



Dharmic and complexity thinking

Improving India and the Diaspora

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India is a land of tremendous diversity and paradox. The diaspora has inherited this, and herein lies its richness, beauty and value, a unity in diversity that transcends time and space, reaching into every aspect of our lives and thinking, and providing ideas to chart our way to our future. We share with India and its people across the world, the tremendous diversity from adaptation to different histories, countries, languages, cultures, and everything else, yet a strong and emotional bond that endures.

Exactly twenty years ago, one of us wrote an article, reprinted on the next page, “Heart Disease and Indo-People: increased risk – increased prevention.” In the twenty years since, we have seen increased obesity, diabetes, heart disease and other illnesses that threaten the Indian economy and that of its diaspora. Not only have we not progressed, but things have gotten much worse.

If there is anything we need to be unified about, in the diversity in which we find ourselves, it is the critical need to recognize this, and start now to create a culture of health in India and across the diaspora. While we celebrate our culture and traditions, we should change the things that cause us harm and do more of the things that make us healthy, using both modern science and knowledge and the traditions of Indian experience and wisdom.

Traditional Indian thinking can light the way for this transformation to health of India and its diaspora. We have written for many years of using an approach from complexity science to address our complex, social, health and other issues. This is a new thinking emerging from Western science in the latter part of the 20th century and considered by preeminent physicist Stephen Hawking to be the science for the 21st century. We have recognized that in many ways, this science is no different from Indian thinking, except that, through the advent of modern computers, it is has become easily accessible and visualizable.

Rajiv Malhotra eloquently advocates for an Eastern gaze in his book “Being Different,” seeing the world from Eastern eyes, and to use a dharmic perspective

to evaluate and address Western, Eastern and global issues. He describes India’s proven ability to use this set of ideas to manage its complex diversity and profound differences, and integrating many diverse streams of humanity. One could easily attribute the tremendous social and economic success of India and its diaspora today to the availability of this thinking and consequent action.

Specifically, the dharmic principles that are enshrined for millennia are opposite to usual Western ideas, but similar to those now emerging from 21st century Western complexity science. Malhotra says that dharmic cultures are more accepting of difference, unpredictability and uncertainty, and consider “chaos” as natural and normal, but needs to be balanced by order.

He says that Indians can handle complexity easier, thinking nonlinearly, and thrive in ambiguity, doubt, uncertainty, and in the absence of centralized authority and normative codes. He goes further to describe interconnectedness and the value of self organization and grass roots collaborative approaches, balanced with top down central control.

This is the set of ideas we need now, to address the issues facing India and its diaspora, and to take us to our future. We need both central and decentralized planning for health and social development, and invite all organizations and policy makers to consider this. We need to embrace dharmic ideas to help ourselves, India and the diaspora to a shared better future. So start with yourself, improve yourself, set an example, teach, talk, discuss, organize at different levels, expand networks, mobilize the community and create lasting change.

This is Gandhi’s “Be the change you wish to see in the world.” By doing this, you practice dharmic thinking and Western 21st century complexity thinking. Let us use what has made India and its diaspora great, to address current issues. We invite you to look at the next article as a challenge, to use dharmic ideas to create change for yourself and the community, and be a part of *creating a culture of health for India and the diaspora*.