the women from these states, particularly those who get raped or otherwise attacked late at night, must be soliciting sex.

Secondly, in a city like Delhi, Podolefsky’s worry about state-initiated approaches is even more complex and problematic. It may be no exaggeration to consider that such traditional approaches such as bureaucratic and official interventions to crime prevention may in fact cause a further perpetuation of such crimes. The Indian police itself are almost singularly distrusted as themselves being deeply involved in criminal activity. The Times of India, a leading English national daily has made note several times of the criminal records of the city’s police force. Puri (2006: 139-140) writes: “Perceptions of an insensitive police force\textsuperscript{136}, fears of reliving the violence through a hostile judicial process, trauma imposed by a culture that taints rape victims and dread of dishonouring the family are among the reasons that women will not report sexual assaults in the vast number of cases.” An article describes one young college girl who did file an FIR [first information report] after being gang-raped in Dhaula Kuan in south Delhi, as an “intelligent, brave and sharp girl” (Times of India, 12 May 2005). The Delhi Police’s slogan “With you, For you, Always” has woefully failed the city’s

\textsuperscript{134} The seven Northeastern states of India are Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Manipur.

\textsuperscript{135} This misguided opinion caused Virender Kumar, the vice-principal of Kirori Mal College of Delhi University to make an explicit rule that all female students, especially those from the Northeastern states, must dress only in the traditional salwar-kameez when in attendance (Puri 2006).

\textsuperscript{136} The Indian Police Force has been strongly criticised for their negligence and violence against civil society in Delhi. In a classic example of their apathy, a ghastly crime was uncovered in a middle class suburb in Delhi’s satellite city, Noida in the early days of 2007. This area falls within the purview of the Delhi police. The dead bodies of 19 children were uncovered in the drain in the front of the house of businessman Mohinder Singh Pandher. While he engaged in paedophilia, his servant Surendra Kohli would later murder and dismember the children, and occasionally experiment with cannibalism. The parents claimed that in spite of insistent complaints about their missing children, the police finally took action only after a parent managed to seek judicial intervention. The killers picked the children of the poor impoverished farmers who had no real power in seeking justice. Because the killings went ostensibly unnoticed for about two years, it is now widely believed that they were done with police complicity (Moritsugu 2007).
women. Furthermore, the literature suggests that the state response to gender-based violence is weak. Mortisugu writes (2007: 88):

Law enforcement [in Delhi] is beset with a familiar set of problems: bribery of underpaid officers, police ties to organized crime and corrupt politicians, and officers’ frequent refusals to file crime reports and launch investigations, because doing so would add to the crime figures in their jurisdictions.

From their study on community approaches to crime prevention, Kelly et al (2005) note that state intervention against crime is necessary, in terms of resources, funding and correctional services; however, it has to work in partnership with sustainable community development. This is because the cause of general crime can be traced back to reasons such as “poverty, racism, unemployment, poor housing and the lack of appropriate social, educational and recreational opportunities” (Kelly et al 2005: 311). Once the community itself is mobilised to respond to issues of crime and victimisation, the “subsequent responses must become enmeshed in the social fabric if they are to be sustainable” (Kelly et al 2005: 321). In this way, specific social issues, many of which may even be regarded as belonging to the private or domestic realm, become community concerns, important enough to motivate a transformation in social behaviour. However, it is critical to note that even Kelly et al’s (2005) ‘sustainability’ analysis of crime is inadequate for gender-based crime as it stands.

While such transformation may be partially facilitated by strategic, legal and community approaches, I argue that this must be also assisted by a restoration of a particular consciousness of the importance of the female aspect in individuals and social life in general. How may the spiritual principles discussed in the previous section assist in engendering deeply such consciousness and in combating gender-based violence in Delhi? In the remainder of this section, I will focus specifically on the notion of ahimsa or non-violence as explained by Gandhi as an important means of addressing this issue.

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137 It is noteworthy that an important issue that is often not raised often in the media but is a significant issue nonetheless is that citizens of other sexualities – transvestites, gay persons, and transgender persons – similarly report a high rate of violence against them, and claim emphatically to be at the receiving end of police brutalities. In India, anal and oral sex are crimes under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code; the police therefore routinely harass and arrest persons of alternate sexualities.
In her feminist analysis of Gandhi’s views on women, Madhu Kishwar (1986) argues that Mahatma Gandhi consciously designed his strategy based on the principle of *ahimsa* or non-violence, because he believed that this was a flawless way of ensuring that women did not remain at the periphery of important social and political movements, and rather, occupied significant positions at the forefront.\(^{138}\) Gandhi rightly understood that if women were to be truly free and empowered, they had to be fearless (Kishwar 1986). He was also clear that their fear stemmed from psychological sources and culturally-socialised vulnerability, and constantly urged them that courage and determination were as much womanly as they were manly qualities (Kishwar 1986). Gandhi said (1940: 208):

> My contribution to the great problem [of women’s role in society] lies in my presenting for acceptance of truth and *ahimsa* in every walk of life, whether for individuals or nations. I have hugged the hope that in this woman will be the unquestioned leader.

*Ahimsa* was a stupendous success. Feminists themselves were amazed by the virtual outpouring of women in their thousands to support the peaceful civil disobedience movement in the 1930s in India, where women were traditionally confined to the home and hearth (Chattopadhyayya 1983, 1939; Cousins 1939). Kishwar (1986: 20) quotes Brailsford, who was convinced that *ahimsa* was valuable, even “if it had done nothing more than emancipate women. It gave women a new sense of power, a new self-view. From this point on, there was no going back.” Gandhi was also aware that the vows that were undertaken by his followers in pursuit of independence – truthfulness, non-violence, chastity etc – could not be fulfilled without cooperation and support from the women (Kishwar 1986). Kishwar (1986: 15) observes that women, as were the men, needed to be “fired with the spirit of *Swadeshi* [self-reliance]. Men alone will be able to do nothing in the matter.”

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\(^{138}\) Mahatma Gandhi did not state that non-violence was a female phenomenon, as opposed to violence being a male phenomenon. He was, however, emphatic that non-violent strategies were the surest way of ensuring the participation of historically oppressed groups in social and political movements. In this, he included women, tribal groups, members of minority religions etc.
Gandhi’s aim, as stated earlier in the thesis, was not to merely win independence from the British. The purpose of his non-violent strategy was to shape a society that would not resort to violent means to any ends (Kishwar 1986). To this end, Gandhi had no doubts that women had a critical role and wrote (1940: 326): “In the war against war, women of the world will and should lead. It is their special vocation and privilege.”

In the interests of overall sustainability in Delhi, the notion of ahimsa or non-violence needs to be centrally and conceptually integrated with all sustainability strategies for the city. But more than this, it has a particular role to play in the elimination of violence against women and other vulnerable groups. Importantly, ahimsa is a vital part of galvanising women’s participation in the planning of their city in real and meaningful ways, and in developing the idea that non-violence in word and deed, must be a part of civic engagement. Ahimsa may be an effective strategy for bringing the problem of violence against women to the public eye, and as a basis for a value-shift that checks violence against women.

Gandhi points to the key difference in responding with ahimsa through fear, and responding with ahimsa through courage (Iyer 1990). As Gandhi demonstrated though his life, ahimsa through courage calls on the individual to take on a powerful leadership role in asserting the principles of social justice, equality and non-exploitation. It does not mean responding passively to non-violence; it means working actively and determinedly for change through non-violent means. Non-violence is to be treated as an essential means for the purpose of achieving the right to safety, security and peace in practise, along with complementary actions such as campaigning for gender-sensitive institutional change.

Apart from giving women the authentic power needed to galvanise change, ahimsa-oriented sustainability may also allow perpetrators of violence the creative and critical space for self-examination. Thailand’s spiritual leader Sulak Sivaraksa says that all forms of violence reveal a lack of harmony of the self, both within, and with other human beings (Donald 1997). External correctional methods can never eliminate the roots of violence, Sivaraksa says; at best they may reduce their incidence or hide them (Donald 1997). The first step, Sivaraksa explains, is to provide an enabling atmosphere where the knowledge is available for a person to become self-aware of the latent
violence in himself or herself. However, the cause of such violence is that greed, hatred and delusion have become institutionally commonplace. Therefore, it is imperative to transform the various institutional structures that support society into ones that support the values of equity, compassion, justice and harmony (Donald 1997). Therefore, to be used as an instrument in transforming institutions, spirituality has to be intelligently engaged, and with integrity, so that it may lead to a sustainable transformation.

6.5. Concluding Discussion

While the above discussions on contemporary issues are largely tentative and exploratory, there are historical examples where spiritual principles have been successfully applied to achieve social stability, equality and emancipation. The Gandhian model of applying spiritual principles pragmatically and effectively in addressing critical social and political issues is an eloquent justification and plea for sustainability to do the same. Importantly, Gandhi’s approach shows that this can be done. So there is arguably a strong case for revisiting these spiritual principles and creatively reapplying them in modern contexts. In fact, the current widespread apathy to critical social and environmental issues, indifference and even insolence may only be countered by means that seek to cause a fundamental shift in human consciousness.

The spiritual principles that were elaborated in Section 6.3 are demonstrably relevant to sustainable development. However, such spiritual values easily risk becoming ‘unattainable’ motherhood ideals. It is important to consistently maintain their critical application in daily living. For instance, in both the East and the West, nature has been increasingly disassociated from the sacred space as far as ongoing introspection is concerned; it is deemed enough to rely entirely on the conclusions of the ancient sages and scriptures (Klostermaier 1989). This is arguably to the disservice of both nature conservationists and spiritual seekers. Klostermaier (1989: 335) correctly points out that “the truth that sets free” is to be found neither in doctrines nor in logical explanations of events but “in ever new insights into ‘the nature of nature’”.

It is also useful to consider that applying principles of Hinduism to sustainable development is an opportunity and a challenge to Hinduism itself to examine and address some of its internal contradictions. It may also be a relevant way for the wisdom
of Hinduism itself to be practised in the streets, public space, and in interpersonal relations, instead of being restricted to the temples and the private realm. Arguably, it is then that the religion may be considered truly practised, when it begins to positively inform and impact the whole of human life.
7. Quo Vadis, Delhi?

7.1. Reflections and Meditations: Preoccupations of the thesis

The notion of development has evolved in ever complex ways, and recent times have witnessed a spurt of research exploring the myriad ways of understanding and practise sustainable development. My thesis was essentially preoccupied with one important question: can spirituality or a spiritually-informed philosophy assist in animating sustainable development in real and meaningful ways? Previously, considering such a perspective within either a mainstream or an explicitly sustainable development discourse would have been arguably regarded as far-fetched or even irrelevant [and this is despite a long-standing involvement of religious and spiritual organisations in development work and the emergence, more recently, of their explicit growing interest in sustainability].

Nevertheless, several scholars have noted a trend within more secular societies and sections of the community that indicates a reawakened fascination and growing "re-enchantment" with the spiritual (Tacey 2000). However, this re-emergence of the religious and the spiritual has not occurred in isolation from other significant sociological and political events. Hunt (2005: xi) correctly notes: "The renewed interest in religious life...is clearly contingent upon its perceived resurgence in certain areas." While some of these "areas" may include distressing ones such as fundamentalism, there is nevertheless a clear recognition of the positive impact of the spiritual renewal on other important dimensions of human lives. As noted in Chapter 2, sociologists such as Gray (2006) and Henery (2003) have already pointed to the growing respect for spirituality as a valid approach in assisting with social work. Heelas and Woodhead (2005) predict that new expressions of spirituality will emerge in the future, particularly in areas such as education, healthcare and wellbeing. Therefore, it was my intention in this thesis to explore the competence of spirituality as an effective means to intelligently and eloquently inform and animate yet another important area, namely, sustainable development.
In Chapter 2, I traced the development of spirituality as a post-secular construct, and noted that several contemporary expressions of spirituality tend to disassociate themselves from religion. However, while articulating a definition of spirituality in relation to sustainability, I was more sympathetic to an understanding of spirituality in religion, as against spirituality as opposed to religion. As Ericcker (2001c: 225) argues, religion provides a “context” for spirituality to be felt. Moreover, my particular focus was on an Indian urban case study and an Indian religion. In my culture, the distinction between religion and spirituality makes much less sense. As scholars have noted, the lines between religion and spirituality are highly blurred in an Indian context (Lipner 1994). Spirituality in India may be best understood as neo-religious (Larson 1995) and best explained by the word dharma (Panikkar 2006). Dharma provides detailed prescriptions on correct human behaviour so as to enable self-development, and is a central tenet of both Hinduism and Buddhism.

Furthermore, in India, secularism itself has religious overtones; Larson (1995) argues that Indian secularism is strongly impacted by neo-Hinduism. As noted in Chapter 6, secularism in India was a strategic way of maintaining communal harmony, particularly in the wake of the Partition holocaust of 1947, but that it was also clear that secularism in India would “lay stress on the universality of spiritual principles” (Radhakrishnan 1956: 147). Therefore, in arguing for a spiritual philosophy to inform a sustainability philosophy that has been thus far secularly oriented, even in India, I maintain that it is logical to consider spirituality that is grounded in religion.

I examined spirituality for its potential to engender a sense of self-awareness in the individual that may assist in causing a shift in consciousness to create and preserve a sustainable mindset. In Chapter 2, I had noted the growing interest of spiritual and faith-based organisations in matters concerning sustainable development. Ecofeminists, ecophilosophers, community development practitioners and others also acknowledge the value of spiritual resources and wisdom to various dimensions of development. I have argued that the scientific knowledge of secular-based sustainability combined with the moral, ethical authority of spirituality might be strategically connected to bring about real and meaningful sustainable development.
I clarified the value of a spiritually based approach to development with each of the three commonly addressed aspects of sustainability, i.e., social, economic and environmental. In addition, I had considered how consciousness of the self relates to the creation of a sustainable mindset. Prior to this, I provided a discussion of the background and events leading up to the notion of sustainable development. I noted that the commentary on sustainable development had expanded beyond merely concern about capitalistic growth models and environmental conservation to include the social and cultural aspects of development. Of critical importance to this thesis, I had observed that in recent times, the discourse on sustainability had unfolded further still to include the religious and spiritual dimensions to sustainable development.

Within such a broad exploration, my specific interest was to investigate if and how certain aspects of Hindu spirituality might lend itself to enlightening sustainable development in an urban Indian context, such as Delhi. Religion and spirituality, custom and tradition, are inextricably linked to features of modern life in India. While India is reinventing itself rapidly as a global superpower, it remains in its essence, a primary culture and civilisation. In the face of this, it would be an error to ignore the impact of spirituality in influencing the conscience of the people towards a more sustainable way of living.

7.2. Case Study: ‘In A City Like Delhi’

The ancient, antique city of Delhi has, in recent times, become a space for reflection on intellectual, political and, increasingly spiritual inquiries about its own future, and the greater one of India. The capital of the republic of India has rapidly expanded at an unprecedented rate, even by the staggering standards of developing Asian cities. While the capital of India has arrived in its own right as a cosmopolitan international city, the relatively short time that the city and its people have had to cope with this dramatic change, has thrown to the surface numerous challenges to the sustainability of the city.

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139 The Indic or the Indus civilisation has been the only civilisation of the forty-five ancient civilisations to survive in an unbroken line as living heritage, right up to contemporary times (Swami Vivekananda 1918).
I specifically chose Delhi because it is the capital of secular India, and is one of the world’s most rapidly growing cities. Enabling the sustainability of Delhi has important implications for overall sustainability within its large and growing metropolitan area, as well as its vast regional hinterland. Given Delhi’s political, bureaucratic and historic weight, it is arguably an important city, and often sets precedents – misguided or otherwise – for urban development in other Indian cities.

In order to move the thesis towards this case study in Chapter 3, I narrowed down the broad concerns of Chapter 2 into a very specific site – the city. I noted that city sustainability agendas form a critical core of overall sustainability strategies and provided a broad overview of some of the important challenges to sustainable development in urban areas. Current models of development in Asia and Africa, based on the Western capitalistic model are unsustainable, particularly in the face of population explosion and rapidly rising urban migration. I found McGranahan and Satterthwaite’s (2000) distinctions between the green and brown agendas useful in examining the tensions between environmental preservation and human health in developing cities [such as Delhi]. I then examined the range of solutions proposed to address the problem of unsustainability in such cities. Noteworthy among these were the insights on individual and collective responsibility. This led me to study the city as an urban sacred site. Through the literature review, I note that the city is filled with opportunities for human spiritual renewal, and that undertaking to explore the potential of spirituality in revitalising urban sustainability is both eminently justified and important.

In Chapter 4, I confine the focus of the thesis much further and locate the concerns of Chapters 2 and 3 in the city of Delhi itself. I provided a contemporary background to Delhi, and a historical account of the city’s urbanising efforts since independence. The key contribution of this chapter is my account of Delhi’s sustainability challenges, based on McGranahan and Satterthwaite’s (2000) explication of green and brown issues of urban development. I broadly categorised these issues, which dramatise the tensions between human equity and the environment, into the biophysical and the environmental, and the social and political. Lastly, I examined the spiritual-religious narrative in post-independence India. I noted that secularism in India has rich undertones of spiritualism, particularly neo-Hinduism. However, the tension between the two stances is most
evident in the language and discourse of development [as well as, interestingly, in spirituality itself], where secularised linguistics is more frequently employed.

I grounded my argument on both sustainable development and spirituality in the first half of the thesis, using interviews with twenty women development practitioners in the city. I particularly sought women's perspectives because, as established in Chapters 2 and 5, it is important that the sustainability discourse has a gender perspective. Earlier development models are believed to have failed because of gender-neutral or gender-insensitive analyses of issues. My interviews sought my respondents' views on whether or not spirituality could facilitate transformation from unsustainability to sustainability, or to greater sustainability, in Delhi. Their views on spirituality, sustainable development and the pragmatic potential of spirituality to enrich sustainability supported my theory, and served as a rich starting point to making the conceptual connection between the two notions in Delhi.

Following the discussion of the women's views, in Chapter 6, I undertook the task of examining Hinduism critically as a possible spiritual philosophy that might assist in addressing these issues in Delhi, by essentially resurrecting a sustainability consciousness or a mindset. I focussed on one of the fundamental tenets of Hinduism - the four-fold path as elucidated in the Purusharthas - to explore the potential to ground sustainable development in the case study in Hindu spirituality. The Purusharthas advise that the seeker go through the several phases of experience - of both material and sensual pleasure - before embarking on a path of non-attachment. However, such experience has to be according to the laws of dharma or loosely translated, ethics, so as to ensure that the experience is not harmful, either to the individual or the society. I also found immensely helpful the principle from which Gandhi never wavered: ahimsa or non-violence, and its use as both a value and a strategy. As Gandhi realised, ahimsa is both integrity in action, as well as a way of bringing vulnerable groups such as women, minority groups etc, into active social and political participation. Finally, as a way of pragmatically translating ideals into action, I used Gandhi's understanding of the vow. I see the vow as a means of creating a strong commitment to sustainability within an Indian context. Gandhi was convinced of the merit and enduring value of employing right means to achieve the right ends.
In proposing a re-engagement with Hindu spirituality to support and facilitate sustainable development in Delhi, it is important to note that both the West and leftist groups in India have condemned the rise of radical Hindu extremism or the ‘Hindutva’ [or Hinduness] agenda of right-wing political groups in the country. Hinduism has also been charged with compromising the status of women. However, the timeless wisdom of Hindu spirituality needs to be critically engaged with, and reinterpreted according to contemporary times to assist sustainable development. The citizens of Delhi desperately need an alternative framework for creating an identity that would positively link ancient spiritual wisdom with the desire for sustainable lifestyles in the present. Hinduism offers a pragmatic methodology for individuals and communities to lead spiritually sustainable lives.

Scholars have noted that India’s greatest strength is its spiritual traditions. India’s philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam – the whole world is one family – seeks to unite and joyously celebrate diversity. This embrace of diversity is strongly evident in India willingly making room in its soil for religions that are not of its loins. As was noted in Chapter 2 and 6, there is no single way to spiritually-based sustainable development, and the notion would need to draw on an assortment of resources. Chapter 2 recalled the profound observations of the Rig Veda: “The Real is One; the Sages call it by Different Names.”

7.3. Lessons from the Delhi case

Interesting insights emerged from my small case study in Delhi, where I explored the potential for spirituality to inform sustainable development. From the literature survey in Chapter 4, it was clear that religion and spirituality impacted the lives of Indians, both historically and in contemporary times. However, the interviews with the women supported my hypothesis more convincingly, because in an important sense, it was clear that they did not see a distinction between sustainable behaviour and spiritual behaviour. Admittedly, they had not consciously conceptualised the notion of spiritually-informed sustainable development. However, this need hardly be surprising because spirituality is possibly best lived and experienced as a natural part of existence. Moreover, as the two case studies of the Urban Broom Goddess, and the success with the population control in the two slums in Delhi showed, the spiritual element was not
an outcome of strategic planning. Rather, it arose naturally in the process of addressing a specific issue, suggesting strongly that spirituality in fact, may be *embedded* in sustainable development in India.

The interviews were revealing. The women agreed unanimously for an inclusion of the spiritual within the sustainability notion; several times, they bemoaned the gradual loss of the spiritual from the public space and discourse in Delhi due to the advent of widespread global capitalism and consumerism. In fact, several of those women could not envisage any distinction between a spiritual and a sustainable way of being. It was clear that they believed that sustainable development would naturally occur if it made “spiritual sense” in India. They emphasised that it is vital, and in the interests of sustainability, to preserve and protect the spiritual dimensions of Indian lifestyles. India’s rich spiritual traditions, they believed, were one of the most sustaining forces of Indian culture. A good sustainability agenda, in their view, would provide an enabling environment for spirituality and spiritually sustainable development to prosper. However, they were careful to warn against the misuse of the spiritual resource by ironically allowing it to become a capitalist commodity, or by becoming vulnerable to dangerous misinterpretation by fundamentalist groups to serve their narrow and parochial ends.

Several other important insights were revealed in the interviews. Critical amongst these was their view of the high rate of crime against women in the city as a sustainability problem. I critically examined this issue further in Chapter 6. Secondly, the women re-emphasised the findings of Chapter 4 that across all the issues of unsustainability in Delhi lay the dark shadow of corruption. There is both an ethics and a business dimension to corruption; several studies attribute both these dimensions as one of the biggest obstacles to sustainability.

It also emerged that the women did not necessarily view sustainable development in the explicit terms outlined in the Brundtland report; their perspectives generally tended to focus upon the social dimension of development. They also tended to speak of sustainable development in terms of ‘stability’. It is true that several direct and oblique references to the economic and environmental aspect of sustainable development in their interviews show that their vision of sustainability for Delhi certainly encompasses
these concerns. Nonetheless, it would be useful for the language of sustainable
development to be adopted in a more mainstream manner in the development discourse
on Delhi, so that sustainability may be better understood and implemented in the
specific context of the city.

However, it was also clear that the development professionals interviewed had some
trouble articulating their notion of spirituality in relation to sustainability, even as they
positively affirmed the concept. In this context, it is vital to actively encourage the
conversation between spiritual and faith-based representatives, and sustainable
development planners and practitioners. As McGuire (1997: 8) points out, “we do not
yet have the language or conceptual apparatus for refining our understanding of
spirituality.” However, only by putting the two into active and engaging dialogue with
each other can we infuse spirituality and sustainability into each other. The development
discourse in Delhi is almost entirely dominated by secularist language; even spiritual
NGOs tend to avoid the use of spiritual idioms in their development projects, since such
language has ceased to have authority in the official space. This is an irony because
beliefs and values continue to be demonstrably informed by spiritual and religious
wisdom. However, language is arguably an important way of mainstreaming ideas that
have generally been peripheral or removed from conventional approaches.

Nevertheless, as I have suggested in the three sites that I re-visited in Chapter 6,
spirituality has pragmatic applications that are useful to sustainable development. In the
context of Delhi, I used Hindu spirituality as an example of how such connections
between sustainable development and spirituality might be made. I found that in relation
to sustainable development, Hinduism has considerable resonance, in that it is
sympathetic to the notion of ‘want’ but is clear that satisfying want is to be a focussed
means to a greater end, namely, self-realisation.

7.4. Wider Applications and Relevance

There are several varying ways of establishing a relationship between spirituality and
sustainability – some may argue that this includes a non-relationship between the two
notions. It is vital to acknowledge that the issue under examination is complex, and may
review resources from a variety of theological, spiritual, philosophical, political,
sociological, feminist and historical literature to arrive at any conclusion. However, from the particular case study in the city of Delhi that this thesis uses, it may be possible to extract some useful insights for the larger argument constructing an affirmative union between spirituality and sustainability globally. It is also beneficial to explore the general trends and possibilities towards a framework that grounds sustainable development in spirituality worldwide.

The increasing unsustainability of contemporary human lifestyles worldwide may be arguably linked to the weakening of spiritual clarity in human consciousness. In his path-breaking book *A Species in Denial*, Jeremy Griffith (2003) likens the waning, and in fact the denial, of the spiritual consciousness in contemporary human society to the proverbial unnoticed elephant in the living room. He argues that this behemothic occurrence is the root cause of the miseries and worries in the world. Generally, observations, debates, and other references to the “human condition” centre on the physical concerns of human existence – poverty, disease and hunger etc (Griffith 2003: 1). However, it is crucial to address the metaphysical or the spiritual dimension to the human condition in order to serve even the interests of the physical aspects (Griffith 2003).

It was clear from the Delhi case study that spirituality might naturally emerge in planning and implementing sustainable development there. However, can the same be said about the ostensibly secular West? Studies suggest that it can. Research reveals evidence of a significant return to the spiritual realm in the West (Tacey 2003). Traditional worship retains a strong following in the West, in spite of rising deflections to non-traditional spiritualities. America’s “megachurches” seat as many as 8000 at a service (Underwood et al 2005). Underwood et al (2005) report that the NEWSWEEK/Beliefnet Poll revealed that 45 per cent of the Americans attend church weekly. However, seventy-nine per cent of the Americans describe themselves as more “spiritual” than “religious”. Schneiders (2000: 6, in Tacey 2003: 15): writes, “Spirituality has rarely enjoyed such a high profile, positive evaluation, and even economic success as it does among Americans today.” Underwood et al (2005) also note that two-thirds of the American population pray and a third meditate daily. In Britain, Tacey observes, similar changes seem to be occurring. Hay and Hunt (2000: 846, in Tacey 2003: 15) write about the results of a ‘Soul of Britain’ survey conducted
by the BBC: “Something extraordinary appears to be happening to the spiritual life of Britain...the results show that more than 76 per cent of the population would admit to having had a spiritual experience.”

David Tacey’s analysis of the renewal of the spiritual impulse in the West reverberates with parallels in the interview responses from the women in Delhi. He believes that increasing social isolation is the main cause for human beings to turn to the spiritual impulse for relief and remedy, and argues that the spiritual resurgence is “not just some fashionable interest in esoteric matters, nor is it an escape from the real or an intellectual enquiry into human nature” (2003: 215). He writes (2003: 215):

It is an emotional and urgent reaction to widespread alienation, disempowerment and disillusionment. It is an almost panic response to the apparent lack of relationality and connectedness in contemporary life. To call for spirituality is to call for healing and reconnection...we only call for spirituality when our brokenness has reached a high point, when we can no longer bear our alienation and call out for some greater authority to heal our emotional suffering.

Tacey finds agreement with Laing, who also believes that the spiritual renewal in the West comes out of a genuine urge to seek meaning. Laing writes (Griffith 2003: 48): “There is a prophecy in Amos that there will be a time when there will be a famine in the land, ‘not a famine for bread, not a thirst for water, but for hearing the words of the Lord.’ That time has now come to pass. It is the present age.”

It may be valid therefore, to suggest that spirituality has immense positive potential to similarly animate sustainability in the West as well. Newman and Kenworthy (1999: 306) argue for instance, that the “inspiration for ethical action on urban environmental issues can be traced back to...‘the Western spiritual tradition’. They believe that the spiritual institutions to support urban sustainability in the West are fully available locally; that the “Auto cities” of the West are also ready for a spiritual revival, and that this wisdom “lies in our stories and hymns and Sunday schools and are embedded in our institutions” (Newman and Kenworthy 1999: 307). They demonstrate through arguments that Gilbert White, E.F. Schumacher and Jane Jacobs operated through the
Western spiritual tradition to advocate environmental sustainability (Newman and Kenworthy 1999).

While the Brundtland Commission report (1987) does not explicitly refer to the loss of spirituality in contemporary society, it does emphasise several times the need for an attitudinal transformation. An attitude that exudes care, empathy, love, humility and integrity is essential to enable the sort of social, economic and environmental transformation that being sustainable appeals for; it basically calls for a transformation in being. The International Environment Forum (2001) pointed out that knowledge of environmental protection, social justice and economic progress comes from two sources: the tangible and the scientific, and the intangible and the intuitive. Scientific information necessary to formulate correct sustainability strategies is available; however, it is now important to promote values and behaviour that will transform knowledge into action. They point out that the destiny of human civilisation at all times has been influenced by its most cherished values (2001). The International Environment Forum (2001) says:

Values, or the application of spiritual principles, have been the missing ingredient in most past approaches to sustainable development. Grand declarations and detailed action plans, even when approved by all the governments, do not go far if people are not motivated to implement them in their own lives, and if institutions are not made responsible to carry them out. The exciting thing about addressing sustainability at the level of values is the potential to create self-generating human systems building a more sustainable and thus ever-advancing civilization.

Finally, as Tyndale writes (2003: 7), it is important for all individuals, including architects and planners of development, to recognise and accept that reality includes a "sacred kernel". She writes:

According to this understanding, if development is to relate to the whole of human existence, analyses, planning and development strategies will have to take into account transcendence - that depth of freedom, infinity and interconnectedness, which is inherent to all human beings [emphasis mine].
Tyndale's (2003) emphasis on transcendence, infinity and interconnection relates back in an important way to my own position that moksha or self-realisation is vitally part of a sustainable being. Development may be truly meaningful, sustainable and enriching, when it extends to “the whole of human existence”, for then it acknowledges not merely the material and physical aspect of human existence. The outcome of such planning and development strategies may be refreshingly and pleasantly different from previous development planning. Tyndale (2003: 7) explains that such comprehension and acceptance demands “a sense of mystery, which enlightens from within, so as to open up our minds to an approach, which does not separate the spiritual from the material”. Such a process helps in accepting the unknown that is an integral and tremendously influential aspect of human life, and hence, inevitably at the core of a deep and true sustainability.
APPENDIX 1
Interview Questionnaire

This schedule provides an overview of the topics that may be raised for discussion and exploration. The dialogue with the participant will take the form of a semi-structured interview; the interaction may be like an informal conversation, loosely structured by discussions on the themes provided below. Conceptual explanations of terms such as ‘sustainability’ and ‘sustainable development’ may be offered.

It may be noted that depending on the personal interests, motivations and experiences of each participant, more time may be devoted to certain sections and themes. It is also possible that these actual words may or may not be used; however, the general drift of the exploration would remain the same.

Opening:

- Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed
- There are no right or wrong answers

Questions

1. What is your understanding of spirituality?
2. What is your understanding of sustainable development?
3. What in your view, are some of Delhi’s biggest challenges to sustainable development?
4. Do you think spirituality is an important part of living in Delhi?
5. Have you used spirituality or spiritually-related resources in your work?
6. What is your vision for Delhi, in say, ten years time?
7. Are there any conditions (beliefs, preparation, ritual, community and tradition) that allow for a more spiritual life in the city?
8. What conditions of Delhi city itself (built environment, natural environment, traditions, beliefs, peoples) do you think are conducive to spirituality?
9. Do you think men understand spirituality differently to women?
10. Do you think multiculturalism adds to a spiritual character of the city?
11. Do you see the rural countryside in the city now, given that Delhi was born out of a conglomeration of villages?
12. What do you see your particular role, as a woman and an individual, in achieving sustainability in Delhi?
13. Do you experience spiritual moments in the city?
14. How do you compare your views with those around you?
APPENDIX 2

IN A CITY LIKE DELHI: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND SPIRITUALITY

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INFORMATION SHEET

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this project.

The research aims to examine spirituality as a means of animating sustainable development. In particular, the thesis will examine spirituality and sustainability in the city, in the context of urban communities, human values and women.

During your interview, you will be asked questions that reflect your views, experiences, opinions and recommendations about the issues of spirituality and sustainability in the urban communities in Delhi, and how you negotiate with the community and the environment. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions that are explored – indeed, the mission is to record as comprehensive a range of opinions and experiences as possible. The interview will take approximately one hour – your permission will be sought to record it, so that it is possible to later consider your views in depth.

You will not be identified though your opinions may be used to substantiate the research. Ultimately, this project will:

1. Help compile a clear picture of the links between sustainable development and spirituality
2. Highlight specifically the context of spirituality and sustainability in an urban context, particularly the city of Delhi
3. Record in particular, the role of women in fostering spiritual and human values in urban communities.

The interview can be held at your home or any other place convenient to you, or at your residence at C-5/A Safdarjung Development Area. Please feel welcome to bring a friend, relative or your children to the interview but we will need around one hour of quiet time to talk about the issues. The times for the interview can be arranged to suit your schedule.
APPENDIX 3

Consent Form

Project title: In A City Like Delhi: Sustainable Development and Spirituality

I am a PhD student at Murdoch University, working on a thesis that investigates the relationship between sustainable development and spirituality in an urban context, particularly in Delhi. The project is under the supervision of Dr. Dora Marinova and Assoc. Prof. Jeff Kenworthy. The purpose of this study is to find out how spirituality can serve as an animating medium to sustainable development, and how this aspect can be used to promote sustainability. For the purpose of compiling as comprehensive a picture as possible, the study seeks to record the views and experiences of the women in working in the development area in Delhi.

You can help in this study by consenting to give an interview, which will ask questions that reflect your views, opinions and recommendations on spirituality, sustainability and your experiences and negotiations with the urban environment in Delhi. It is anticipated that the time taken to complete the interview will be no more than one hour. If you so consent, the interview will be recorded on tape so as to facilitate easier transcribing for me.

These questions may be seen as personal and private. You may decide to withdraw your consent to participate at any time. All information given during the interview is confidential and no names or other information that might identify you will be used in any publication arising from the research. You may either supply me with an email or postal address, where I can send the transcript of the interview and a summary of findings. The final thesis, which contains the findings of this study and its conclusions, will be available through the Murdoch University’s library.

If you are willing to participate in this study, could you please provide the details below. If you have any questions about this project, please feel free to contact either myself Yamini Narayanan at 91-9810536444 or y.narayanan@murdoch.edu.au, or my supervisor Dora Marinova at 61-8-93606103 or d.marinova@murdoch.edu.au.

My supervisor and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have on how this study has been conducted, or alternatively you can contact Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee on 91-8-93606677.

I (the participant) have read the information above. Any questions or doubts that I had have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to take part in this activity, however, I am aware that I may change my mind, and withdraw from the process at any time.

I agree for this interview to be taped.
I agree that research gathered for this study may be published provided my identity is not revealed.

Participant/Authorised representative:

Date:

Investigator (Chief Investigator who must be a member of Murdoch University)

Date:

Student Investigator (Yamini Narayanan):

Date:
APPENDIX 4

List of Interviewees Cited in the Thesis

The following list of interviewees only provides the details of those women who have been cited in the thesis, and whose permission has been sought to reveal their identities. There are three respondents who have been quoted in the thesis [with permission as per the consent form] but whom I was unable to contact to seek permission to use their names. Their names have therefore been withheld and only general details have been provided for them.

1. Sushma Aggarwal is director of the Arpana Trust NGO that seeks to rehabilitate slum refugees who arrive from the regional hinterland.
2. Dr. Nirupama Bhatnagar is a scientist researching malaria eradication.
3. Dr. Promilla Bhutani is a retired community paediatrician and healthcare worker in six villages in South Delhi.
4. Geeta Dharmarajan heads the internationally reputed Katha NGO that is concerned with ensuring that children living in slums below the age of fourteen are able to access their constitutional right of free primary education.
5. Latika Dikshit is a senior social worker of the Congress Party, and personal advisor to Mrs. Sheila Dikshit, Chief Minister of Delhi.
6. Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath was a recipient of the Padma Shri award [one of India’s highest civilian honours] in 2006 for advancing culture and education at the tertiary level, and Principal of the prestigious Lady Shri Ram College for Women, University of Delhi.
7. Dr. Madhu Kishwar is senior fellow at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, and editor of Manushi [a leading women’s journal].
8. Sushma Mehrotra heads an NGO on HIV/AIDS awareness and assistance in the city.
9. Meenakshi Mishra is a senior bureaucrat within the Indian Audit and Accounts Services [IAAS].
10. Sister Nirmalini is a senior member of the Carmel Convent chapel and school, which heads development programmes related to literacy and adult education, AIDS relief, healthcare clinics and manages an orphanage through UNDP funding.
11. Sudha Raina is a senior member of the regional women’s welfare wing of the UNDP.
12. Sucharita Sen is a research associate with TERI [Tata Environmental Research Institute] and a doctoral candidate in political science at Delhi University.
13. Susan Vishwanath is professor of sociology at Jawaharlal Nehru University.
14. Development Worker 1 works at a Sikh hermitage in and coordinates their on providing daily mid-day meals for the urban poor
15. Development Worker 2 is a sociologist and senior researcher at an urban studies research institute.
16. Development Worker 3 is a rural research officer in an international organisation.
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