Liliane Danso-Dahmen, Philip Degenhardt (Eds.)

SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION

PERSPECTIVES FROM ASIA AND EUROPE

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Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung

CONTENT

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TOWARDS RADICAL ECOLOGICAL DEMO-CRACY IN ASIA: LESSONS FROM INDIA[63]

A Grassroots Assertion

In the first few months of 2016, a series of events took place in India that should have made us all sit up.

On March 16, 2016, five *Adivasi* (indigenous people's) villages in Raigarh, Chhattisgarh (central India) unanimously vetoed the plans of South Eastern Coalfields Limited (SECL), a subsidiary of India's public-sector coal mining giant Coal India Limited (CIL), to mine their forests. These villages were Pelma, Jarridih, Sakta, Urba, and Maduadumar.

On March 23, the *Kamanda Gram Sabha* (village assembly) of Kalta G.P in Koida Tahsil of the Sundargarh district in Odisha unanimously decided not to give its land for the Rungta Mines, proposed by the Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation of Odisha (IDCO), south-eastern India.

On May 2, the National Green Tribunal directed that before clearance can be given for the Kashang Hydroelectricity project (to be built by the state-owned body Himachal Pradesh Power Corporation Ltd or HPPCL), the proposal be brought before the Lippa village *gram sabha* in the Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh in the Indian Himalayas for approval. The 1,200 residents of Lippa have been waging a seven-year struggle against the project.

And then, on May 7, the Supreme Court rejected a petition by the Odisha Mining Corporation seeking the reconvening of *gram sabhas* in the Niyamgiri hills to consider a mining proposal that the *sabhas* had rejected in 2013 (more on this below). The

court observed that the conclusion of the *gram sabhas* at that time was to reject the mining project, and the petitioner would have to approach an appropriate forum if it wanted to challenge this.

These events hold significance not only for the communities involved, but for India as a whole, and indeed for humanity, for they point to a more direct kind of democracy than has been practiced so far – one that locates power in the hands of ordinary people and questions the meaning of development by bringing in ecological and cultural issues. It is these implications that I would like to bring out in this essay, within the broad context of the ecologically unsustainable and deeply inequitable pathways that humanity has followed across the earth, and, more specifically, in India. Behind the glamour of the 21st-century urban pockets that India proudly showcases lie vast stretches of poverty, hunger, malnutrition, exploitation, inequality, and ecological ruin. In a recent book, a colleague and I have provided detailed facts and figures, and extensive analysis of these.[64] Growth in the post-1991 era of globalization in India, even when at fairly high rates, has not substantially increased net employment in the formal sector. India continues to occupy amongst the lowest positions in most global surveys of human development and social welfare, including the UNDP's Human Development Index, and various measures on the gender gap, malnutrition and undernutrition, and hunger. In such a "business as usual" scenario, there is an urgent need to search for alternatives.

Towards a radical ecological democracy
Across India, as elsewhere in the world, several rural and urban communities are exploring sustainable and equitable ways of achieving well-being in one or more sectors of life. These initiatives are a complex mix: of creating further spaces within the existing system and fundamentally challenging it, of retaining or regaining the best of tradition while discarding its worst, of synergizing old and new knowledge. Most of them point to a different set of principles and values than the ones on which the currently dominant economic and political structures are based. All of them have weaknesses and issues that need resolution, but they all show the potential for a different future for India. They point to a paradigm or vision of the future that can be called Radical Ecological Democracy (RED) or *eco-swaraj*:[65] a socio-cultural, political, and economic arrangement in which all people and communities have the right and

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64 Shrivastava, Aseem and Ashish Kothari (2012) *Churning the Earth: The Making of Global India,* Viking/Penguin Books; For a short accessible summary of the book, see http://www.kalpavriksh.org/images/CLN/Globalisation%20Brochure.pdf, accessed on June 22, 2015.

65 The term "swaraj" has a long history in India. Loosely translated as "self-rule", it is a combination of individual to community autonomy and responsible living; it was made known mostly by Mohandas Gandhi, including in his seminal work *Hind Swaraj.*

full opportunity to participate in decision-making, based on the twin fulcrums of ecological sustainability and human equity.[66]

Importantly, such a paradigm has emerged more from the lived experiences of grassroots movements and initiatives (many of which will be described below), though they do not use the term RED or *eco-swaraj* (some do use variants of *swaraj,* especially those with explicit or implicit roots in Gandhian thought and practice). This is not to deny the influence key ideologues, activists, and figures from Indian and global history have had both on me and on many of these initiatives, including Buddha, Gandhi, Marx, Ambedkar, Tagore, and tribal or other traditional revolutionaries and rebels. In my mind, RED is an eclectic mix of all these, plus strands of deep and social ecology from western thought and action. There is also a variation of this evolving as a framework of alternatives, in a process of countrywide gatherings of people working on initiatives in various sectors, called Vikalp Sangam or Alternatives Confluence.[67]

RED stands on five pillars: ecological sustainability, direct political democracy, economic democracy, social justice, and cultural diversity. I will briefly dwell on each of these below, except ecological sustainability, which, for the readers of this essay, is likely to be self-explanatory.

An alternative politics: power to communities
Direct or radical, embedded political governance goes well beyond the "representative" democracy that countries of the world have adopted. Decision-making starts from the smallest, most local unit, and builds to expanding spatial units. In India, the Constitution mandates governance by *panchayats* at the village and village cluster level, and by *ward committees* at the urban ward level. However, these are representative bodies, subject to the same pitfalls (albeit at smaller levels) that plague representative democracy at higher levels, including elite captures. It is crucial to empower the *gram sabha* (village assembly) in rural areas, and the area *sabha* (neighborhoods) in cities, or other equivalent bodies where it is practical for all members to participate in decision-making. All critical decisions relating to local issues should be taken at this level, with special provision to facilitate the equal participation of women and other marginalized sections.

The four events cited at the start of this essay are examples of a nascent or active radical democracy. Another, frequently cited, is Mendha-Lekha village in the

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66 An early treatment of this concept is in Kothari, Ashish (2009): 'Radical Ecological Democracy: Escaping India's Globalization Trap', *Development,* Vol. 52(3): 401–09; subsequent development is in Shrivastava and Kothari, *Churning the Earth,* Kothari, Ashish (2014a): 'India 2100: Towards Radical Ecological Democracy', *Futures,* Vol 56: 62–72, and Kothari, Ashish (2014b): 'Radical Ecological Democracy: a Path Forward for India and Beyond', *Development,* Vol. 57(1): 36–45.

67 Kothari, Ashish (2015) 'Confluence of hope: converging for a better world', India Together, March 11, http://indiatogether.org/vikalp-sangam-champions-of-alternative-sustainable-development-op-ed; see also www.vikalpsangam.org or www.alternativesindia.org

Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra state, which is self-governing under the principle of "our government in Mumbai and Delhi, but we are the government in our village". All decisions are taken by consensus in the village assembly, based on information generated by *abhyas gats* (study circles). A struggle against a big dam that was to displace Mendha-Lekha and dozens of other villages in the 1980s brought to the villagers the importance of self-mobilization.[68] Since then, the village has conserved 1,800 hectares of surrounding forest, and gained full rights to use, manage, and protect it under the Forest Rights Act 2006, reversing a couple of centuries of colonial and post-colonial top-down governance of forests.[69] It has moved towards fulfillment of all basic requirements of food, water, energy, and local livelihoods, including through the sustainable harvesting of bamboo from the forest. In 2013, it also turned all its agricultural land into village commons. Inspired by its example, several other villages in eastern Maharashtra are moving towards their own versions of self-rule.

In the state of Nagaland, a state government initiative called "communitisation", has devolved aspects of decision-making regarding health, education, and power (e.g. salaries and transfers of teachers) to village and town communities.[70] Another state-sponsored initiative, the People's Plan process in Kerala, attempted to create forums and the capacity for villages to carry out their own development plans, though it has suffered under inconsistent support from changing governments. Cities like Bengaluru and Pune are exploring participatory budgeting, with citizens able to submit their priorities for spending to influence the official budgets. While this has a number of pitfalls and shortcomings, such as local elite dominance, and the fact that citizens still cannot *determine* spending priorities, civil society groups see it as a step towards decentralizing and embedding political governance.[71]

But the local and the small-scale cannot by themselves create the change we need other than on some local issues. Many operations need to be coordinated and managed at much larger levels, such as the railways and communication services. Many problems (toxics and pollution, desertification, climate change) are at scales much larger than the individual settlement, emanating from and affecting entire

68 Pathak, Neema and Vivek Gour-Broome (2001) *Tribal Self-Rule and Natural Resource Management: Community Based Conservation at Mendha-Lekha, Maharashtra, India,* Kalpavriksh, Pune/Delhi and International Institute of Environment and Development.

69 Pathak, Neema and Erika Taraporewala (2008), 'Towards self-rule and forest conservation in Mendha-Lekha village, Gadchiroli, India', Report of a consultation for a ICCA Consortium and IUCN TILCEPA-TGER project sponsored by the GTZ, Kalpavriksh, http://www.iccaforum.org/images/media/grd/mendha_india_report_icca_grassroots_discussions.pdf, accessed April 2013; Vasundhara and Kalpavriksh (2012) *A National Report on Community Forest Rights under Forest Rights Act: Status and Issues,* Vasundhara and Kalpavriksh in collaboration with Oxfam India.

70 Pathak Broome, Neema (2014) 'Communitisation of Public Services in Nagaland – A step towards creating alternative model of delivering public services?', case study for project on 'Alternative Practices and Visions in India: Documentation, Networking, and Advocacy', Kalpavriksh, Pune/Delhi, www.vikalpsangam.org/static/media/uploads/Resources/nagaland_communitisation_neema.pdf, accessed July 2015.

71 Menon, Sanskriti (2009) Participatory Budgeting. Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, http://www.desd.org/efc/Participatory%20Budgeting.htm, accessed March 2013; see also www.janaagraha.org

landscapes (and seascapes), countries, regions, and indeed the earth. In a RED scenario, such larger level governance is envisioned to be carried out as clusters or federations of villages and towns with common ecological features, larger landscape level institutions, and others that in some way also relate to the existing administrative and political units of districts and states (more on this below). Governance across states, and across countries, of course, presents special challenges; there are a number of lessons to be learnt from failed or only partially successful initiatives, such as the Kyoto Protocol, or sub-national regional initiatives, such as the river basin planning authorities in India.

Landscape and trans-boundary planning and governance (also called "bioregion-alism", or "ecoregionalism", amongst other names) are exciting new approaches being tried out in several countries and regions. These are still fledgling in India, but some are worth learning from. For a decade, the Arvari Sansad (Parliament) in Rajasthan brought 72 villages in the state together to manage a 400 sq. km river basin through inter-village coordination, making integrated plans and programs for land, agriculture, water, wildlife, and development.[72] Its functioning has weakened in recent times, but it provides an important example to learn from. In the state of Maharashtra, a federation of Water User Associations has been handed over management of the Waghad Irrigation Project, the first time a government project has been completely devolved to local people.[73]

Though communities (rural and urban) will be the fulcrum of alternative futures, the state has a critical supporting and enabling role to play at least in the near future, especially to assist communities in situations where local capacity is weak, and to rein in business elements or others who behave irresponsibly towards the environment or people. Over time, however, nation-state boundaries may become far less divisive and important if genuine globalization (more on this below) is promoted; eventually they may become irrelevant. The increasing networking of peoples across the world, through both traditional means and new digital communications, could be a precursor to such a process. Cultural and ecological identities will become more important, but these too will be defined not so much as isolationist categories but as enriching diversity within the essential unity of humankind, a diversity to be celebrated, and with the openness of learning from each other.

Across all levels of decision-making above the smallest direct democracy unit, ways to ensure accountability of representatives have to be built in. Lessons could be

72 Hasnat, S.N. (2005) 'Arvari Sansad: The farmers' parliament', *LEISA India,* December, http://www.agricul-turesnetwork.org/magazines/global/practice-and-policy/arvari-sansad-the-farmers2019-parliament, accessed April 2013; see also www.tarunbharatsangh.org

73 Paranjape, Suhas and K.J. Joy, Undated, The Ozar Water User Societies: Impact of society formation and co-management of surface water and groundwater, Society for Promoting Participative Ecosystem Management (SOPPECOM), Pune, available at http://www.soppecom.org/pdf/Ozar%20WUA%20study%20report.pdf, accessed April 2013.

learnt from ancient Greek and Indian democracies, and from experiments in Latin America.[74] These include highly constrained "delegated" responsibility where representatives do not attain power independent of the constituency that has elected or selected them, but are subject to clear mandates given by the constituency, the right to recall, and having to report back. Referendums as a means of direct democracy at large levels, as is available in countries like Switzerland, can also be institutionalized.

Economic democracy and localization

Radical or direct democracy can only work with an economic system that acknowledges and respects ecological limits, democratizes production and consumption, and enhances local self-reliance for basic needs. One of the principles of responsible governance is subsidiarity, in which those living closest to the resource (the forest, the sea, the coast, the farm, the factory, the urban facility, etc.) should be empowered to manage it. This is because it is assumed that they would have the greatest stake, and often the best knowledge, to manage it. Of course, this is not always the case, for centuries of government- or corporate-dominated policies have effectively crippled community institutional structures, customary rules, and other capacities. A move towards open localization of essential production, consumption, and trade, and of health, education, and other services, is eminently possible if civil society organizations and the government sensitively assist communities.

Sustainable agriculture using a diversity of crops has been demonstrated by thousands of farmers (including the most marginal, caste-discriminated women farmers) where two community groups, the Timbaktu Collective and the Deccan Development Society, work in Andhra Pradesh and Telengana, by communities working with the Green Foundation in Karnataka, by farmers of the Beej Bachao Andolan, and by the Jaiv Panchayat network of Navdanya.[75] Sustainable pastoralism has been sustained or revived amongst nomadic or resident pastoral communities with whom the group Anthra works.[76] Community conservation of forests, wetlands, grasslands, and coastal/marine areas, and also of wildlife populations and species, is spread over several thousand sites in Odisha, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand, Nagaland, and other states.[77] Water self-sufficiency in arid, drought-prone areas has been demonstrated by hundreds of villages through decentralized harvesting and strict self-regulation of use, such as in the Alwar district of Rajasthan by Tarun Bharat

74 Muhlberger, Steve (1998) 'Democracy in Ancient India', http://www.nipissingu.ca/department/history/muhlberger/histdem/indiadem.htm#text20, accessed on 22 June 2015; Roper, Brian (2013) *The History of Democracy: A Marxist Interpretation,* Pluto Press; Lang, Miriam, and Dunia Mokrani (eds.) (2013) *Beyond Development: Alternative visions from Latin America,* Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung and Transnational Institute.

75 www.ddsindia.com; http://www.greenconserve.com/; http://www.navdanya.org/campaigns/jaiv-panchayat

76 www.anthra.org

77 Pathak, Neema (ed.) (2009) *Community Conserved Areas in India: A Directory,* Kalpavriksh

Sangh, and in Kachchh by Sahjeevan and other groups.[78] In Bhuj town (Kachchh, Gujarat), groups like Hunnarshala, Sahjeevan, Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan, and ACT have teamed up to mobilize slum dwellers, women's groups, and other citizens into reviving watersheds and creating a decentralized water storage and management system, manage solid wastes, generate a livelihood for poor women, create adequate sanitation, and provide dignified housing for all.[79]

But again, local is not enough. Parallel to political institutions at landscape and larger scales, there is a need to conceive of economics at scales different from the currently dominant structure. This includes trade and exchange conducted on the principles of democracy and fairness. Groups of villages, or villages and towns, could form units to further such economic democracy. For instance, in Tamil Nadu state, the Dalit panchayat head of Kuthambakkam village, Ramaswamy Elango, envisages organizing a cluster of between 7–8 and 15–16 villages to form a "free trade zone" or "regional network economy", in which they will trade goods and services with each other (on mutually beneficial terms) to reduce dependence on the outside market and government. This way, the money stays back in the area for reinvestment in local development, and relations amongst villages become stronger.[80] In the Nilgiris of Tamil Nadu, the initiative Just Change has brought together producers, consumers, and investors to form a single cooperative, enhancing the localization of exchanges that are benefiting several hundred families.[81]

Communities across larger landscapes could get together and prepare land/water use plans. Such plans, for each bioregion, could be combined into state and national plans, permanently putting the country's ecologically and socially most fragile or important lands under some form of conservation status (fully participatory and mindful of local rights and tenure). Such a plan would also enjoin towns and cities to provide as many resources from within their boundaries as possible through water harvesting, rooftop and vacant plot farming, decentralized energy generation, and so on; and to build mutually beneficial rather than parasitic relations with rural areas from where they will still need to take resources.

Such approaches provide massive opportunities for livelihood generation. There needs to be a renewed emphasis on labor-intensive industries and infrastructure, including handlooms and handicrafts, local energy projects, local access roads and communication lines, and others that people can be in control of, building on their own traditional knowledge or with easily acquired new skills. Jharkhand's state-created

78 www.tarunbharatsangh.org; http://www.sahjeevan.org/ta_drinking_water.html
79 www.hunnar.org/iup.htm; http://www.sahjeevan.org/ta_urban_initiative.html
80 R. Elango, personal communication, January 2013; Cajka, Adam (2014) 'Kuthambakkam', case study for project on 'Alternative Practices and Visions in India: Documentation, Networking, and Advocacy', Kalpavriksh, Pune/Delhi, www.vikalpsangam.org/static/media/uploads/Resources/kuthumbakkam_1st_july.pdf, accessed July 2015.
81 www.justchangeindia.com

initiative, Jharcraft, has in less than a decade enhanced the livelihoods of over 300,000 families with relatively simple inputs to empower the producers of silk cloth, cotton handlooms, metalcraft, tribal art, leatherwork, bamboo and cane furniture, and so on.[82] Another state government initiative, Kudumbashree in Kerala, has provided or enhanced livelihoods for 400,000 women in various local production or service units, though, like many such successful large enterprises, there are tensions created by political parties vying for control and unequal empowerment.[83] The social enterprise SELCO has enhanced the livelihood and social conditions of over 150,000 families through decentralized solar power, provided by ensuring financial linkages that help the families ultimately pay for it themselves.[84]

India also has several dozen producer companies and cooperatives of farmers, craftspersons, fishers, pastoralists, and others; many of them run along democratic lines of decision-making and revenue-sharing. Apart from the Just Change initiative mentioned above, this includes the Nowgong Agriculture Producer Company Ltd (NAPCL) in Madhya Pradesh, the Aharam Traditional Crop Producer Company (ATCPC) in Tamil Nadu, and the Dharani Farming and Marketing Cooperative Ltd in Andhra Pradesh, all examples of farmer-run companies encompassing several settlements that enable producers to directly reach their markets; Qasab – Kutch Craftswomen's Producer Co. Ltd in Kachchh does the same for women working on embroidery, appliqué, and patchwork.[85]

At several places in India where the above initiatives are active, rural-urban migration has slowed down and been reversed. Similar results have been seen in villages like Ralegan Siddhi and Hivare Bazaar in the state of Maharashtra, in the Dewas district of Madhya Pradesh where Samaj Pragati Sahayog is active, the village Kuthambakkam in Tamil Nadu, and others.

A close corollary to the discussion of economic localization is the nature of money. It may remain an important medium of exchange, but it needs to be much more locally controlled and managed rather than anonymously by international financial institutions and markets. Considerable local trade could revert to locally designed currencies or bartering, and the prices of products and services, even when expressed in monetary terms, could be decided between givers and receivers rather than by an impersonal, non-controllable distant "market". A huge range of local currencies

82 Dhirendra Kumar, MD, Jharcraft, personal communication, February 2013; Kothari, Ashish (2013a) 'Being the Change', *The Hindu,* April 21, http://www.thehindu.com/features/magazine/being-the-change/article4636561. ece, accessed April 2013.

83 Devika (2014) Don't Let the Magic Fade: Thoughts on Kudumbashree's Sixteenth Anniversary, *Kafila,* August 16, http://kafila.org/2014/08/16/dont-let-the-magic-fade-thoughts-on-kudumbashrees-sixteenth-anniversary/, accessed November 2014; see also www.kudumbashree.org

84 Bidwai, Praful (2009) *An India That Can Say Yes,* Heinrich Boll Foundation; SELCO (undated) *Access to Sustainable Energy Services via Innovative Financing: 7 Case Studies,* SELCO

85 Avani Mohan Singh, NAPCL Board, pers. comm., 2009; http://www.timbaktu-organic.org/aboutdharani.html; http://www.facebook.com/pages/Qasab-Kutch-Craftswomen-Producer-Co-Ltd/120970047978656

and non-monetary ways of trading and providing/obtaining services are already being used around the world.[86] Reviving public control of the monetary and financial system, and reorienting financial measures such as taxation, subsidies, and other fiscal incentives/disincentives to support ecological sustainability and related human security and equity goals is critical; key elements of this were laid out in India's draft National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan produced in 2004 and shelved by the government.[87]

Towards a just society

For localization to succeed, it is crucial to deal with the socio-economic exploitation and inequities embedded deep in the daily lives of Indians, arising both from tradition and from modernity, including in relations of caste, class, gender, ethnicity, and others. Such inequities can indeed be tackled, as witnessed in the case of Dalit women gaining dignity and pride through the activities of the Deccan Development Society in Andhra, Dalits and "higher" castes interacting with much greater equality in the Kuthambakkam village of Tamil Nadu where mixed housing has also been promoted, and Adivasis gaining recognition and equal status through "self-rule" and other movements in central India. Initiatives like that of Maati Sangathan in Uttarakhand have mobilized and empowered women to resist domestic violence, gain independent livelihoods, and challenge male-dominated political processes. The group URMUL in Rajasthan has succeeded in enabling girls to access education and other services earlier denied to them by a highly patriarchal society.[88] Associations of waste pickers and hawkers, such as the KKPKP in Pune and Hasirudala in Bengaluru and the National Hawkers Federation, have provided substantial dignity to people otherwise socially shunned by the rest of society by enhancing incomes, building relations with middle-class households, and showing that they are an essential part of the city.[89]

Cultural diversity and knowledge democracy

India boasts enormous socio-cultural diversity (including nearly 800 distinct languages, according to a recent People's Linguistic Survey led by Prof. Ganesh Devy),[90] with close links to its biodiversity. Development and modernity have wiped out substantial parts of this diversity, but a number of initiatives aimed at alternative living are successfully resisting this. The women of the Deccan Development

86 http://www.uea.ac.uk/env/ijccr/index.html, accessed on June 22, 2015; http://www.uea.ac.uk/env/ijccr/pdfs/IJCCR%20vol%2012%20(2008)%201%20deMeulenaere.pdf

87 Kalpavriksh and TPCG (2005) *Securing India's Future: Final Technical Report of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan,* Kalpavriksh, available at http://www.kalpavriksh.org/index.php/conservation-livelihoods1/72-biodiversity-and-wildlife/national-biodiversity-strategy-action-plan/224-nbsap-final-technical-report.html, accessed April 2013.

88 www.urmul.org; see especially http://www.urmul.org/?product=beyond-novella-memories-of-change

89 http://www.wastepickerscollective.org; http://www.swachcoop.com; http://www.hasirudala.in

90 http://peopleslinguisticsurvey.org/

Society, for instance, regularly celebrate festivals and occasions related to all religions (including highlighting the links between cultural and biological diversity).

The generation, transmission, and use of knowledge and of ethical perspectives are crucial pillars of any society. RED envisages the dissolution of several boundaries that currently dominant forms of education, learning, and research have created: between the "physical", "natural", and "social" sciences, between these sciences and the "arts", between "traditional" and "modern" knowledge, and so on. A number of alternative education, learning, and research initiatives attempt to do this: schools like *pachasaale* of the Deccan Development Society in Andhra Pradesh, the *jeevan shalas* ("life schools") of the Narmada Bachao Andolan, struggling to save the Narmada valley and its inhabitants from a series of mega-dams, and the Adharshila Learning Centre in Madhya Pradesh; colleges like the Adivasi Academy at Tejgadh, Gujarat; open learning institutions like the Bija Vidyapeeth in Dehradun in Uttarakhand, Bhoomi College in Bengaluru, and Swaraj University in Udaipur.[91]

Many of the initiatives on alternative living also attempt to synergize various knowledge systems, emanating from local communities, formal scientific institutions, and others. Sustainable food production, water harvesting, appropriate shelter, and so on, are successfully achieved with such knowledge mixes. Several groups are working on public health systems that empower communities to deal with most of their health issues through combining traditional and modern systems, and through strengthening the links between safe food and water, nutrition, preventive health measures, and curative care. Also crucial in all this is that knowledge remains in the commons, instead of being privatized through IPRs; various creative commons, open source, and other movements are examples of this.

Finally, and equally important, RED would also promote, and in turn be strengthened by, a freeing of the personal and community spirit from the bounds of materialism and bigoted religiosity. Quests for improving oneself through spiritual means would be reinforced by the spirit of living and working in communities, and would, in turn, reinforce the community. The balance between the individual and the community is always delicate and has to be carefully nurtured. Here too the notion of *swaraj* is important, for it contains the principle of individual autonomy and freedom carefully balanced with the responsibilities that such an individual has towards the collective; Gandhi could perhaps be read as an anarchist in his emphasis on individual autonomy, but also as a socialist in his focus on the collective. Many traditional

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91 http://www.ddsindia.com/www/psaale.htm; http://www.ddsindia.com/www/Education.htm
http://www.narmada.org/ALTERNATIVES/jeevanshalas.html
http://adharshilask.tripod.com/aboutadh.html
http://www.Adivasiacademy.org.in
http://www.navdanya.org/earth-university
www.bhoomi.org
www.swarajuniversity.org

societies were perhaps too heavily tilted on the side of the collective, modern society is clearly too individualistic, and it is the balance between the two that has to be achieved.

Meaningful globalization

RED is not to be construed as an argument against globalization per se. Throughout human history, the flow of ideas, persons, services, and materials amongst the regions of the world has often enriched human societies. With its focus on localized economies, cultural diversity, and ethical lifestyles, and the elimination of the homogenizing, steamrolling effect of global finance and development hegemonies, RED would actually make the flow of ideas and innovations at the global level much more meaningful, leading to the enrichment of all cultures rather than of a few at the cost of the most. To paraphrase Gandhi, globalization of this kind would enable the winds of all cultures to blow freely across peoples and regions, but not allow any one to sweep another into oblivion.

A most urgent need of such a global exchange is to share the various ideas and visions of alternatives that are being discussed or practiced across the world. India's *Adivasis* and other local communities may find much that resonates with their own resistance modes and alternative worldviews in the various versions of *sumak kawsay* or *buen vivir* ("good living") as articulated by the indigenous peoples of South America. The rich in India could learn from some of the *décroissance* or "degrowth" processes or "voluntary simplicity" initiatives in Europe and the USA.[92] More practically, India needs to build much better relations with neighboring countries, based on our common ecological, cultural, and historical contexts. Transboundary landscape and seascape management would be an example, including "peace zones" oriented towards conservation where there are currently intense conflicts (e.g. the Siachen glacier between India and Pakistan). The Sustainable Development Goals framework, though flawed on a number of counts, could provide some opportunities for global relations.[93]

In moving towards this transformation of the nature of globalization, we will need to explicitly reject the "nationalism" tendencies that are cropping up in many parts of the world (including in India), which are xenophobic and intolerant of "outsiders". It is precisely the negative impacts of economic globalization that have created such tendencies, as ordinary people everywhere see their lives uprooted and their economic opportunities becoming limited (making it easier to blame "outsiders" for the

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92 Gudynas, E. (2011) 'Buen vivir: Today's tomorrow', *Development,* Vol. 54(4); Lang and Mokrani, *Beyond Development;* Demaria, F, F. Schneider, F. Sekulova, and J. Martinez-Alier, 2013, What is degrowth? From an activist slogan to a social movement, *Environmental Values,* Vol. 22: 191–215

93 Kothari, Ashish (2013b) 'Development and Ecological Sustainability in India: Possibilities for a Post-2015 Framework' Oxfam India, Delhi, available at: http://www.oxfamindia.org/sites/default/files/Working%20 paper%2016%20-%20Dr.%20Ashish%20Kothari.pdf, accessed March 2013.

situation). With more localized, self-reliant economies, a focus on meaningful livelihoods and employment, and with the revival of dynamic social and cultural patterns, people of one region will hopefully be far more open to exchanges and relations with people from other regions and cultures, and indeed multiculturality may become the norm.

Principles and values

It is important to deduce the principles and values that emerge from ongoing initiatives in alternatives, which would form the bedrock for the RED framework, and show just how different it is from today's capitalist or state-dominated economic and political systems (including their "green economy" and "green growth" narratives, which remain trapped within the status quo) especially when they are all taken together:[94]

– Respecting the functional *integrity and resilience of ecological processes and biological diversity,* enshrining the *right of nature* and all species to thrive in conditions in which they have evolved.
– *Equitable access* of all people, in current and future generations, to the conditions needed for human well-being.
– The *right of each person and community to participate* meaningfully in decision-making, and the *responsibility* to ensure this is based on ecological integrity and socio-economic equity.
– Respect for the *diversity* of environments and ecologies, species and genes, cultures, ways of living, knowledge systems, values, economies and livelihoods, and polities.
– *Collective and cooperative thinking and working* founded on the commons, respecting individual freedoms and innovations within such collectivities.
– Social and human *resilience* in the face of external and internal forces of change.
– Mindfulness towards *interconnectedness* amongst humans, and between humans and the rest of nature.
– *Simplicity* and *enoughness,* with *satisfaction* and *happiness* derived from the quality of relationships.
– Respect for the *dignity and creativity of labor and work,* with no occupation or work being inherently superior to another, and the need for work to be dignified, safe, free from exploitation, and enjoyable.
– *Non-violence, harmony, peace.*

These values will continue to evolve as frameworks like RED are explored, modified, and adapted for the diversity of life on earth.

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94 For more details, see the People's Sustainability Treaty on Radical Ecological Democracy, http://radicalecologi-caldemocracy.wordpress.com/, accessed January 2013.

Challenges and opportunities for transformation

For its wider implementation, RED calls for massive mindset, structural, and behavioral shifts. It faces serious challenges, including inadequate understanding of the impacts of human activities on the environment and of the workings of nature, continuing tension between various knowledge systems hampering synergistic innovation, a political and bureaucratic leadership that, for the most part, lacks ecological literacy, unaccountable state and corporate power, an entrenched patriarchy, corruption of various kinds, continued militarization, and a feeling of "helplessness" amongst the general public.

But in India, as in many other parts of the world, the above-mentioned and thousands of other initiatives are signs that a transformation is possible over the next few decades, especially in conjunction with strong resistance by communities and civil society against the imposition of destructive "development" projects and processes, and the commercialization of life and knowledge. Aiding the above are the occasional progressive policies of governments, and technological innovations that make human life not only less dreary but also more ecologically sensitive – in industrial and agricultural production, energy, housing and construction, transportation, household equipment, and others – often building on traditional technologies.

Who will lead the way to a RED future? People's movements and civil society organizations, mostly in the non-party political sector (including progressive worker unions in the formal and informal sector), are likely to continue being the main change makers into the near future. At times, sections and individuals within government, political parties, and academic institutions have taken the lead, or helped communities and civil society organizations, and it is important to continue to push for more radical changes within such institutions. But in India, as in some other parts of the world, there is a long historical tradition of bottom-up resistance and reconstruction (as seen prominently in response to the macro-economic and political forces of domination during both colonial and post-colonial times, implying civil society activism for at least 200 years), the continuation in some (even if weakened) form of several thousand years of knowledge and wisdom, multiple forms of enlightened leadership from amongst "ordinary" people as also amongst elite sections, a relatively independent media and judiciary, and the opportunities provided by a democratic set-up, howsoever flawed it might be. Additionally, Indians now have a much greater chance of interacting with people around the world, building networks of resistance and alternatives, learning from each other (and at the recent International Degrowth Conference in Budapest in September 2016, I proposed a Global Alternatives Confluence, building on the process of the Vikalp Sangam in India mentioned above). It is this complex of phenomena that will, hopefully, make RED-like trends prosper in the coming decades, not only in India but globally.

The Socio-Ecological Transformation (SET) is a question of survival for mankind. The reason for this dramatic statement is simple. The capitalist mode of production and the lifestyle it engenders are not sustainable, either socially or ecologically. However, the regions of the world, the people who live there, and the different classes are unequally and unevenly affected. As the OECD noted in a recent report on Southeast Asia, China, and India, the former is among the regions of the world most strongly impacted by climate change. At the same time, the high economic growth in Asia is accompanied by a steadily rising (fossil) energy demand. The effects on ecosystems are well known – but nevertheless not commensurately taken into account, either in daily life or in political decision-making.