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## Year of India: Introduction to the Special Issue

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# **Year of India: Introduction to the Special Issue**

**Dan Paracka**

The Year of India marked the 34th anniversary of Kennesaw State University's (KSU) award-winning annual country study program. The program has been a major force for internationalizing our campus introducing thousands of students to the rich diversity of world cultures that make up the human family and helping them to develop a complex understanding of today's interdependent world. The program draws upon the expertise of our faculty to offer special courses, organize lectures and events, engage in collaborative research, partner with Indian universities and community groups, and mentor and assist students interested in learning about India and its place in a global society.

Rather than simply continue the program's traditional format, the Year of India witnessed the implementation of several new features including the integration of a new organizational model that seeks to empower academic colleges by providing them with a more active role in program development and more focused intentional curricular connections. The new model also provides enhanced leadership opportunities for faculty with expertise related to the country of study. Finally, the new model provides a very exciting and unique opportunity for students to enroll in an interdisciplinary team-taught course with a very affordable study abroad component.

As a way of introducing our campus community to India, I published the following essay on-line making it widely available before the program began. The essay is reprinted here as a way to help readers, especially those unfamiliar with Indian history and society, have a valuable entry point for further learning, inquiry, and understanding of India, as well as to provide a useful introduction to the issues examined in this volume.

## **Unity in Diversity**

North, South, Central, East, and West across India the winds of change constantly blow. While Indian history, like all great civilizations, is replete with wars and violence, India is remarkable for its emphasis on non-violence and peaceful coexistence across religious and cultural differences. Boundless in its diversity, too big for one deity, it is a land of deep spirituality and mundane inanities, a place where sages abandon worldly possessions seeking liberation and where maharajas erected exquisite pleasure palaces. Home of the Himalayas and life-giving rivers—the Saraswati, Ganges, Yamuna, Narmada, Brahmaputra, Kshipra, Godavari, and Kaveri, as well as the monsoon seasons of the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean, India is a crossroads and fertile land.

The world's largest secular democracy and the second most populous country in the world (soon projected to be the most), with more than 400 ethnic groups and languages, India is the birthplace of four major world religions (Buddhism,

Hinduism, Jainism, and Sikhism), boasts large numbers of Muslims (2nd largest Muslim population in the world – approximately 170 million) and long-standing Christian communities (approximately 24 million) as well as many other religious groups including Jewish and Parsi. The Apostle Thomas is said to have arrived on the Malabar Coast of India around 50 CE. Approximately 80% of Indians are Hindu but only 36% speak Hindi as their first language. There is no national language of India, but the official languages of government are Hindi and English. The Indian Constitution also recognizes 22 languages, of which the most widely spoken are Telugu, Bengali, Marathi, Tamil, Urdu, and Gujarati. India's diversity of religious practices, languages, and ethnic origins is remarkable (including for example people of African origin who have lived in India for at least the past eight centuries). Devoted to the divine, Hinduism, at its core, recognizes the sacredness of life reflecting its complexities and the notion of unity in diversity.

### World Heritage

The ancient Indus valley civilization of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro (in present day Pakistan) dates back over 5,000 years and was larger than that of Egypt's Nile Valley or Mesopotamia. There are 35 (27 cultural, seven natural, and one mixed) World Heritage Sites in India that are recognized by UNESCO. The most famous is the architectural marble splendor, the Taj Mahal, built by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his wife Mumtaz who died in childbirth in 1629. Other treasures include places such as the Ajanta and Ellora caves or Rajaraja's red sandstone temple complex at Tanjore with its ancient Cholan Empire murals.

The great books of India or four Vedas include: the *Rig-Veda* which comprises more than 1,000 hymns in praise of 33 gods and refers to rituals associated with these gods; the rich epic narrative tales of the *Brahmanas*; the *Aranyakas* with rituals for the spiritually advanced; and the *Upanishads* that focus on the relationship of the self with the cosmos (McGee, 1996, p. 20). The Vedas introduce the concepts of Dharma (divine, social, and ethical order of the universe) and Karma (cause and effect of individual action), and the basis for the caste system. These include works such as: the *Mahabharata* with its tragic battles, where good people on both sides die, the longest poem ever written (15 times longer than the Bible); the *Bhagavadgita* (Song of the Lord) with its wisdom and story of Lord Krishna advising the warrior Arjuna; and the *Ramayana* with its timeless and popular story of the husband Rama, wife Sita, and the monkey Hanuman. Adding the story of Prince Siddhartha and the founding of Buddhism, India has gifted the world a remarkable literary and philosophical legacy.

Another unique and important cultural heritage of India that has found proponents all over the world is yoga. Yoga refers to disciplined activity that aims to promote mental concentration as a path to spiritual liberation. It helps the practitioner move self-awareness away from an entanglement with worldly objects to perceive deeper truths of the divine (McGee, 1996, p. 32). Describing yoga as the freedom of discipline, Donna Farhi (2004) notes: "Sadness is moving through me, but sadness is not who I am; excitement is moving through me, but excitement is not who I am; grief is moving through me, but grief is not only who I am" (p. 72).

In the West, yoga has become a popular system of physical exercises aim at harmonizing the body with the mind and breath that is touted for having many health benefits. The Year of India at KSU will kick-off on International Yoga Day with an opportunity for faculty, staff, and students to learn more about the practice. KSU also offers regular courses on yoga.

### **Invaders, Trade, and Empires**

Would-be conquerors such as Darius (Persians), Tamburlaine (Mongols), and Alexander the Great (Greeks) could not defeat the Indian spirit. Instead, as in the case with the Mughal empire, “a hybrid Indo-Islamic civilization emerged, along with hybrid languages—notably Deccani and Urdu—which mixed the Sanskrit-derived vernaculars of India with Turkish, Persian, and Arabic words” (Dalrymple, 2015, p. 65). Generally, in the wake of military conquest, Hindus have tended to prefer religious syncretism over religious exclusivism (Gier, 2014, p. 4).

The Greek defeat and departure around 327 BCE was soon followed by the rise of Chandragupta Maurya, one of the greatest leaders and organizers of Indian history (Wood, 2007, p. 71). Chandragupta’s famous Athashastra is an important early text on the art of statecraft, power politics, and diplomacy. Even more famous than Chandragupta is his grandson Ashoka whose violent rule is said to have been transformed after converting to Buddhism and adopting a peaceful and compassionate stance. He established rules of good governance that included religious tolerance and non-violence and made many practical infrastructural improvements such as roads and water wells for the well-being of society. Buddhism, India’s most successful cultural export, spread far and wide during the reign of Ashoka and became a major influence on the cultures of China and East Asia (Wood, 2007, p. 97). The golden age of the Guptas was a pluralist time that saw the founding of the world’s first residential university at Nalanda drawing student from Persia and East Asia. It was also during the reign of the Guptas that the famous Kama Sutra exposition on erotic love and human sexuality was composed.

India has been at the center of vast overland and ocean-going trade routes for more than 2,000 years. Cultural exchange over these routes was extensive. The Spice Route brought Arab, Greek, and Roman seafaring merchants to India, and the Silk Road established contact between China, India, and Europe. Tamil poems dating back to the 2nd century BCE tell of Greek and Roman visitors. The Khyber Pass and the Hindu Kush connected, by what became known as the Grand Trunk Road, the overland route between India and China (over 1,600 miles passing through Kabul, Afghanistan; Lahore, Pakistan; and Delhi, India). But ships also sailed between these great empires and throughout Southeast Asia. Indeed, Muslim and Hindu traditions spread successfully to Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam primarily by sea traders, not overland conquerors (Gier, 2014, p. 6).

Illustrating the importance of trade in cultural exchange, British historian Michael Wood (2007) notes: “The Roman craze for pepper was all about food, of course. Nothing better underlines the idea that the story of civilization is also the history of food and cooking; and Indian cooking ... was perhaps the first

international cuisine.... In the Roman Empire the celebrity chef Apicius wrote a famous cookbook in which 350 of the 500 recipes ... used pepper and southern Indian spices” (p. 103). Courses and programs featuring Indian cuisine will be an important part of introducing students to Indian culture during the Year of India program. Indian vegetarian cuisine and its nutritional health benefits will be studied as well as connections to Ayurveda, a holistic system of healthcare (diet, nutrition, exercise) that emphasizes prevention and is the world’s oldest school of medicine having been practiced in India for more than 5,000 years (Arnett, 2014, p. 22).

It was sea trade that first brought Islam to India but the Muslim Mughal Empire, which ruled vast territories of northern India from 1526-1857, came over land. Mughal is the Arabic and Persian form of Mongol but the Mughal Empire was actually founded by Zahir-ud-din Muhammed Babur, a Chaghatai Turk born in 1483 in today’s Uzbekistan (Kaplan, 2011, p. 121). Babur’s grandson, Akbar the Great, known for his rule of reason and tolerance of diversity, is said to have reflected: “It cannot be wisdom to assert the truth of one faith over another. The wise person makes justice his guide and learns from all” (Wood, 2007, p. 194). He held weekly seminars and conferences with representatives of Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Christians, Jains, Sikhs, and Zorastrians to discuss the tenets of these faiths and built a “City of Yogis” (Gier, 2014, pp. xv, 2).

The Sufi mystics associated with the peaceful spread of Islam in India often regarded the Hindu scriptures as divinely inspired. As William Dalrymple (2015) explains, “In village folk traditions, the practice of the two faiths came close to blending into one. Hindus would visit the graves of Sufi masters and Muslims would leave offerings at Hindu shrines” (p. 65). Religious syncretism was a common practice in pre-colonial India as evidenced by circumstances surrounding the founding of the Sikh Golden Temple at Amritsar as the foundation stone is said to have been laid by a famous Muslim saint Mian Mir and the murals of the interior walls depicted stories of Hindu mythology. At its dedication in 1588, Guru Arjan explained the four cardinal doors: “My faith is for the people of all castes and creeds from which every direction they come and to which ever direction they bow” (Gier, 2014, pp. 208-209). It was the British in the second half of the 19th century who first regarded Sikhism as a separate religion from Hinduism (Gier, 2014, p. 210).

Akbar initiated tax reforms, reorganized the civil service, and called for equal treatment before the law for Muslims and Hindus. However, the sixth ruler of the Mughals, Aurangzeb, who reigned from 1658-1707, reinstated shari’ah law and reimposed a tax on non-Muslims. The Mughal Empire granted the British East India Company permission to trade in India in 1612. In 1765 the Treaty of Allahabad gave the East India Company the *diwan*, the rule of Bengal (including the states of Bihar and Orissa), and the right to collect taxes, marking the beginning of British rule in India. Between the 1760s and 1799, the British fought four wars with the Muslim rulers of Mysore ending in the East India Company’s 50,000 strong armed forces besieging the fortress of Seringapatam and the death of Sultan Tipu (Wood, 2007, p. 225). Most importantly, British control of the seas’ rich trade routes was extremely lucrative. As they gained military and political control over the territory, Britain further exploited India’s natural resources, agricultural outputs like cotton and tea, and manpower including extensive use of Indian soldiers in its army

(Chatterjee, 2001; Sen, 2017). As its most valuable possession, India truly was the jewel in the crown of the British Empire. And if political and economic subjugation was not enough, Lord Macaulay's 1835 minute on Indian education proclaimed English as the superior language of instruction.

## **The Caste System**

Traditionally, Indian society consists of four *varnas* or classes: the *Brahmins* (priestly people), the *Kshatriyas* (rulers, administrators, and warriors), the *Vaishyas* (artisans, merchants, tradesmen, and farmers), and *Shudras* (labor classes) with an implicit fifth element, being those people deemed to be entirely outside its scope, such as tribal people and untouchables or *dalit*. Occupational specialization has long been an important aspect of caste and traditionally may have contributed to a sense of interdependence within communities as economic ties served to cut across caste barriers (Srinivas, 1957, pp. 529-530).

Such distinctions have been understood as contributing to a hierarchical segmentation of society into groups whose membership is determined by birth and kinship with numerous gradations and various restrictions of diet and social interaction. However, scholars acknowledge that the social stratifications of caste do not adhere to a strict hierarchy, that there are multiple hierarchies, based not only in religious rituals of purity and pollution, but also secular issues of class and political power that are constantly changing (Gupta, 1993). Nicholas Gier (2014) asserts that caste discrimination led many Hindus to convert to Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity (p. 7). The concept of caste was also reinforced and used as a mechanism of social division for the purpose of maintaining colonial rule. Many observers blame the British for fueling divisions between castes and religious groups. Gier (2014), a scholar of religious conflict in Asia, observes that most religious conflict in India came after colonial incursions (p. xi). While caste traditions and social divisions persist, changes in legal protections, the educational system, economic opportunities, gender relations, and rural/urban migration have contributed to greater mobility and fewer restrictions.

## **The British Raj**

The 1857 Mutiny by the Bengal Army, also known as India's First Nationalist Uprising, saw the end of the Mughal Empire and the replacement of the East India Company with the British government in full control of India. It was the greatest uprising against any colonial power in the Age of Empire, uniting both Hindus and Muslims, but it was a war of horrific violence. As described by Peter Marshall (2011), "In May 1857 soldiers of the Bengal army shot their British officers, and marched on Delhi. Their mutiny encouraged rebellion by considerable numbers of Indian civilians in a broad belt of northern and central India - roughly from Delhi in the west to Benares in the east. For some months the British presence in this area was reduced to beleaguered garrisons, until forces were able to launch offensives that had restored imperial authority by 1858" (n.p.).

For approximately 200 years, the British controlled vast territories of the Indian subcontinent (East India company, 1765-1858; British Raj, 1858-1947). Under the British Raj, the territory stretched from Burma to Baluchistan and Kerala to the Khyber Pass with approximately 50,000 troops and 250,000 of its own administrators relying primarily on Indian cooperation. Rudyard Kipling's 1865 poem "Gunga Din" perhaps best summarized the loyalty and ultimate sacrifice of Indian soldiers in its epitaph "you're a better man than I, Gunga Din!" During this period, as a result of the massive export of resources and other colonial policies, India's economy was decimated. The economic drain from India "has not only been a major factor in India's impoverishment . . . it has also been a very significant factor in the Industrial Revolution in Britain" (Alavi, 1982, pp. 62-63).

Following World War I, in which a million Indians fought for the British and 50,000 died, the 1919 massacre of Sikh demonstrators at Amritsar occurred. At least 379 unarmed demonstrators meeting at the Jallianwala Bagh Park were killed, most of whom were Indian nationalists meeting to protest the British government's forced conscription of Indian soldiers and the heavy war tax imposed on the Indian people.

During the Second World War, the British Raj sent over 2.5 million Indian soldiers into almost every theatre of the war. Over 87,000 Indian soldiers died in the war and a major famine in Bengal in 1943 led to over 5 million deaths by starvation. Rice and other crops from Bengal were prioritized to aid the war effort, leading to acute shortages and exorbitant prices. The Indian National Congress (founded in 1885), demanded independence before it would back Britain, but London refused, and the Congress announced a "Quit India" campaign in August 1942 with tens of thousands of its leaders imprisoned by the British for the duration of the war.

Colonial rule in India served the British Empire. However, British rule instilled, through both cooperation and resistance, an emphasis on secular law, education, and constitutional government. It served to build a modern infrastructure of railway linking a vast network of people, products, and trade between India and the world. Unfortunately, India received little if any of the immediate material benefits of such developments. Nonetheless, modern observers may reflect: "India cheerfully welcomed every new influence from the West, absorbing them all into a crazy-quilt mix that was Indian and nothing but Indian" (Iyer, 1988, p. 358). More critically, subaltern historians of India have played a leading role in rewriting Indian "history from below" to emphasize the role of peasants and the working classes (Guha & Spivak, 1988).

### **Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948)**

Known as the Mahatma or "great soul," Gandhi drew many of his beliefs from India's spiritual traditions especially Jainism's concept of *ahimsa* or non-violence. For Gandhi *ahimsa* was not just a moral doctrine but a guiding principle for social and political life. He viewed non-violence as a critical means for actively and responsibly engaging the world (McGee, 1996, p. 53). In his autobiography, he famously wrote: "there is no other God than Truth." It was this realization in the

power of truth (*satyagraha*) and non-violence (*ahimsa*) that guided him to be involved in law and politics. Setting an example by engaging in and promoting courageous acts of civil disobedience, peaceful protest, long marches, and hunger strikes, Gandhi was instrumental in leading India's independence movement. Following India's partition in 1947, he was assassinated in 1948. His non-violent strategy was the inspiration for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s civil rights movement in the United States.

### Partition of India

India's independence in 1947 came at great cost. The partition of India which followed on the immediate heels of independence is one of the most tragic events in modern history, as William Dalrymple (2015) summarizes:

In August, 1947, when, after three hundred years in India, the British finally left, the subcontinent was partitioned into two independent nation states: Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan. Immediately, there began one of the greatest migrations in human history, as millions of Muslims trekked to West and East Pakistan (the latter now known as Bangladesh) while millions of Hindus and Sikhs headed in the opposite direction.... Across the Indian subcontinent, communities that had coexisted for almost a millennium attacked each other in a terrifying outbreak of sectarian violence, with Hindus and Sikhs on one side and Muslims on the other—a mutual genocide as unexpected as it was unprecedented. In Punjab and Bengal—provinces abutting India's borders with West and East Pakistan, respectively—the carnage was especially intense, with massacres, arson, forced conversions, mass abductions, and savage sexual violence. Some seventy-five thousand women were raped, and many of them were then disfigured or dismembered (p. 65).

By 1948, as the great migration drew to a close, more than 15 million people had been displaced, and more than 1 million were dead. An estimated 20 million Hindus left West Punjab and East Bengal and 18 million Muslims went to Pakistan (Das, 2000, p. 27). The long-term impact of partition has been significant costing untold waste, on-going violence, and tremendous military expenditure. Again, as Dalrymple (2015) reflects: "Today, both India and Pakistan remain crippled by the narratives built around memories of the crimes of Partition, as politicians (particularly in India) and the military (particularly in Pakistan) continue to stoke the hatreds of 1947 for their own ends" (p. 65). At the same time, the suddenness of Partition, the destructive force of rapid change, the painfulness of dislocation, and genocidal violence have also led to a history of denial as much as an apportioning of guilt to opposing sides (Pandey, 2001, p. 3).

There have been many other tragic incidences of violence in India since Independence. Several that should be mentioned are: the decades-long insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir, Indira Gandhi's 1975-77 Emergency (which started with



1974 railway workers strike and expanded with protests over electoral misconduct), Indian troops attack on the Golden Temple in 1984 and subsequent assassination of Indira Gandhi, the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya in 1992, and the Gujarat riots in 2002. Often, in these cases and others, the rationale and tendency has been to portray the underlying causes and issues in terms of national security rather than human rights.

### **The World's Largest Secular Democracy**

It is remarkable that India's secular democracy has stood the test of time given its very shaky beginnings and the on-going tensions it faces. Its extraordinary heterogeneity of ethnicities, languages, religions, and cultures is a constant reminder that differences matter and that intercultural understanding is critically important to the modern nation-state.

One of the most powerful examples of how India's democracy has worked effectively to improve peoples' lives is its efforts to prevent famines. Under British rule, prior to India's independence, famine and mass starvation as a result of grain exports was a regular occurrence, causing between 12 to 29 million lives lost. Charitable activities and relief works were forbidden, for fear of interference with laws of the markets (Davis, 2001; Monbiot, 2005). Since independence, despite severe crop failures in 1968, 1973, 1979, and 1987, respectively, there has been no substantial famine in India (Sen, 1999, p. 180). Averting famine is not achieved simply by opening up markets, as disaster victims do not have the means to buy the food that the market and modern transportation infrastructure can deliver. There have to be collective economic policies that bring employment opportunities in providing relief in disaster areas.

As the above case demonstrates, the greatest problems facing the planet and humanity today are shared problems that require collaboration and cooperation. India's focus on trade, education, science, and technology as part of a global network points the way forward towards a better future. Because India is long accustomed to pluralism, it may be better prepared to negotiate the diversity of the global economy (Das, 2000, p. 15).

### **Persistent Inequalities**

Despite some successes, the extraordinary deprivation of the underprivileged in India reflects an overall poor performance regarding issues of social justice. India's government spends just 1.2 % of GDP on public health and the literacy rate in India is about 74%. The greatest threats to India's stability and future are its vast inequalities, especially gender and income disparity. The poor's vulnerability often leads to exploitation. Income levels among India's poor do not afford them even basic necessities and essential public services in education and healthcare are missing for a huge proportion of the Indian population. Infrastructure such as reliable electricity, clean drinking water, and adequate roads are often lacking. As Dreze and Sen (2013) report: "in 2011 half of all Indian households did not have any access to toilets, forcing them to resort to open defecation on a daily basis (p.

280). In 2015, around 170 million people, or 12.4% of the population, lived in poverty - defined as under \$1.90 (IndiaSpend, 2015).

For women, too, while opportunities exist at all levels of society for the privileged few, most women and girls do not have the same access that men and boys do. Women's workforce participation (29%) is extremely low and their representation in Parliament and state assemblies is generally at or below 10% (Dreze & Sen, 2013, pp. 225-226). One of the persistent and troubling statistics is the mortality rates for female children. According to a 2011 United Nations report on childhood mortality the rate for female children between the ages of 1-4 was the highest in the world. Another troubling issue is the rate of sex-selective abortions (although illegal continues to be practiced). There also growing concerns about the incidence of rape which is vastly underreported and for which very little support or protections are provided by police and the legal system (Dreze & Sen, 2013, p. 228).

Finally, there is a great divide between rural and urban India. Seventy percent of the population lives in rural areas where almost three-fourths of the rural households live with a monthly income of less than Rs 5000 or \$75. The rural literacy rate is much lower than that of urban areas and gender disparity, where the urban female literacy rate is almost 20% higher than for the rural female, is significant. Illiteracy is a major obstacle in combating poverty and social oppression. Attendance rates in school are lower and infant mortality rates are higher. Rural India lags behind urban India in all the indicators including health indicators and access to basic services (Mukunthan, 2015). However, there is some recent evidence that the gap between rural and urban India is narrowing (Hnatkovska & Lahiri, 2013).

## **Global Economy**

From 1947 through the mid-1980s, India operated under a planned economy with a massive bureaucracy nicknamed the "Permit Raj" (Iyer & Victor, 1988, p. 8). Describing the economic policies of India at the time of independence, Gurcharan Das (2000) explains, "Gandhi distrusted technology but not businessmen. Nehru distrusted businessmen but not technology. Instead of sorting out the contradictions, we mixed the two up. We had to deal with holy cows: small companies are better than big ones (Gandhi); public enterprises are better than private ones (Nehru); local companies are better than foreign ones (both)" (p. 11). India embraced democracy before capitalism.

However, over the past two decades, India has been moving from a domestic to a global agenda, from a closed to an open economy, from public to greater private investment. Politically, it has transitioned from a highly centralized democratic system to a more regionally, locally controlled, decentralized one. The process of wide-ranging economic reform in India began in 1991, including trade and investment liberalization, industrial deregulation, gradual privatization of public enterprises, and financial and tax reforms, and has continued despite several changes in government (*Europa World*, 2017). In 2004, Manmohan Singh (former Finance Minister) became the first non-Hindu Prime Minister of India. Serving as

Prime Minister for 10 years, he played a crucial role in the economic liberalization of India.

India is now among the fastest growing of the major global economies and forecasts predict that this growth will continue. The economy of India is the 7th-largest in the world measured by nominal GDP and the 3rd-largest by purchasing power parity, with an average rate of approximately 7% over the last two decades. India is the world's largest sourcing destination for the information technology (IT) industry helping to lead the economic transformation of the country and altering the perception of India in the global economy (India Brand Equity Foundation, 2017).

But as noted above, India's success in the global economy has primarily benefitted a privileged few. Issues of high-profile corruption (mobile phone spectrum and coal mining licensing) have also plagued the country and a new anti-corruption institution called Lokpal was established in 2013 (Iyer & Vietor, 2015, p. 1). Still, India has largely succeeded at competing on the highest levels. Its focus on trade, education, science, and technology as part of a global network points the way forward towards a better future but only if it can find ways to share such benefits with a broader segment of its society.

### **The BJP and the Rise of Hindu Nationalism**

The current Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, was elected in May 2014. He came to power pledging to tackle corruption, cut excessive business regulations, and revive the economy (Iyer & Vietor, 2015, p. 2). He served as Chief Minister of Gujarat from 2001 to 2014, and is the Member of Parliament for Varanasi. Modi, a member of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), is a Hindu nationalist and member of the right-wing Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. Since taking office, Modi's administration has tried to raise foreign direct investment in the Indian economy and increased spending on infrastructure, but reduced spending on healthcare and social welfare programs (Kalra & MacKaskill, 2015). Trying to improve efficiency in the bureaucracy, he has begun a high-profile sanitation campaign, but weakened or abolished environmental and labor laws (Ninan, 2017, pp. 203-205). Modi is a controversial figure due to his Hindu nationalist beliefs and criticisms of inaction during the 2002 Gujarat riots (Human Rights Watch, 2012). Nonetheless, he enjoys high levels of popular support.

### **Indian Americans**

There are approximately 3.2 million Indian Americans and it is one of the fastest growing communities in the United States. According to a 2012 Pew Research Center report, many are recent arrivals. In 2010, 87.2% of Indian-American adults were foreign-born and only 56.2% of adults were U.S. citizens. Indian Americans are also among the most highly educated racial or ethnic groups in the United States with 70% of Indian Americans aged 25 and older having college degrees in 2010. Indian Americans generally are well-off with the median annual household income for Indian Americans in 2010 at \$88,000, much higher than for all U.S. households (\$49,800) — perhaps not surprising, given their high education

levels. Interestingly, only about half (51%) of Indian Americans are Hindu (DeSilver, 2014). For a fuller understanding of the Indian Diasporas' efforts at immigrant advocacy as well as their rights and challenges as citizens, see Monisha Das Gupta's (2006) work on this topic. As part of the Year of India, KSU organized monthly community tours to the Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Sanstha Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Atlanta as well as the Global Mall, a large shopping mall of South Asian goods and services. These tours provided faculty and students the opportunity to interact directly with the local Indian American community.

### **Globalization, Inclusion & Sustainability**

The theme for this volume, *India: Globalization, Inclusion & Sustainability* has as its basis several papers that were delivered at the Year of India international conference held in March 2018 titled "Envisioning the Future and Understanding the Realities of India's Urban Ecologies." The papers also reflect wider issues of India's historical place in the on-going processes of globalization. As such, all the papers help demonstrate how much India has changed as well as how much the world outside India has changed. Generally, I might add, these changes seem to be mostly for the better as humanity slowly learns how to live together, more peacefully, inclusively, and sustainably.

The first article in this volume reveals the terrible start that characterized early intercultural exchange and the aggressive nature of empire building. The second article examines the complexity of interpretations that accompanied growing recognition in the West of India's unique contributions to human thought, science, and spirituality. The third article deals with India's self-perception of its own cultural values in today's global society. The last three articles provide different perspectives on the historical process of urbanization in India examining different influences and issues during the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-independence eras. India's urban growth and development embodies a paradoxical mix of globalization, modernity, and advanced technology with regionalism and tradition accompanied by importunate poverty and inequality. As these works show, a holistic understanding of India's complex urban ecologies is extremely important to developing more sustainable and healthy cities not just in India but around the world.

Perhaps no one sums up the empowering spirit of India better than the Nobel Prize winning laureate Rabindranath Tagore (1910):

*"Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;  
Where knowledge is free;  
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow  
domestic walls;  
Where words come out from the depth of truth;  
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;  
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary  
desert sand of dead habit;  
Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought  
and action –*

*Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake”*  
(Radice, 2011, p. 184).

The enduring narrative of India’s wise insistence on non-violence, peaceful coexistence, and religious tolerance will surely defeat the narrow interests of those that would divide communities for their own benefit or past sins. In today’s modern world, perhaps more than ever before, the well-being of our lives and communities are intertwined and interconnected in ways that are clearly inseparable and that require shared problem-solving built upon mutual respect and understanding. We hope this volume helps readers appreciate the challenges and importance of working together to develop solutions to the world’s most pressing issues.

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