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## **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Perspectives from Contemporary India and 6th Century Jain Yoga**

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## **DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION: PERSPECTIVES FROM CONTEMPORARY INDIA AND 6<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY JAIN YOGA**

*Christopher Key Chapple*

**Abstract:**

*This article examines diversity, equity, and inclusion through two lenses: the *Yogabindu*, a sixth century Sanskrit text written by Haribhadra Virahanka that lauds the shared benefits of religious practice regardless of tradition, and reflections on life in India as experienced by the author in 2019 with special attention given to the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gandhi's birth, exclusionary refugee policies, and environmental protections.*

**Key Words:** Haribhadra, *Yogabindu*, Mahatma Gandhi, pollution, Fulbright-Nehru

As American culture copes with and prepares for the impending demographic shift in 2045 to a white minority, three words have taken center stage: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Diversity has always been part of the American quilt, yet unheralded often due to prejudicial attitudes. Equity has never been part of the American ethos, primarily because of the oppression of Indigenous peoples and the reliance upon enslaved persons from Africa for the bulk of the 500-year presence of European oppressors, and stark, persistent income inequality. Inclusion has risen to importance in public discourse because of the legacy of legal, economic, and cultural exclusion of non-whites. The Civil War and, one hundred years later, the Civil Rights movement have attempted to provide redress for past injustices. One hopes that the emerging slogan calling for DEI, like the clarion call *Liberté, Egalité, and Fraternité* of the French Revolution, will signal vital changes in the years ahead.

One may ask, how does this inquiry relate to South Asia and the overall field of South Asian Studies? Two areas will be explored in this regard. The first is India's long history of racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. The second is the Indian commitment to nonviolence as the prime ethical value, leading to a philosophy both complex and subtle that flies in the face of simple bifurcations. After a brief summary assessment of diversity history and enactment of personal and political nonviolent strategies, reflections will be shared on some current environmental and political issues in India. This essay also explore how a sixth century Jain text, the *Yogabindu*, might provide a pathway

toward understanding the importance of recognizing diversity and seeking the common good as a way toward a more open and accepting polity.

### **India's Diversity: Three and Two and More**

The Indian subcontinent is vast, more than a thousand miles from north to south, and a thousand miles from west to east. Three primary linguistic groupings of people may be discerned as follows. Speakers of Dravidian languages are found primarily in the south.<sup>1</sup> Speakers of Indo-Iranian-European languages are primarily in the north. Speakers of the ancient Munda languages are located in the hilly and mountainous regions as well as within urban areas where many have migrated for employment and educational opportunities.

Two early indigenous religions have been joined with an overlay of numerous other faiths, some from outside India, and some born within the subcontinent. The earliest faiths have been characterized as Śramanical and Brahmanical. The former emphasizes meditation and a quest for liberation. Its founding figures such as Parshvanath, Mahavira, and Shakyamuni Buddha hail from northeast India. The Brahmanical tradition includes elaborate rituals and systems of polity first delineated in the Vedic texts that originate in the northwest and document movement into the rest of subcontinent. The two have interacted for more than two millennia with the Upanisads, extensions of Vedas, incorporating many of the practices originally associated with Śramanical teachings. This amalgam gave birth to what is generally considered to be modern Hinduism.

After the destruction of the first Jewish temple in 586 B.C.E., Jews began to settle in India. Two thousand years ago, Christian traders established communities in South India, following a Syrian rite form of the faith. More than a thousand years ago, both Muslims and Zoroastrians arrived from Iraq and Iran. These faiths brought different narratives into the continent, developing lifestyles that held much in common with the pre-existing Indian culture, but with different belief systems and foodways. The Advaita, Bhakti, Tantra, and Yoga

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<sup>1</sup> For information on the early history of India, see Jonathan Mark Kenoyer, *Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998), Nalini Rao, ed., *Sindhu-Sarasvatī Civilization: New Perspectives* (Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 2014), and Edwin Bryant, *The Quest for the Origin of Vedic Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

movements added an amalgam of textures that supplement and, in many ways, synthesize both Śramanical and Brahmanical sensibilities. The Sikh tradition arose around 500 years ago, innovating a new form of faith and practice. Sikhs, with more than 25 million followers today, comprise the world's fifth largest religion, after Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists.

The percentages for each religion in India obscure an underlying complexity. Though 80% are said to be "Hindu," the number of Hindu denominations can be quite staggering. Multiple teachers and traditions within the broad Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva religious traditions can be found. Though the Christian population comprises only 2.3% of the population, these 27 million adherents place India in the top twenty of Christian nations. How has this complex diversity managed to coexist for so many thousands of years?

### **Nonviolence: A Way of Acceptance**

The Jain faith represents a small percentage of India's population, with approximately five million followers or less than half a percentage of India's total. However, their influence over the centuries has been remarkable and, despite their relatively small numbers, they continue to thrive both as a subculture and as an economic and educational force. Well known for their adherence to the teaching of nonviolence, they have developed a rigorous yet open combination of practices and beliefs. Belief and practice are intertwined: the Jains declare that the universe is eternal, not created, and that each individual life force (*jīva*) shapes its own destiny through purposeful choices that lead either to bondage or freedom. Life takes innumerable forms, from elemental and microbial expressions, to complex mammals including humans. Moving toward freedom requires strict adherence to a code of nonviolence, including vegetarianism or veganism and avoidance of judgmental hostility. This latter attitude came to be encoded in Jain literature notably in the writings of Haribhadra Virahanka (6<sup>th</sup> century) and Haribhadra Yakini Putra (8<sup>th</sup> century).

## Pluralism in the *Yogabindu* of Haribhadra Virahanka: Highlights of Text and Journey

While on a Fulbright Nehru Fellowship<sup>2</sup> during a year-long sabbatical in 2019 and 2020, I completed a translation of the *Yogabindu*, a sixth century Jain Sanskrit text by Haribhadra that gives a snapshot of common spiritual practices across religious traditions. The following article will highlight key features of the text, interwoven with reflections on several field experiences and current events in India during this period.

The newspapers in late 2019 were filled with repeated reporting on five issues, two political and three environmental. The political issues were Gandhi's 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary and the exclusion of Muslims from a law providing safe haven for refugees. The reminders of Gandhi and his legacy were quite heartening. However, having read William Dalrymple's moving account of Wahhabi suppression of Sufis in the Sindh province of Pakistan, I found the exclusion of persecuted Muslims from receiving safe haven in India particularly disturbing.<sup>3</sup>

The environmental reporting focused on a proposed ban of single use plastic bags, the required immersion of images after their worship into especially constructed pollution-capturing ponds. In the capital city, it included the yearly onslaught of stifling pollution due to the burning of chaff in nearby agricultural areas, and the ubiquitous streetside bonfires essential for providing warmth as temperatures drop with the approach of winter. Though these topics were not taken up as such in the *Yogabindu*, the ways in which these issues presented

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<sup>2</sup> The title of the funded project was "Jain Yoga and Religious Pluralism as Found in Haribhadra's *Yogabindu*," Lectures were given throughout India under the auspices of the Fulbright Nehru program and the International School of Jain Studies. Locations included Nagpur, Ramtek, Mumbai, Lonavala, and Pune in Maharashtra; New Delhi; Chennai, Pondicherry, and Madurai in Tamil Nadu; Bengaluru and Mysuru in Karnataka; Hardwar and Rishikesh in Uttarakhand; Kolkata and Shantiniketan in West Bengal; and Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh.

<sup>3</sup> See "The Red Fairy," the story of Lal Peri in William Dalrymple, *Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), pp. 109-141. He describes her as a "deeply eccentric ascetic... [who] lived an unusually traumatic life... a triple refugee: first as a Muslim driven out of India into East Pakistan after Hindu-Muslim riots in the late 1960s; then as a Bihari driven out of East Pakistan at the creation of Bangladesh in 1971; and finally as a single woman taking refuge in the shrines of Sindh" p. 118. He also laments "the 2009 dynamiting of the shine of the seventeenth-century Pashto poet-saint Rahman Baba at the foot of the Khyber Pass," deemed by the Wahhabi as a "centre of idolatry, immorality, and superstition" (130-131).

themselves in varying degrees of complexity can be seen in the glimmers of purposeful ambiguity evoked by Haribhadra. For instance, in the *Yogadr̥ṣṭisamuccaya*, Haribhadra Yakini Putra, after castigating practitioners of Tantra, shares that he does not want his critique given directly to them, but that he composed this work in hopes of showing others the advantages of adhering to basic standards of purity.<sup>4</sup> He urges his readers to avoid licentiousness and thereby avoid its attendant harms.

### **Freedom and the Common Good**

Each of the five topics actively discussed in 2019 carried a message that in some way appealed to the common good. On the historical side, honoring Gandhi served as a reminder of freedom from colonial rule and reclamation of national and personal self-pride. On the political side, the limits placed on the immigration of Muslims, ironically imposed at the same time as the Gandhi remembrances, pointed to Gandhi's greatest disappointment: the partition of India from Pakistan. On the environmental front, legislation was enacted to deal with solid waste disposal through the ban of one-use plastic bags, water pollution by capturing the highly toxic chemicals used to paint the colorful images of Ganesh and the goddess, and air pollution by sharing hourly data on the toxicity caused by local and distant fires. Each of these news events carried an implicit rejoinder, in the tradition of the major premise (*siddhānta*) being answered with an opposite view (*pratipakṣa*). However, rather than leading to resolution, the result was often ambiguous, seeming to point to an underlying understanding that imperfection is unavoidable. Gandhi, the father of the nation, was not one hundred percent successful. He did not desire partition but acquiesced to its inevitability. India's cherished secularism guarantees and upholds the right to practice any religion. However, the general populace seems to support the current government in setting religiously defined limits on immigration, despite the fact that many progressive Muslims are being harassed and displaced by conservative movements. Many vendors flaunt the rules on plastic bags; many worshippers continue to improperly dispose of ritual materials; and each winter the fires continue to rage in North India. How can the ideal be

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<sup>4</sup> For the critique of Tantra, see verses 66-85 and for the avoidance of confrontation, see 226-228 (Christopher Key Chapple, *Reconciling Yogas: Haribhadra's Collection of Views on Yoga*, SUNY Press, 2003).

accommodated as a possibility in face of the daunting prospect of the real?

If the ideal is freedom, an ancient analogue can be found in the pan-Indian quest for *mokṣa*. Every person wants to be free from the shackles of colonial exploitation. Every person craves personal safety. No person wants to suffer due to the pollution of the soil, the waters, and the air. Hence, the beginning of the *Yogabindu* rings true, calling for an acknowledgement that all people seek freedom:

1. Having bowed to the celebrated, auspicious,  
eternally liberated Lord of Yogis,  
I will proclaim the *Yogabindu*,  
which I put forth to demonstrate truth.
2. Each impartial, knowledgeable person  
who is established in the way of authenticity  
knows the harmonious nature of truth  
among all Yoga texts.
3. Because the purpose of Yoga is liberation,  
there can be no splintering.  
Since there is no difference in the final goal  
there is no true difference between types of Yoga.
4. Due to its goal of liberation,  
Yoga is followed with effort by the intelligent ones.  
This pure, true system, beneficial to one's being,  
should be sought with great longing.
5. To the extent that a system results  
in joining one to one's true nature,  
such a Yoga connects one with  
the most eminent of intentions.
6. Due to the linking (*saṃyoga*) of the self with the  
other (*karma*),  
one remains trapped in *saṃsāra*.  
Through disconnection (*viyoga*) from that (*karma*), one  
is indeed liberated...<sup>5</sup>

The karma in late 2019 took five symbolic and real expressions. In the political realm, the nation celebrated Gandhi and the desire to be free from colonial rule. At the same time, the government acted on a desire to be free from fear of the 'the other' by disallowing any Muslim to seek refuge in India. All people, as noted, want to have a landscape

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<sup>5</sup> Translations by the author.

without the taint of plastic bags. Everyone needs pure water and prefers clear air. However, each of these situations are complex. Not all persons venerate Gandhi. Not all Muslims are potential terrorists. The convenience of plastic bags has enduring allure. Some images under worship do not harbor pollutants. If given a choice between economic ruin or hypothermia, most reasonable people will choose fire. Reality subverts the ideal. Nonetheless, a desire for the common good manages to inspire people of good will to seek new solutions.

### **Dreams or Reality?**

Why do people persist in their positivity? India has long valued a yearning for the possible in both material and spiritual realms. Haribhadra Virahanka's *Yogabindu* proclaims the power of dream in effecting powerful change. He emphasizes the role of the mind in the determination of one's happiness, and the importance of paying attention to meaning-filled clues that arise in dreams.

1. From even a little bit of faith  
generated by the external practices of Yoga,  
beautiful dreams arise  
such as visions of one's chosen deity.
44. The yogis, established in good action,  
mainly see thrilling gods, gurus,  
brahmins, and sadhus in their dreams,  
driving away all lower states.
2. The process of driving away these [lesser states]  
establishes the efficacy [of Yoga].  
Because they cut away time and circumstance  
they are not to be faulted.
46. From the Yoga of sleep and mantra,  
the dream of truth (*satya svapna*) is made real.  
The knowing person, in a state of harmony,  
thus attains goodly success.

Like Martin Luther King, Jr., Mahatma Gandhi had a dream. He found imaginative ways to bring his dream into reality, though the result was an imperfect reality. The effects of partition can still be felt in the current laws that prohibit persecuted Muslims from entering India. The dream of harmony has not yet been fully realized. Similarly, contemporary activists dream of a world freed from the shackles of industrial pollution. Plastics, heavy metals, carbon, and methane carry



the density of karmas that inhibit the full expression of life on Earth. Only through daily lifestyle and systemic changes can their effects be countermanded. Corporations and governments must be directed away from blind allegiances to profits at the expense of people and the environment. Such a reversal requires a powerful dream, a dream that perhaps starts with the acknowledging the nightmarish extent of the harm done to the earth, the waters, and the air.

### **Worship as a Pathway to Change**

The *Yoga Sūtra* of Patañjali, a text important for understanding the religions of India, teaches the practice of cultivating opposites. Modern consumerism, which has been globalized in the era of neo-liberalism, suggests that the highest human happiness can be found in the acquisition of material goods. However, from a Yoga perspective, the opposite is true if one is to achieve freedom, social harmony, and a cleaner environment. Only by relinquishing attachments can one rise above the mindset that imposes colonization, bigotry, unbridled production and consumption of disposable consumer goods, and diet and lifestyle habits without regard to the environmental damage they cause. Haribhadra Virahanka writes that one must adopt universal spiritual practices to extricate oneself from the morass of human suffering:

108. The means of liberation to be embraced  
would be the same for all of creation,  
from the [heights of] Brahman  
all the way down to a clump of grass.

The *Yogabindu* urges one to engage in acts of devotion, regardless of one's faith, in order to move towards freedom.

110. Pūjā is to be practiced to honor  
the knowledge of those who see connections  
and to acknowledge the service provided by  
wise gurus and gods.

111. The list of those to be honored  
is long and detailed, including women and men,  
mothers and fathers, teachers of the arts,  
the elderly, and teachers of dharma.

112. These vaunted people are to be acknowledged

three times each day through bowing (*namakriya*)  
or at least thinking about them.

113. This Yoga entails standing when they enter,  
not taking a seat before they do,  
not flaunting their names in public,  
and not listening to any off-color talk [about them].

114. And, within one's power,  
always offer them the best of clothing  
and sublime actions and undertakings.

115. Renouncing undesirable things,  
turn to things desired.

These are to be known with refinement.

It is said they must not conflict with dharma.

116. After dispatching the bodies of the dead in the  
highest manner,  
do not sit on their furniture.

Offer their wealth to a place of pilgrimage.  
Memorialize them with a blessed portrait.

117. In a spirit of purity and faith,  
one should know how to do *pūjā* for the gods  
with flowers (*puṣpa*), food offerings (*bali*),  
garments (*vastra*), songs (*stotra*), and turmeric.

118. Householders should honor  
all the great souls and gods  
with a will and inclination  
that does not discriminate against any of them.

119. All gods merit honoring,  
not just one preferred god.

Those [who worship all gods] have controlled their  
senses  
and have overcome their fears and difficulties.

This last verse clearly evokes the spirit of open acceptance that urges choosing process over product. Regardless of who or what is “under worship,” the rituals remain the same, employing flowers, food, textiles, song, and spices as offerings.

By focusing on rituals, one supports an important cultural sensibility: living beings are more important than profits. Although it is acknowledged that clothing and textiles play a role in human wellbeing, this text emphasizes intent over glamour. The sentiment in the words “offer them the best of clothing” suggests that intent is more important

than quantity. The general attitude conveyed is one of respect, not a sense of power-over. Furthermore, rather than emphasizing who or how to engage in worship, these verses work at conveying an overall demeanor grounded in humility and simplicity, not arrogance or showiness.

### **Paryushan in Delhi**

A distinctly Jain ritual known as Paryushan takes place every year at the end of August or in September. The ten-day observance of repentance and expiation requires special ablutions and the donning of light yellow Pūjā clothing. As can be seen in the photograph, a circular sand painting serves as a ritual focal point, adorned with different symbols in each of its ten pie-like segments, two each of orange (one with Oms), green, white, yellow, and red (one with the cosmic swastika). Each segment represents one of the ten chapters of the *Tattvārtha Sūtra*, the sacred philosophical text revered by Jains of all denominations.



In another part of the temple, a seated image of Parshvanath can be found under worship, with dozens of men of all ages, in fresh Pūjā clothes, taking turns at polishing the white marble image. As you look at the photo below, you will see three signifiers: the cobra hood

protecting Parshvanath, the cobra insignia at the base of his throne, and the emblem on the chest that symbolizes the loving compassion-with-simultaneous-dispassion characteristic of all 24 Great Teachers (*Tirthankaras* or *Jinas*). Parshvanath is number 23 and has been dated from approximately 850 B.C.E.



### **Religious Pluralism, Regional and Local: Durgā Pūjā**

October in India is the month of festivals and celebrations, like February is in China, and December is in Christian nations. Several temples were within walking distance of our apartment in Haus Khaz

Village, so I decided to explore them. The local Jagannathan temple revealed how India's capital city responds to linguistic and ethnic multiplicity. The temple, gleaming white, beckons its visitors with a sparkling clean small parking lot and friendly entrance, with the words *Seva Sangha* (community of service) emblazoned in English, Oriya, and Bengali scripts above the entrance, although not in Hindi. As one progresses up into the outdoor five-shrine mandir, Ganesh is the first to welcome visitors, with a Śiva lingam to the other side. On the far side to the left stands a shrine for the goddess, and, as at many such temples, the most visited shrine, on the back to the right, is to Lakshmi, goddess of wealth. In the main shrine, one finds representations of Jagannath, his brother Balabhadra, and his sister Subhadra as one would see in the main Puri temple in Orissa, carved of wood and painted colorfully with very large eyes. Some Vaishnavas consider Jagannath to be the ninth incarnation of Vishnu, while Śaivites consider him to be Bhairava, Buddhists see him a form of Buddha, and Jains as a Tirthankara. The main Jagannath festival occurs in July worldwide, with the parading of the images into the public, including through Santa Monica in California.

Moving down the road and around the corner, the neighborhood Sanatana Dharma Śiva Temple bustled with school-holiday energy, with many children playing in the street and in the main temple hall. On the ground level, a small meditation space honored Shirdi Sai Baba (1838-1918), revered in his life and up to the present by both Hindus and Muslims in India. Ascending the marble stairs into the large main hall, one encounters, immediately to the left, a life size image of Baba Nagpal, founder of the major Chhatarpur Saiva temple complex further south in Delhi. Maureen and I met with him in 1994, four years before his passing. With dreadlocks more than 15 feet long and polio-ravaged legs little more than the size of two thin sticks, he sat for years under a sacred tree, telling wisdom stories. Slowly, his disciples bought up the surrounding land and created what, in the 1990s, was the largest Hindu temple in the world. Baba Nagpal beamed happily at our 1994 delegation of religious leaders. He expressed joy at being in the company of people who asked him for nothing and said wistfully that most of his days are spent blessing new businesses and giving encouragement to students undertaking exams. His *samādhi* funerary shrine remains an important pilgrimage site.

The front of the temple has been given over to a massive Durgā *pandal*, a temporary shrine constructed for the purpose of performing

pūjā. During Nava Rātri / Durgā Pūjā, her image is constructed of clay, painted elaborately, and dressed in finery for the nine-day celebration. Her image, some twelve feet high, and replete with her regal lion mount and multiple weapons, blocks the view of the holy Saivite family of Śiva, Parvatī, Ganesh, and Skanda/Murugan/Kārttikeya. Later that day she will be removed, taken in a grand procession through the streets of Delhi, most likely in the company of thousands of people, and immersed in a tank built for this purpose, allowing Her clay to melt back into its elemental form. Thousands of temples throughout India are now committed to “eco-immersions.” In Delhi, 116 temporary ponds have been built by the government to service more than a thousand images for use only within the state.

In the old days, when all materials were made of plant matter, including the dyes used to paint the images, they would be immersed in the closest river, in this case, the Yamuna. However, during the modern period, lead paints and other chemically laced substances have been used to enhance the glamor of each statue. Just as in Buddhist nations, where the fires created to send replica items to accompany the dead into a better life create the largest single source of pollution, so too would the rivers and ponds in all India see a horrific spike in pollution during the month of October due to the immersion ceremonies. Thanks to education projects, public funding, and the miracle of modern environmental science, this has been minimized. And it has created a great deal of paid work for sanitation workers!

As noted above, the month of October is to Hindus what the month of December is to Christians, September for Jews (Yom Kippur) and Jains (Paryushan), and the month of February for the Chinese (New Year), and, I suppose, the floating sacred time of Ramadan, which follows the lunar calendar. We all need to mark the passing of time each in our own way, with an eye toward reflection, taking stock, making amends, and moving forward.

On the eighth of October, 2019, we traveled to the Bengali neighborhood of Kashmere Gate to witness a sea-change in Hindu religious practice. A big part of the festival season includes creating giant clay images that are erected in *pandals* and tents throughout the country. Legislation was passed in 2015 urging all pūjā committees throughout India to plan new ways to dispose of images. In the old days, the images would be paraded to a river, lake or pond and immersed, with the clay returning to the earth. However, with the advent of creating these images out of plastics and heavy metals, a

spike in water pollution rendered these bodies of water highly toxic. So the government decreed: no more! For a fixed number of days, families will visit these images, often to be found at intersections, outside temples, or even in parks, to take darshan and remember the qualities and stories associated with each deity. In early September, Ganesh Caturthi was celebrated primarily in Mumbai and Maharashtra. In October, one finds celebration of the goddess in Nava Rātri, culminating with the worship of Durgā, particularly popular in Bengal.

We traveled to the Bengali neighborhood for the final, dancing, exuberant and sad moment. People were exuberant because the festival had been great fun, and sad because the Goddess would soon return to her elemental source, her image melting into the water, and her clay restored to the earth. It was quite remarkable to see the crane lift the 15-foot-high image and then lower her into the immersion pond. According to newspaper reports, the testing of the Yamuna River today confirms significant improvement over past years: no longer a spike in heavy metals. However, the crop burning had begun near Delhi, and the air became laden with smoke from regional farms. Again, day after day, the newspapers carried stories about air, water, and soil, urging reduction of pollution in all ways.

## Yoga

The Ganesh Puja in Maharashtra in August, Paryushan in September, and the celebration of Durga Puja in October encapsulate activities that fall under the catch-all word for religious practice employed in India: Yoga. Haribhadra praises Yoga as the gold standard for effecting personal and societal change:

410. Entering this path,  
one is overcome with this indeed.  
Yoga is the adherence to this truth.  
With this, one gains happiness and more.
411. Happiness, certainty, firmness,  
contentment, seeing truth,  
renunciation of the path tread by ordinary people:  
these are the six ways of Yoga  
through which a sage attains success.
412. The feeling one acquires by practicing meditation,  
thinking clearly, and reading texts  
are three esteemed ways

through which highest Yoga wisdom is obtained. For nearly two millennia, Yoga, often associated with its descriptions in the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Yoga Sūtra* and lauded in many other texts, has been the pathway to human freedom, providing a template for overcoming pain and suffering.

### **Living in India, 2019**

A first-time visitor to India quite often is taken aback by the sensory overload of animals wandering the streets, itinerant workers from the village living in tents along the highway, open fires, open sewers, seemingly endless piles of trash, and a cacophony of automotive, animal, and human sounds and smells. Depending upon the time of year and place, one might find oneself in the most polluted air quality on the planet, particularly if one is in Delhi in the winter. Living in Delhi each summer for nearly a decade and for the entire latter of half of 2019, one could not ignore palpable improvements since my first visit in 1981. The air quality, which seemingly hit an all-time low in 1997, has improved immensely since the CNG requirements for taxis and buses were implemented at the urging of M. C. Mehta, winner of the Goldman Prize for environmental innovation. The municipal water supply now brings greater pressure to the tap and the availability of reverse osmosis activated granulated carbon filtered water has become pervasive. A nationwide government campaign called Swacch Bharat, roughly translated as Clean India, has dignified the work of street sweepers due to the positive nationwide press campaign that lauds tidiness as a patriotic duty. Recycling collection stations now appear throughout the city. Journalists have itemized the size and number of landfills within the capitol district: very small and very few. Slowly the pieces of the puzzle have begun to make sense for visitors and residents alike: Delhi, one of the oldest cities on the planet, was not built for the onslaught of modern consumer culture. Dealing with the detritus of plastic is quite different from disposing of banana leaves.

A stunningly direct article in the *Hindustan Times* (the newspaper co-founded by Gandhi that his son Devadas (1900-1957) edited from 1937 until his death) describes the perils of plastic, quoting studies that have received little mention in the western media. Specifically, journalist Rhythma Kaul quotes Dr. N. Chandrasekaran,



director of the Centre for Nanobiotechnology at the Vellore Institute of Technology in Tamil Nadu:

Single-use plastics are largely the low-density variety, which can be quite harmful for human health. ... [they are] light weight and get converted to micro- or nano-plastics which easily enter the body. Microplastics are between 0.05nanometers (nm) and 5nm in length while nanoplastics are 1,000 times smaller. [Nanoplastics] smaller than 50nm pass through the intestinal wall, enter tissues and organs, affecting circulatory, respiratory, digestive, nervous, and endocrine systems... [they] gradually gets degraded inside the cell and converted into styrene, a possible carcinogen.<sup>6</sup>

Kaul notes that problems arising from nanoplastic intake might include “obesity, abnormality in sex organs, early puberty, infertility, metabolic disorders, learning disabilities, impaired immune function, altered nervous system function, diabetes, even certain types of cancer.” Candrasekaran suggests that the “solution lies in generating awareness about the harms of single-use plastic... at the grassroots level.” All over India, shopping bags generally are made of cloth and, despite inevitable protest from plastic industry lobbyists, the public seems squarely behind minimizing the use of plastic.

After braving days in Delhi in the fall of 2019 when the particulate matter parts per million exceeded 700 (in Los Angeles persons are advised not go outdoors when levels hit 200, a once-in-a-decade occurrence), returning to the United States in 2020 brought many unanticipated events and challenges. The pandemic kept virtually everyone indoors, away from school, away from work, away from the highways. The Black Lives Matter movement accelerated due to the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and others. Fires raged from San Diego to Seattle, rendering dystopic skies, heavily polluted air, and the burning of millions of acres. The question of sustainability seemed quaint and privileged in the face of so many lives lost. The stark question of survival lingered: who is safe from disease? From environmental degradation? From social othering and denigration?

Haribhadra suggests that the only way to escape from any dilemma or calamity, or to help others who have fallen upon hard times, is to cultivate the practice of giving, *dāna*. These passages proclaim that through giving, great change can be effected:

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<sup>6</sup> Rhythma Kaul, “Growing plastic use taking a toll on public health: Experts” (*Hindustan Times*, October 7, 2019).

121. One should wish to engage  
in giving (*dāna*) as recommended,  
providing food to groups such as the poor.  
In regard to those groups who are thriving,  
one is not to obstruct  
their own share [of well-being].

122. Additionally, those who carry  
the marks of observing vows,  
specifically the vow of not cooking,  
require the donation of food.  
These [monks and nuns] always move  
about in harmony with their own teachings.

123. The [prior] group includes  
those whose eyes are closed,  
who are pitiable in their blindness and poverty,  
who are afflicted with specific diseases.  
They are without the power to act on their own.  
(Unlike the monks and nuns.)

124. The gift is given for the benefit  
of both (giver and receiver).  
This [act of giving] is not recommended  
if it might cause disease or unwholesomeness.

125. Giving is the primary practice of dharma.  
Giving destroys poverty.  
Giving causes one to be beloved by people.  
Giving increases one's fame.

126. Auspicious behavior is proclaimed  
as announcing one's disdain for worldliness,  
concern for uplifting the impoverished,  
gratefulness, and sincerity.

If one considers the plight of refugees, all would be deemed worthy of  
gift, regardless of religious persuasion.

### **Challenges into the Future: Will We All Become Ecosystem People?**

Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* describes a future  
wherein Lauren Olamina wanders from Pasadena to the Beach Cities  
of California's South Bay. She dodges bullets and hunkers down in  
garages, without electricity, without a reliable food source before

trudging north as if pursuing the Underground Railroad, following the Big Dipper to create a self-sufficient survivalist community in the far northern reaches of California. More than 60,000 people each night live in Los Angeles County without housing, many with fewer resources than the displaced Olamina family of Butler's novel. As I write this essay in early 2020, the sky is red with smoke generated by fires that have claimed millions of acres up and down the western coast of America. Coronavirus has affected the lives of billions worldwide, and millions in the Americas. In Zoom class this week, one student shared that her family has lost significant income. Her mother cleans houses and has become unwelcome in the homes of others due to Corona virus. Another student's uncle refuses all medical treatment because of his status as an undocumented worker.

When we lived at Navdanya near Dehradun, we slept without heat in the cold Uttar Khand winter, rejoicing when the final night arrived and our hosts lit a bonfire that brought warmth and delight. Just beyond the boundaries of the farm, the local forest people lived in lean-tos and similarly gathered around the fire for warmth. During the day they ventured illegally into protected lands, lopping branches to feed their goats, using the dried branches for firewood. We interfaced with these families daily on our walks as they worked gathering fodder and firewood around the outskirts of the property.

Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha have identified three modalities of environmental emplacement in India: the urban omnivores, educated and well-housed, the ecosystem people, rural, largely uneducated, living in symbiosis with available resources, and ecological refugees who have fled to the cities to enter the cash economy.<sup>7</sup> Throughout the globe we live at a crossroads, recognizing that the urban omnivore lifestyle must change. Its extractive requirements cannot be maintained. The realities of climate change demand a restructuring of the global economy beginning with moving away from reliance on carbon-based energy, the ever-increasing meat and animal product consumption, and the abuse of plastics. The omnivore must heed the pleas of the ecological refugees and learn lessons from ecosystem people.

Haribhadra Virahanka advocates the adoption of a reflective, spiritual lifestyle in order to set things right in the world. Though these words were spoken and written more than 1400 years ago, they hold wisdom

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<sup>7</sup> Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha, *Ecology and Equity: The Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1995), pp. 3-5.

even today. Rather than relying upon consumer pleasures as a source of meaning, Haribhadra again lauds basic decency as the true test of worth and happiness. Peace and happiness only be found through reflective spirituality (*adhyātma*) and religious practice (*sādhana*).

68. Spirituality is praised  
as the highest method on this path.

Such a person travels  
on the way of truth without interruption.

69. Having become freed from conflictual speech,  
one should think consistently of spirituality.

In order to achieve the knowledge to be known,  
one must shake off the dust of darkness.

186. [The person not bound by the past]  
would be cloaked with peace,  
with a spiritual practice (*sādhana*)  
established in purity.

Connected with subtle existence,  
that person will follow feelings of the truth.

187. It is thought that the one  
whose amalgam of karmas is cloaked with peace  
and whose existence takes resort in purity, will be rich,  
experience happiness and pleasure beyond reproach,  
as well as be good looking and youthful.

Furthermore, Haribhadra states that prayer, regardless of the divinity revered, brings about moments of restoration and stability, creating a resiliency reserve:

381. Prayer (*japa*) is said to be the initial practice  
to attain spirituality (*adhyātma*).

From the essence of this limb arises divine grace  
(*devatā anugraha*).

Hence this is a way of cultivating insight  
(*abhidhīyate*).

382. The object of *japa* is noble recitation.

It is said to be a hymn to the gods (*devatā-stava*).

It is seen that though this sins dissolve (*pāpa-hāra*).

Poisons are thus removed (*viṣa-apaharaṇa*).

383. It is advised for it (*japa*) to be performed  
either in front of a deity (*devatā-apurata*)  
or in a place where the water is pure  
or in a beautiful grove of trees.

384. Counting the joints of the fingers  
or telling the mala beads like giving life to a son,  
one witnesses stability [of breath] at the tip of the nose.  
By oneself, one finds inner peace (*praśānta*  
*antarātmanā*).

385. [Japa requires] focusing the mind  
on the qualities of the desired deity,  
as well as its meaning and associations.  
If one is distracted, then one should stop.

386. When one gets over improper behavior,  
then one can, through the breath, resume.  
It purifies desires.

In this way, a person, by stopping, is not stopping.

387. In *japa* the measure of time is celebrated.

From this, in not doing (*akaraṇe*),  
one acquires the dispositional behaviors (*bhāva-vṛtti*)  
that characterize awakening (*vidur-buddhā*).

388. This is praised by the noble sages.

Purity [arises] from effort at holding [to this practice].

From this, dharma always arises,

both at the time and following its performance.

Through tending to one's inner life, the outer realm improves.

### Moving Toward Resolution

This essay identified five areas of concern: the need for remembrance of a heroic figure (Gandhi), a disturbing exclusionary governmental policy regarding Muslim refugees, the intransigence of pollution caused by plastics, worship-induced water pollution, and basic air quality. Yes, Gandhi continues to inspire. No, it is not fair to withhold safe haven from any persecuted minority. Yes, the earth and the human body itself need to become free of poisonous trash, waters, and air. If we typologize the neglect of Gandhi, the rejection of refugees, and the preponderance of pollution as poisons, Haribhadra's words hold poignancy:

155. Drinking poison destabilizes.

Respect for elders (*guru-pūjā*) bring stability.

It must be performed in hopes aimed upward,  
towards the purpose of highest immortality.

Venerating exemplars helps move a person and a society toward a place of hope. It also fosters a sense of confidence and trust in the innate goodness of others.

In a magnanimous gesture, Haribhadra, a convinced adherent to the Jain faith, celebrates the competition. Though differing in so many ways in the realms of metaphysics and even ethics, Haribhadra lifts up the Buddhist Bodhisattva ideal as not different in intent from the ideas professes by his own brethren.

270. The one who “stands down”

[backs away from poisonous karma]

is known as a Bodhisattva.

All the signs [of moving to freedom] are indicated.

(The Jain with correct vision (Samyagdr̥ṣṭi) who has cut the knots of karma behaves like the Bodhisattva of Mahāyāna Buddhism.)

271. The Bodhisattvas descend into the body,  
indeed, from on high.

Although joined [to the world] here in body,  
their consciousness does not descend.

272. These two (Bodhisattvas and Samyagdr̥ṣṭis)  
are the same in all ways.

They have a taste for higher purpose.

They are visionary. They tread the path.

They are of noble disposition.

They have lovely qualities.

273. Correct vision and awakening  
arise from the same source (*pradhāna*).

It is clear that the Jain saint

is of the same being as the Bodhisattva.

274. Whether a person desires to be joined  
in the space of awakening [the Bodhisattva]  
or making pilgrimage

(the Jain saint’s journey to the Siddha Loka),

it is known that excellence can be found

in both the Bodhisattva and the Jain saint.

Commonality of virtuous intent allows one to overcome all obstacles, even the rigidity of close religious affiliation. A saintly person would continue to remember the good work of Mahatma Gandhi, would extend a helping hand to all refugees in need, and work to end pollution of the earth, waters, and air.

## **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion**

To conclude this reflection, I would like to share three examples of persons who have dedicated themselves to creating a culture of openness to animals, to women, and toward the nuances of Indian history. These examples help illustrate an aspect of India's cultural grammar that reflects a willingness to embrace difference and even contradiction without falling into a brittle rejection of the worth of the other.

First, I want to salute the life and dedicated work of Dr. Vivek Menon, founder and director of the Wildlife Trust of India. My wife and I visited him in his Noida offices in the fall of 2019 after traveling from Rishikesh to Dehradun in Uttarkhand. We described to him our witnessing of a flyover (an Indian term for elevated highway) under construction along the route, noting that it will allow safe passage of elephants and other wide animals. He smiled. He acknowledged that, yes, this was his idea and required a great deal of effort to implement! The flyover also helps humans, whose risk will be reduced. Five hundred humans are trampled to death each year in India by elephants. During a visit with Vivek in 2014, he had described his work on behalf of the tigers in the Sundarban region of West Bengal. He noted that villagers have grown to accept the inevitability of the occasional loss of human life and resist any wholesale effort to eradicate the tigers. Animals have earned the right to live and to be protected even when human life is at stake.

Our conversation continued with a charming story of how his work often brings him into unexpected relationship with the famous, rich, and powerful. Vivek told of one fortuitous meeting with Britain's Prince William, Princess Kate, and India's Prime Minister Modi. William, the future king, and his wife have an abiding interest in wildlife, influenced no doubt by the work of his father Prince Charles on behalf of the environment. The prince asked the Prime Minister about his interest in wildlife and protection of nature. At first, the Prime Minister indicated that he had little interest or knowledge about this topic. However, Vivek carefully made the case for nature protection in India as vital to heritage preservation, and assurance was given that the good work of nature protection shall continue!

Second, I want to salute the work of Janki Devi Memorial College in Karol Bagh, an industrial area of west Delhi. The college

was founded by Brij Krishan Chandiwala in 1959. When Gandhi was assassinated on the grounds of the Birla mansion (now the National Gandhi Museum), he fell into the arms of Chandiwala, a great industrialist and freedom fighter. Chandiwala organized the funeral for the Mahatma, famously attended by more than two million people. He established the college, which remains exclusively for women, in the Karol Bagh neighborhood to attract girls from working class, presumably low caste families involved with handicrafts, pottery, and other trades. Even today, many of the earthen lamps (*deepa*) lit during Diwali, the festival of lights, are made in Karol Bagh.

Third, I want to talk about the work of Chandiwala's great niece, Surekha Narain, whom we had met in Rishikesh. She invited us to be part of her Delhi Metro Tours experience of the Mehrauli historic district south of Delhi. We visited the Yogamaya Mandir, a temple in honor of the goddess. Though reduced in size, this temple site has been well documented in Jain literature. Elaborate tantric rituals took place there, as described in the stories of Dādā Guru Manidhari Jinachandra Sūri (1140-1166). He defeated dozens of Kaula Tantric practitioners in debate, convincing them to become Jain nuns.

We also visited Qutab Minar, a pillar made of iron dated from the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Originally part of a Hindu temple, the site was converted into a mosque with a landmark minaret built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The mosque retains images of multiple goddesses and gods and animals in its columns and walls, including vivid images of the goddess that undoubtedly were part of the original Yogamaya Devi temple. From there we hiked up part of the Aravalli range of hills to a Dargah cave. The Sufi Baba Farid (1179-1266) lived there for many years in meditation. He subsequently entered into the state of Fanā (analogous to Buddhist *nirodha* or yogic *samādhi*) and then returned to inspire many others in the Chishti Sufi community.

We walked through the magnificent vegetable market and climbed through Hathi Gate into the final residence and resting place of the last Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar (1775-1862). Now in ruins, this palace once housed the entire court. The British deposed him in 1857 and deported him to Burma. A few steps away, we entered the Dargah (shrine) of Khwaja Qutbiddin Bakhtiyar Kaki (1173-1235), to whom the Qutab Minar mosque is dedicated. The shrine attracts people of all faiths. The convergence of religion on the central experience of silence is palpable in the Dargah holy sites.



On the drive back to Green Park and Haus Khaz, we visited the New Delhi Aurobindo Ashram and its deliciously fragrant bookstore, gardens, and meditation hall. In a single day we moved from the fifth century to the twelfth century, to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and into the present, experiencing Hindu Tantra, Jain austerity, Islamic Sufism, hegemonic remnants of British colonial rule, and post-independence meditation-informed modernity.

### Conclusion

India presents many contrasts and contradictions. On the one hand, its energy policies require weaning away from reliance on fossil fuels within 50 years. Its restrictions on the use of plastics are among the most stringent in the world, at least on paper. On the other hand, its turbulent turn toward intolerance of non-Hindu faiths causes consternation and fear, particularly among Muslims and Christians who have called India home for centuries. What can be done to foster a tolerance of diversity, to bring about equity for persons regardless of their faith or social status, to realize an inclusive society as enshrined in the Constitution of India that sees oneness in all faiths and in all persons?

Haribhadra, as we have seen above, advocated paying attention to the grammar of worship and prayer, regardless of which temple is visited or which prayer is spoken. One first cultivates the good life and then takes on the practice of meditation. This brings about acceptance and equanimity and “cuts the thread of expectation;” knowledge arises which brings freedom.

360. Through repeated merit, one arrives at cultivation (*bhāvanā*).

The mind is connected in *samādhi*.

This connectivity is to be strengthened every day.

This, indeed, is the practice to be known.

361. This practice reduces impurity.

One is inclined toward the practice of purity (*śubha*).

Therefore, the good mind increases.

This is understood to be the benefit of cultivation.

362. A mind state regularly residing in purity is called meditation (*dhyāna*) by the sages.

It resembles an unflickering lamp.

It endows a person with enjoyment of the subtle (*sūkṣma*).

363. The wise thus say:

“The conclusion of this (Yoga) results in separation from attachment, stability in the midst of existence, and mastery (*viśitā*) at all times.”

364. Equanimity (*samatā*) is called equanimity because it arises when, due to understanding, one abandons likes and dislikes within the realm of things that are manufactured by ignorance.

365. The fruit of this [equanimity] is declared when one cuts the thread of expectation.

Thus, one destroys subtle karma and strengthens the process of disengagement.

367. Whoever stops the behaviors (*vṛtti*) that result from involvement with karma (*anya*), destroys (*saṃkṣaya*) those karmas and no longer re-enters the form of existence.

367. This indeed is liberative knowledge.

Here one attains total freedom.

One obtains liberation from all obstacles.

One reaches [eternal] existence and bliss.

A return to this sensibility will help advance the cause of peace in the years to follow. Rather than dwelling in opinion and realms of divisiveness, Haribhadra advocates dropping the argument, dropping righteousness in favor of harmonious vision.

525. For the purpose of attaining the highest self, what does it matter which argument one adopts?

What matters is joining and holding onto a vision that makes sense.

Haribhadra established a template for not only tolerance of other views, but active celebration of commonalities. Rather than seeking to disparage the “other,” Haribhadra consistently sought to explain and understand how overcoming the difficulties of karma can bring social and individual freedom, establishing an enduring template for inter-group harmony.



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