

In A City Like Delhi: Sustainability and Spirituality

By

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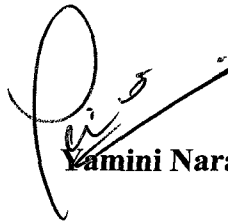
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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work that has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.



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