ORGANIZING RESISTANCE AND IMAGINING ALTERNATIVES IN INDIA

Edited by

ROHIT VARMAN

DEVI VIJAY

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GROUNDED IN REALITY, A RADICALLY ALTERNATIVE FUTURE

ASHISH KOTHARI

As India proceeds further into its eighth decade after independence, it is evidently deeply troubled. Every day the news channels shout out terrifying, gut-wrenching issues. Religious, racial, and caste hatred spawn a spate of killings and maiming, the state complicit in its eerie silence if not tacit encouragement. Air pollution epidemics affect millions. Plastics in rivers and lakes and cow's bellies, and pesticides in our food. No let-up in gender violence, domestic and elsewhere, with the rape and murder of little girls only the shocking tip of the iceberg. Adivasis and fishers and farmers and pastoralists, deliberately forgotten as the relics of the past, being displaced *en masse* for mines and industries and highways and amusement parks (the amusement being, of course, a prerogative of the rich). Financial scandals in which the swindling of hundreds of crores is now routine, almost boring, with how and where the swindler has escaped to becoming a point of greater interest. Species of wildlife being wiped out, and increasingly unpredictable climatic patterns. Politicians are reducing the world's largest elections (the latest in the summer of 2019) to farcical, bitter slanging matches devoid of the substance that political debates should be about. And the latest twist, the unprecedented slap in humanity's face by a tiny virus, with its own horrific consequences to the health and livelihoods of millions of Indians.[1]

It is as if all the fundamental ills of our society were converging: caste, gender, and race-based oppressions coming to us from the past, capitalist

class exploitation and state-sponsored violence against communities (in the name of 'development') as more recent additions, and, underlying these, an increasing alienation from the rest of nature. These ills do not necessarily locate themselves in the same set of oppressive people, nor are the oppressed always the same. Indeed, the status of 'being oppressed' and 'being an oppressor' sometimes merges confusingly into each other in the same individual or group. Therefore, it is more meaningful to locate the structures of power domination and not just individuals who currently control those structures to understand, challenge, and find alternatives to these structures and their various manifestations.

Elsewhere, a colleague and I have critically analysed the dominant model of 'development' based on blind faith in economic growth as the engine to move people out of poverty, hunger, and deprivation (Shrivastava and Kothari, 2012). With its roots in the desire of imperial powers to find new ways of exploiting and dominating the world after the so-called Second World War, to aid in the reconstruction of their own economies, this model is based on a unilinear notion of how nations should 'progress' (farming/fishing/pastoral to industrial and post-industrial; traditional to modern, and so on), considers measures like gross domestic product (GDP) as the most important indicators of the stage and rate of development, and promotes unrestrained industrialization, commercialization, extraction of resources, and urbanization. Its impacts have been disastrous across the world, as evidenced by the way in which human activity has crossed several critical planetary thresholds, with rapid biodiversity decline, widespread water and air pollution, and potentially runaway climate change as some of the results (Deb, 2009).

In this chapter, I depart from an examination of these structures and forces of injustice, oppression, ecological unsustainability, and the fundamental faults of the 'model' of development foisted upon the country by them. Here, I focus on the kind of responses that people are giving to their manifestations in their lives. How are people in India reacting to continued deprivation and discrimination and to new forms of displacement and dispossession?

There seem to me two crucial sets of responses: one, resistance to what is perceived to be wrong (that is unjust, unequal, unsustainable, and so on) and,

second, the construction of alternatives in ways that are considered right (the opposite of these 'uns'). I deal only briefly with resistance here; most of the chapter is dedicated to the alternatives.

RESISTANCE

On 22 May 2018, police firing upon protestors in Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu, resulted in the death of 13 people. The event was not one-off but a culmination of resentment brewing over two decades of pollution impacts by factories, including Sterlite Copper, which boiled over when local demands to stop further expansion were not heeded by the government. This struggle is just one of possibly hundreds of such movements across India, some very small and very quiet, others bigger and more vocal (Shiva, 1991; S. Kothari, 2000; Sen, 2018a, 2018b).[2] They have an ancient heritage, with stories of peasant, Dalit, and Adivasi resistance against despotic rulers, oppressive castes, and the British colonial government being increasingly unearthed and written about. They have a more recent heritage too, in a large number of movements against independent India's policies and projects in the last few decades, or against the communalization of public life and discrimination against religious minorities, or against continued and new forms of patriarchy and masculinity.[3] Such resistance is invaluable in many ways. It shows as a myth the narrative that everyone is in favour of 'development' and economic growth, or okay with India becoming a 'Hindu rashtra', or accepts masculinist notions of how women should behave in order not to get molested. It puts a brake, howsoever slow and small, on the progress of the 'crush-everything-in-its-path' juggernaut that a nation aspiring to be a twenty-first-century superpower in the same image as those it is copying has become. It shows, sometimes powerfully, that there are other notions of what it is to live well as humans with each other and with the rest of nature, far from the consumerist, selfish, individualistic, and exploitative world that corporate capitalism hardsells. And by managing to sustain a diversity of worldviews, ways of living, ecologies and economies, cultures, and arts and crafts, it provides the possibility of constructing alternative pathways out of the multiple crises we face. It is to these alternative pathways that I now turn, and focus my attention on.

TRANSFORMATIONS IN FIVE SPHERES

Across India, there is an incredible churning of ideas and practices taking place, albeit still small or 'on the margins', showing alternatives to the dominant system. These include attempts at sustainable and equitable ways to meet basic material needs (food, water, energy, housing, sanitation, clothing); alternative and community-based health, learning, and education initiatives; assertions of localized decision-making and governance of villages and urban neighbourhoods; struggles for gender, caste, age, ability, and sexuality justice; livelihood security through greater control over economic processes; democratizing the media, arts, and other cultural spaces; initiatives towards peace, harmony, and non-violence in the midst of conflict situations; rebuilding a relationship of co-existence with the rest of nature, including through community-led conservation of ecosystems; exploring the complex balance between individual freedoms (including spiritual quests) and collective good; asserting basic spiritual and ethical principles to challenge the dogma of institutionalized religions; and much more. What we see in these and myriad other examples, in nascent or well-developed ways, are transformations taking place in five spheres: political, economic, social, cultural and knowledge, and ecological. These are elaborated, with examples, here.

POLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS

Here, I explore nascent experiments in India directed at radical democracy. The first few months of 2018 witnessed a series of news items emanating from central and eastern India, of a movement labelled 'Pathalgari', of Adivasis declaring a region of autonomy though very much within the framework of the Indian Constitution (Tewary, 2018). According to several reports, the movement has arisen from the consistent failure of the Indian state to provide for the needs of Adivasis in ways that respect their distinct identity and their own worldviews and knowledge systems, and in fact, on the contrary, its proclivity to alienate Adivasis from their lands and natural resources by allowing corporations to take over. For some years before this, the Dongria Kondh Adivasis of Odisha have repeatedly rejected proposals for mining in

their area, asserting that the territory belongs to their deity Niyamraja and no one had the right to do such extraction from it; their struggle reached the Supreme Court, which held up the right of their *gram sabha*s to allow or reject mining (Tatpathi, Kothari, and Mishra, 2016). In the Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra, 90 villages in the Korchi *taluka* have come together as a *maha gramsabha* to resist mining proposals but also to work out self-governance mechanisms (Broome et al., 2020). In the same district, the example of the Gond village Mendha-Lekha is well known, having declared nearly three decades back that '*our* government in Delhi and Mumbai, but in our village, *we are* the government' (Broome, 2018). In the town of Bhuj, Kachchh, some colonies have asserted their role in decision-making with regard to the planning of infrastructure and civic amenities, rather than leave it only to bureaucrats and politicians; I will refer again to this later.

In other parts of the world, parallel initiatives include the iconic movements by indigenous Zapatista communities in Mexico and the Kurdish ethnic community in west Asia to assert autonomous governance, as also the struggles for self-determination by many indigenous peoples in Latin America, North America, and Australia (Aslan and Akbulut, 2019; Esteva, 2019; Leyva-Solano, 2019). In urban situations, there is the 'municipalism' movement, where a more collaborative, solidarity-based politics is attempted to ensure the participation of local neighbourhood institutions.[4] In these, there is an attempt to broad-base decision-making to the general population, and not restrict it only to a few elected or chosen people.

These examples from different regions across the world point to a different conception of democracy than the one adopted by most countries. Time and again, the limits and perversions of representative, liberal democracy have been exposed. Political parties and politicians who fight elections promise the earth but once in power, by and large, appear to find all kinds of excuses to shy away from coming good on their commitments. Increasingly, as demonstrated by some of the examples here, people are realizing that the crucial locus of power can be themselves, as individuals and collectives. The ground-level struggle to empower *gram sabha*s and local urban bodies, beyond even what the Constitution mandates, is a manifestation of this realization. It is radical or direct democracy, flourishing in situations where people can take decisions face to face, that brings back the true meaning of the word (demos = people;

cracy = rule) and takes society closer to *swaraj* as Gandhi and others appear to have meant it (more on this later).

Meaningful power at the scale of the village or urban neighbourhood would require more than what the Indian Constitution and laws under the 73rd and 74th Amendments provide. In particular, almost nowhere in India do such local bodies have financial and legal powers that could make them truly independent. A partial exception is the power of village councils in Nagaland due to its special Constitutional status as also the extension of financial powers over several departments through its 'communitisation' law (Broome, 2014). Kerala's attempt at decentralizing planning to village bodies is another partial exception (Isaac and Franke, 2002).

Radical democracy, of course, can work best in small populations; at larger scales, it can work in limited situations such as with referendums for very important decisions, but otherwise, there will still be a need for representative or delegated institutions of decision-making at those larger levels. Processes of making such institutions accountable then become crucial; these could include the right to recall, public charters, the right to information, the responsibility to report back, frequent rotation of representatives or delegates, regular public hearings, full transparency of budgets, plans, and decisions, and so on. Even the few of these put into place in India already show the potential of making larger-scale institutions of decision-making more accountable, as, for instance, in the case of the Right to Information (RTI) law.

Radical democracy will work best where at least four features are met. First, people must have the *right to participate* in decision-making in all matters that affect their lives. Second, they must have the *capacity to participate* meaningfully (including access to relevant information and knowledge), something that will need time to build, given that a couple of centuries or more of centralized decision-making have robbed people of the confidence and ability to participate. Third, there need to be *accessible forums* of decision-making: *gram sabha*s, neighbourhood assemblies, subsidiary bodies for various functions, and so on. Fourth, perhaps most crucial and most difficult to grasp and achieve, there needs to be a certain *maturity, or wisdom*, of decision-making processes – for instance, a sense of responsibility among the majority towards the minority so that decisions do not get reduced

to the politics of majoritarianism. This is not to say that *only* when these four features are in place should radical democracy be tried out, but rather that in exploring it on the ground, as is happening in some examples cited earlier, these features need to be introduced, strengthened, and evolved, including through appropriate policy changes. Without this, radical democracy can also go horribly wrong, as when local elites capture or retain power or when referendums go haywire based on public perception manipulation. Clearly, the move towards radical democracy is no overnight magic wand but a difficult, very possible, long-term process.

Another important and complex issue with moving towards radical democracy is the need to review decision-making boundaries based on ecological and cultural links and contiguities. Nation-state boundaries across the world are often the result of arbitrary decisions. In the case of India, the South Asian boundaries make little ecological and cultural sense; they have divided up the Sundarbans and fisher communities between India and Bangladesh, unique deserts and nomadic populations between southern Pakistan and India, contiguous mountain ecosystems and peoples between northern Pakistan and India, the trans-Himalayan plateau and nomadic peoples between Tibet and India, and so on. At this historical juncture, the idea of dissolving or making porous these boundaries seems rather remote, but at least one can begin with some transboundary cooperation to sustain the ecological and livelihood security of these regions, even establish 'peace parks' where there is a history of conflict, and take other such steps that can bring down the fences and walls.

There are not too many examples of ecoregional or bioregional political boundaries, but lessons can be learned from attempts within India or outside. For about a decade, 60-plus villages in the Arvari river basin in Rajasthan, for instance, governed the area through a people's parliament ('Arvari Sansad'), putting the river at the centre and ignoring *tehsil* or district boundaries (Hasnat, 2005[5]). In Australia, there has been an initiative to plan for the Great Eastern Range cutting across conventional political boundaries, for integrated planning. Transboundary protected areas in several regions of the world are another example; while they do not challenge nation-state boundaries, they prioritize the ecological (and sometimes cultural) contiguities across these boundaries. A broader approach of this kind is called 'connectivity

conservation' (Pulsford et al., 2015; Sandwith et al., 2001). An initiative to conceive of the Ecuadorian and Peruvian Amazon as one bioregion, centred around visions and planning by resident indigenous nations, began in 2018 as the Sacred Headwaters Initiative.[6] And perhaps the boldest initiative is that of the Kurds, attempting an autonomous region run on direct democracy principles in a region cutting across Syria, Turkey, and Iraq (Flach et al., 2016).

Building on the kind of examples given here, essays in a recent book, *Alternative Futures*, lay out what India's political future could be. They posit a 'radical democracy' or a 'socialism freed of the state', where people and collectives are at the centre of decision-making (including on laws and policies), and ecological contiguities and flows are respected. These are resulting partly from the emergence and spread of mass movements demanding transparency, accountability, wages, and community rights (such as those that brought RTI legislation) and a 'rainbow coalition of grassroots social movements' (Das, 2017; Kodiveri, 2017; Nigam, 2017; Patankar, 2017; Roy et al., 2017). Such a system, liberated from historical contestations, could integrate many ideals of Gandhi, Ambedkar, M. N. Roy, Iqbal, Tagore, Phule, Marx, and Kosambi, especially those focused on achieving social justice, direct democracy, and ecological sustainability, which in various different ways these activist-thinkers espoused (Nigam, 2017; Patankar, 2017). In any case, social movements and those practising radical grassroots alternatives do not divide themselves into these ideological boxes and combine several elements across these boxes (A. Kothari, 2018). India could then also play a significant role in a new, dynamic, and democratic multilateral governance at global levels (Dubey, 2017).

ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATIONS

In this section, I explore experiments anchored around food and livelihood sovereignty, reorganizing economics around the local, greater producer control, and alternative organizational forms. In some of the examples of attempted self-governance and autonomy mentioned earlier, one of the central motivating factors is the desire to take greater control over the economy. The Gadchiroli examples are some among many across India, asserting that forests belong to the community, and their use and conservation will be governed

according to its rules. Corporates exploiting these forests, usually with the permission and assistance of the Forest Department, have been told to leave. Instead, the villages are building the capacity to do sustainable harvesting and trade in forest produce. This process does not necessarily challenge the larger capitalist or statist economic structures (the produce is, after all, sold to contractors from outside), but it makes a dent in them by asserting collective control and greater ability to determine prices and other terms by trying to make sure benefits are equitably shared among the producers, and in many cases building in ecological sustainability principles.

Similar processes are seen in examples of producer companies and self-governed cooperatives established by farmers, fishers, craftspersons, pastoralists, service providers like waste-pickers and hawkers, and others. Examples include 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.[7] In not-so-common situations, the state too has helped in the process, as in the case of Kudumbashree's production units covering about 5 million women in Kerala and Jharcraft's craftsperson collectives in Jharkhand that have provided sustained or better livelihoods for over 300,000 families (though reportedly of late this has faltered due to change in leadership).[8]

Movements towards sovereignty over the means of meeting basic needs are also spreading. An example is that of food sovereignty, asserted by some farmer movements such as the Deccan Development Society (DDS[9]) and the Food Sovereignty Alliance[10] in southern India, or the Beej Bachao Andolan (Save the Seed Movement) in the north. For about three decades now, the Dalit women farmers of DDS have shown how dryland, local biodiversity, and knowledge-based agriculture can provide not only full food security to thousands of households but also complete control (hence not only *security* but *sovereignty*) over the means of food production and consumption. Based on these and many other examples, Mansatta et al. (2017) posit an agricultural future with community-based

food sovereignty and agroecological approaches as its basis. To this is added a perspective on pastoral futures, advocating an enabling environment that can integrate pastoral production with nature conservation, ensure space for pastoralists in the landscape, and develop combined livestock production and environmental protection as an attractive 'career' option for young people (Köhler-Rollefson and Rathore, 2017).

Several initiatives at localized generation, governance, and management of water exist across India; an increasing number are also focusing on energy, housing, and other such basic needs. In Kachchh, for instance, the group Arid Communities and Technologies (ACT) has enabled water self-sufficiency using the meagre rainfall of the region in several dozen villages and in some colonies of Bhuj town; the group Hunnarshala has provided new respect to traditional mud-building techniques and trained over 100 youths to become architects using both traditional and modern knowledge; groups like Khamir, Qasab, Kalakshetra, and others have helped revive local crafts to the level where thousands of people are deriving decent livelihoods.[11] 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 (SELCO, n.d.). These and other initiatives provide fodder for the envisioning of a more sustainable, equitable future for water and energy governance and for livelihoods (Dharmadhikary and Thakkar, 2017; Hande et al., 2017; Uzramma, 2017).

Of crucial importance is a reorganizing of economics to be centred around the local. 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 former Dalit *panchayat* head of Kuthambakkam village, Elango Rangasamy, envisages organizing a cluster of between 7–8 and 15–16 villages to form a '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; Ela Bhatt, social worker and founder of one of India's largest women's cooperatives, Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), calls for a 100-mile radius approach to self-reliance. This and other examples are generalizable to posit localization and

regionalization of economies that are ecologically stable and renewable, with substantial use of biomass for various needs (Bhatt, 2015; Joy, 2017; Kajka, 2018; Shrivastava and Rangasamy, 2017). This way, the money stays back in the area for reinvestment in local development, and relations among villages become stronger. In the Nilgiris of Tamil Nadu, the initiative Just Change has attempted to bring together producers, consumers, and investors to form a single cooperative, enhancing the localization of exchanges that are benefiting several hundred families.[12]

There are vibrant examples of alternative organizational forms that depart from the dominant corporate form. While examples of non-profit retail or social enterprises whose main motive is not profit are uncommon,[13] the ones that exist show the potential. One that celebrated its tenth anniversary in early 2018 is reStore, the non-profit store in Chennai that enables organic farmers, craftspersons, and others to reach consumers without claiming any profit from their transactions; it has inspired several dozen more such stores in Chennai, confederated under the banner of Organic Farmers Market.[14] Millet Mama is a low-priced restaurant specializing in millet-based food that a young person interested in promoting healthy cuisine runs and where profits are not one of the motives.[15] The Shaheed Hospital in Chhattisgarh was established by workers, does not rely on corporate or governmental funding, and is run on principles of reaching the neediest first and foremost.[16]

Crafts (India's second-biggest employer after agriculture) provide an opportunity for India to bypass the option of high-energy industrialization, which benefits only a few, in favour of low-energy, dispersed craft industries, which could usher in democracy in production, a basic building block for true social equity (Uzramma, 2017). This sector is only one of many where ownership of the means of the production is or could be in the hands of the producer and away from capitalist owners. As Roy (2017) has argued, the future of industrial work lies in a radical change of two crucial determinants of capitalist society, that is, competition and profit. Some of this has been attempted by movements in India, but they need to go beyond a politics and theorization that can go change all structures of exploitation, inequality, and injustice. In India, initiatives that challenge corporate capitalism, such as worker takeover of industrial production facilities and their subsequent running on democratic, equal-pay principles, and alternative currencies

or exchange systems that enable some freedom from centralized monetary systems, are absent or rare. But there are examples of these in many other countries that we can learn from (Meira, 2014; Karyotis, 2019; Labour Party, undated; Vio.Me, 2019; Workerscontrol.net, 2020). Though still marginal to the dominant systems, these show the potential of non-capitalist, non-statist economies.

Another major shift has to be a radically different vision for the nature of urban areas. Currently characterized by unsustainability and inequity both within themselves and in their relationship with rural areas, cities in India have to undergo drastic transformations. Kapoor (2017) envisages dispersed urbanization with small towns as development and skilling hubs, innovative mechanisms for financing, public authorities at multiple levels to regulate the uses of land and water, empowering urban local bodies or governments for decentralized governance, and low carbon pathways. The 'Homes in the City' programme initiated by several civil society groups in Bhuj contains several of these elements, with its focus on empowering marginalized populations to self-govern and self-provision basic needs, and make the town authorities more accountable (Bajpai and Kothari, 2020).[17] Patwardhan (2017), based on several decades of activism and research, proposes people-centric sustainable transport that can make a city pleasant and safe, where people can walk, cycle, and reach destinations without dependence on automobiles. Pune's cycle plan,[18] made after substantial public consultation, is a good example of what can be done, though its actual implementation appears to be faltering.

Overall, the initiatives mentioned here point to a very different economic system than the one dominant today. Its main elements would be mindfulness to ecological limits, local to global; a primary focus on meeting human needs, and in particular those of historically or presently marginalized people; localized self-reliance for basic material and non-material needs; producers having control over means of production and consumers over the conditions of consumption, the two overlapping as prosumers by realizing the full potential of meaningful and diversified work; dissolution of the hard divide between 'work' and 'leisure', and the revitalization of livelihoods that combine labour, enjoyment, dignity and meaningfulness in place of deadening and mechanical jobs ('deadlihoods'[19]); a mutually beneficial relationship and indeed a continuum rather than a sharp break between the rural and the

urban; bringing back to centre stage the relations of caring, sharing, and affect in the economy, including recognition of the enormous and currently invisibilized contribution of women in production and reproduction.

SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS

Localized governance systems can also go horribly wrong in enabling or encouraging elite capture, continued social oppression, and exploitation. A series of recent examples in parts of India, where local *panchayat*s or customary community institutions have given regressive judgements in cases of inter-caste or inter-religious partnerships, are manifestations of this. Economic localization can also be counterproductive to those who are historically weak, such as the landless. Trends in Europe and the United States or, for that matter, north-east India, where migrants and 'refugees' are being denied basic human rights and livelihood opportunities in the name of 'nationalism' or localization, are further indications of these dangers. Hence the crucial importance of simultaneous struggles towards greater social justice and equality or equity, and of bringing to bear on such situations globally accepted norms, such as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A. Kothari, 2019).

While explicit resistance and social movements such as those of many strands of feminism, anti-racism, Dalits, LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer), and others have their very legitimate role in this, there are also fascinating examples of quieter, somewhat indirect routes towards social justice. The Dalit women of DDS, mentioned earlier, have not only achieved food sovereignty for their households but also, through this and through some remarkable work in alternative media, education, and other sectors, transformed the gender and caste relations in several dozen villages. As Dalits, women, and small farmers, their members were previously triple disprivileged; they now stand tall and proud, with other castes, men, and large farmers having to treat them with respect. The revival of handloom weaving in Kachchh, western India, mentioned earlier, has helped remove the most regressive manifestations of casteism towards the Dalit weavers (though it must be mentioned that this revival is based on elite markets, and thus a crucial part of the macro-economic system remains

unchallenged in this) (Kothari et al., 2020). In Tamil Nadu, the former Dalit sarpanch Elango Rangasamy, also mentioned earlier, made good use of a government scheme to persuade a few hundred families of Dalits and other castes to move into a mixed housing society, resulting in a gradual reduction of casteism (Kajka, 2018). The activist musician T. M. Krishna's initiative to combine his classical Carnatic singing with the music of the transgender community in southern India attempts to break down traditional social attitudes against this community.[20] Various initiatives at using sports to empower the girl child, such as football in Uttar Pradesh,[21] are some other interesting approaches.

In none of these examples has the transformation been complete. Given the deep historical roots of many injustices, the complete removal of the structures of gender, caste, sexual orientation, and other inequities is a long-term process. Teltumbde (2017) has argued that the Dalit movement needs to recognize its class consciousness and move beyond the focus on political reservations towards economic empowerment, adoption of a proportional representation system, and outlawing castes altogether. On gender relations, Gupte (2017) envisions an India without gender binaries and patriarchy, one that will refute sexual interactions as power-laden transactions; people will have reproductive and sexual rights; women will have open and safe access to private and public spaces and inequalities related to caste, class, and religion would be abolished. Dealing with the problems of religious minorities, Engineer (2017) draws on the example of a mohalla (neighbourhood) committee in Bhiwandi to propose the building of local social networks and groups of diverse communities to tackle communal tensions. Narrain (2017), dealing with the stigmatization of multiple sexualities, advocates the recognition of the notion of love in a wider sense, which can be characterized as the love of justice or empathy for the suffering other. And Dungdung (2017), bringing out the plight of Adivasis for many of whom independence never seems to have arrived, argues for a future in which they can determine their own paths of well-being, based on territorial autonomy and their own cultural, ecological, intellectual roots.

Contemporary India even seems to be going through a worsening of hostilities and conflicts around these inequities, encouraged or at least not actively discouraged by the right-wing state; but paradoxically this may be

a manifestation of the entrenched system trying desperately to retain its domination against an up-swell of justice-based movements.

Social transformations are also about achieving well-being as a whole. This includes rescuing the concept of 'wealth', 'prosperity', and 'happiness' from the materialist distortions that modern capitalism has trapped them into, and reviving their non-material sources, including family and friendship relations, relaxed modes of learning, forums for expressing one's creativity and innovation, vibrant cultural spaces, means of spiritual deepening, and connecting with the rest of nature.

CULTURAL AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFORMATIONS

This section explores initiatives at reviving and sustaining cultural and knowledge diversity, integrating various forms of knowledge for transformation, and promoting the knowledge commons.

India's enormous cultural and knowledge diversity is celebrated in many ways, such as in the thousands of festivals dotting the entire country. But it is also under threat, both from the forces of homogenization (not least of which is the uniform, top-down, dulling education imparted in most schools) and from those who portray and use this diversity for their own divisive ends (such as religious 'superficialists'[22] and hyper-nationalists).

Take, for instance, language. Not so long ago India may have had well upwards of 1,000 languages (not counting dialects within them); even now, it has at least 780 living languages, according to the remarkable People's Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI) initiated in 2010.[23] Each of these languages is a library of knowledge, and when any is lost, we lose a storehouse of information, experience, and wisdom. India's school system mostly imparts education in the official state language, ignoring the diversity of mother tongues that the students come from, and, within a generation or two, causing the loss of languages (or a substantial part of them) that may have sustained for centuries before this. Added to this is the politics of divisiveness that has made language a tool of conflict between states or regions within states. But a breath of fresh air in this dismal scenario are the attempts by groups like Bhasha, which coordinated the PLSI, helps revive and popularize languages being otherwise lost, creates dictionaries and literature for children to

continue using their mother tongues while also learning state and 'national' languages, and organizes *sangam*s (confluences) for speakers of various languages to come together. Its founder, Ganesh Devy, has struggled to also promote recognition of 'forgotten' or marginalized groups of Adivasi and nomadic communities, and leads a movement to create communal harmony and counter inter-community hatred. In an essay on the future of languages in India, Devy (2017) advocates support for languages that are not popular or in the mainstream or have not reached the cities, maintaining e-libraries and literary societies, and initiating magazines of and for indigenous languages.

Perhaps the most important agenda in all this is the transformation of the education system, away from the stultifying homogeneity and poor quality of public schools and universities as also the elitism of private institutions. An increasing number of alternative learning centres are showing how education can be fun, creative, and meaningful, bringing back the original meaning of school ('skhole' = learning with leisure!), providing avenues for more holistic development of the child (head, hands, heart … and feet!), and enabling youth to grow up as innovative, responsible adults who will question dogmas of capitalism, statism, casteism and patriarchy. Examples include the *jeevan shala*s ('life schools') of the Narmada Bachao Andolan, Marudam in Tamil Nadu, Adharshila Learning Centre in Madhya Pradesh, and Imlee-Mahua in Chhattisgarh; colleges like the Adivasi Academy at Tejgadh, Gujarat; and open-learning institutions like the Bija Vidyapeeth in Dehradun in Uttarakhand, Bhoomi College in Bengaluru, and Swaraj University in Udaipur.[24]

Another strand of the movement includes people who reject institutional learning altogether, preferring to do home or community-based 'schooling'. Even more important than these alternative initiatives, though, are attempts to transform the formal system, especially of government institutions; for instance, Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh (SECMOL) and others in Ladakh led a movement to introduce mother-tongue-based education in its schools, the Krishnamurthy Foundation has facilitated new, mixed-age self-learning methods in some schools in Karnataka,[25] and so on. Based on these and other examples, Tultul Biswas and Rajesh Khindri of Eklavya argue for a vision and practice of education that can open up opportunities and unleash the potential towards the

development of a balanced, just, and responsive students and teachers (Biswas and Khindri, 2017).

Many of the examples of alternative initiatives given in this chapter (such as Arid Communities and Technologies, Hunnarshala, DDS, and Bhasha) have as one of their core elements the use of diverse knowledge systems. This is increasingly seen in the health sector also. The central government's programme on traditional health systems, supporting Ayurveda, yoga, Unani, Siddha, homoeopathy, and naturopathy, is positive but very partial and often half-hearted. For instance, it does not ensure that all public health institutions like village and urban ward-level clinics have multiple health systems available. Allopathy still gets the lion's share of attention. It also does not pay much attention to folk systems that are not necessarily codified like the ones named earlier, even though they are widespread and often very effective (though also rapidly eroding as relevant knowledge and skills disappear with each passing generation). Additionally, the privatization of health services and increasing control by the corporate sector has meant a horrendous loss of access to the poor, and increasing financial burden on the household economy. This has been especially sharply exposed by COVID-19.

Here too several initiatives are noteworthy, such as the promotion of alternative health systems by the Foundation for Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions, enabling access to reliable, accountable, community-based health services by constituents of the national network, Jan Swasthya Andolan, and groups like Tribal Health Initiative, devolution of some financial control over official health services to village councils through the 'communitization' scheme of Nagaland, and worker-led facilities like the Shaheed Hospital mentioned earlier and others. These initiatives form the basis for some futuristic thinking by health activists Abhay Shukla and Rakhal Gaitonde, with a stress on the democratization of health centred on a Universal Health Care (UHC) approach that will bring in the vast majority of public and private healthcare providers under a single integrated system, including multiple systems of health (Shukla and Gaitonde, 2017). Robust community health systems have been key to communities being able to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic, such as in Sittilingi *panchayat* of Tamil Nadu and Kunariya *panchayat* of Kachchh, Gujarat.[26]

As important as all the aforementioned is the struggle to keep knowledge and information in the public sphere, as a common good. Over the last century or so, and especially in the last two–three decades, there has been a significant thrust towards privatization, such as through intellectual property rights. This is not to say that all knowledge in the past was in the public domain or democratically available; *vaid*s could hold crucial medicinal knowledge to themselves, dominant castes dictated what kind of knowledge could be accessed and generated by whom, and so on. But knowledge for everyday use, knowledge that was crucial for survival and livelihoods and basic needs, was freely shared (Posey, 1996). This may have been the base for the enormous diversification of plants and animals in agriculture. For instance, one species of rice domesticated long back spread from farmer to farmer into various ecoregions of India, where it was bred through successive generations of trial and error into over 50,000 varieties; or countless home remedies using commonly available plants like *neem* or turmeric became common knowledge for millions of people. Countering the trend towards privatization, especially into the hands of the corporate sector, is therefore very much part of the alternative movement; this includes initiatives for open-source software, copyleft and creative commons, deliberate acts of putting IPR (intellectual property rights)-protected materials into the public domain, and other initiatives that could democratize knowledge (see Raina, 2017, for a futuristic look into what this would entail; for more global trends, De Angelis, 2019, and Halpin, 2019).

This also becomes important in the fields of media and arts. Corporatization of the economy and society in general has also captured these arenas; nothing better illustrates this better than the grip that private corporations have over much of the mainstream media (Guha Thakurta, 2017), and how some of the 'social' media platforms have allowed themselves to be used for distorting national elections and spreading hatred. The arts too have become commodities for private (mostly elite) consumption, adding to the older trend of the artificial division between classical (accessible to the elite) and folk (accessible to others). Countering these trends are some remarkable initiatives such as alternative media, for example, online portals like *Scroll.in* and *The Wire*, community radio, decentralized cellphone-based communication initiatives like CGNetSwara, and the continuation or revival of folk and street theatre; or the use of music for social transformation

such as Justice Rocks, the example of T. M. Krishna and transgender collaboration mentioned earlier, and Bangla Natak in West Bengal.[27] These and other examples are used by Paranjoy Guha Thakurta (2017) and Sudha Gopalakrishnan (2017) to posit a future in which media and the arts, respectively, are democratized by and also contribute much more to the struggles for justice and sustainability.

What all this means is that a crucial part of the transformation towards justice and sustainability is the sustenance of cultural and knowledge diversity, the maintenance of knowledge, arts, and media as a public commons, and the enabling of democratic pathways of generating, transmitting, storing, and evolving knowledge. This applies to modern science and technology as well (see, for instance, Abrol, 2017). A crucial part of all this is the decolonization of knowledge (and of tools like maps) and building equitable collaborations between different forms of knowledge.[28]

ECOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATIONS

In this section, I examine initiatives across India of rebuilding a harmonious relationship with the rest of nature, ecological regeneration and community-led conservation, and transformations in environmental governance, especially in relation to 'development' decisions.

There is much to be done to repair humanity's very troubled relationship with the earth and its various constituents. The global impact of our war on the rest of nature, whether through the COVID-19 pandemic or through the climate crisis, is very much visible now. As a counter-trend, several initiatives by governments, civil society, communities, and individuals have enabled some threatened species and ecosystems to sustain and revive in the midst of an otherwise dismal loss of biodiversity. Unfortunately, many of these, especially those implemented by governments and civil society and corporations based on the dominant exclusionary, Western models of conservation have alienated and dispossessed millions of people in the Global South. A vibrant alternative to this is the phenomenon of community-driven initiatives at governing and managing ecosystems in ways that help conserve them and their constituent species and functions; termed Indigenous Peoples' and Community Conserved Territories and Areas (ICCAs) or Territories

of Life, these have been recognized in global policy, cover a vast part of the globe, and have significant potential to help in the repair of the earth. But they are also severely under-recognized in most countries, and many are threatened with extractive activities and other factors.[29] Elsewhere, shifts in global paradigms of conservation are also leading to more co-governance approaches with governments, communities, and others as equal partners. As Shanker, Oommen, and Rai (2017) point out in an essay on the future of conservation in India, there is a need for a holistic approach that integrates conservation ideals with social and environmental justice. Any conservation approach has to embrace community and traditional knowledge as an ethical and moral imperative to distributive justice so that it can address a variety of issues ranging from inequalities to oppression.

An exciting recent development is the spread of the notion of nature having rights, not necessarily because it is of use to humans but in itself.[30] In 2006, Tamaqua Borough in the United States banned the dumping of toxic sewage sludge as a violation of Rights of Nature. Very soon after that, in 2008, Ecuador became the first country in the world to recognize Rights of Nature in its Constitution. In 2009, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution proclaiming 22 April as International Mother Earth Day. Later, in the same year, it adopted a resolution on Harmony with Nature. In 2010, Bolivia held a *World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth*, where the '*Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth'* was issued. It has been submitted to the United Nations for consideration. In 2012, Bolivia also passed a law of Mother Earth and Holistic development for living well. In 2015, alongside the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris, a manifesto was adopted highlighting co-violations of nature's rights and human rights around the world. In 2017, New Zealand adopted the Te Awa Tupua Act granting the Whanganui river legal rights (prior to and subsequently, it also recognized such rights of a national park and a mountain). Colombia, the United States, Mexico, Scotland, Canada, Chile, and other countries have also adopted national or local policies and legislation recognizing the rights of nature. In several places, such declarations are being used to stop extractive or other ecologically destructive proposals.

In India, there has been a flurry of judicial activism on this front, with the Uttarakhand High Court declaring that Ganga and Yamuna rivers have

rights of 'personhood' and appointing 'parents' to secure these rights. The order (subsequently put on stay by the Supreme Court) does not have much clarity on what specifically the rights mean, what constitutes violation, how action will be taken on these violations, and so on; and it has some problematic social implications in prioritizing the Hindu reverence of the river (Kothari and Bajpai, 2017).

The same high court also gave an astounding order in late 2018, declaring that the 'entire animal kingdom' has similar rights of personhood. Again, the court does not go into the nitty-gritty of what such rights could entail, how they would be actualized in situations of violation, and how such orders would not be misused by class, caste, or religious interests (for example, discriminating against people eating meat as part of their cultural traditions).

Moreover, giving legal rights to nature has its own pitfalls and limitations, not the least of which is that in most cases this is happening by giving it 'personhood', thereby conferring it the same rights as people would enjoy. This retains anthropocentrism of sorts. Could the movement towards recognizing legal rights of nature lead to what indigenous peoples and many religions have recognized for long, that the rest of nature needs to be treated as equals, with respect, and with full consciousness of the restraints that come necessarily from such treatment?

Any attempt at giving nature its space also requires a questioning of the overall model of environmental governance in India. Lele and Sahu (2017) point to four major issues: regulatory failure, limits to judicial activism, domination of neo-liberal growth ideas, and the assumption that conservatism is environmentalism. They argue that environmentalism has to be embraced as a way of life, that is, quality of life, sustainability, and environmental justice. This leads us to the issue of ethical transformations in the next section.

In summary, ecological transformations require re-healing our relations with the rest of nature, regenerating degraded ecosystems and reviving declining species, recognizing the rights and responsibilities of communities living closest to or most dependent on nature, re-commoning privatized spaces, putting the environment squarely into the centre of all human (including economic) activities, and democratizing decision-making on processes and projects that affect the environment.

ETHICAL TRANSFORMATIONS

At the foundation of alternative initiatives is a set of ethical principles and values, often unstated and implicit, sometimes explicitly articulated. These are very different from the principles underlying 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).[31]

- 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 and inclusive access* of all people, in current and future generations, to the conditions needed for human well-being (*sarvodaya*).
- 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.
- Autonomy and self-determination, individual to community, while ensuring that this does not undermine the autonomy of others (*swashasan*, *swaraj*).
- Self-reliance for basic needs, material and non-material (*swavalamban*).
- 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* and *reciprocity* among humans, and between humans and the rest of nature.
- *Simplicity* and *enoughness*, with *satisfaction* and *happiness* derived from the quality of relationships (*aparigraha*).
- Respect for the *dignity and creativity of labour 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 as a *livelihood* (*aajivika*).

- *Non-violence, harmony, peace* (*ahimsa*).

This is not an exhaustive list, and many of the values have diverse meanings and interpretations. These values will continue to evolve as frameworks like *eco-swaraj* or Radical Ecological Democracy (which I describe later) are explored, modified, and adapted for different sociocultural, economic, and political conditions.

A similar (if varying) set of values is seen in many other alternative initiatives around the world. Anti-mining or indigenous autonomy movements in South America, for instance, invoke ancient indigenous worldviews like *buen vivir, sumak kawsay, sumak allpa, suma qamana, allin kawsay,* and *kametsa asaike* which posit a 'good life' based on harmonious relation with each other and with the rest of nature (Caruso and Barletti, 2019; Chuji et al., 2019; Gualinga, 2019). Many of these, or others like *sentipensar,* challenge modernity's separation 'between mind and body, reason and emotion, humans and nature, secular and sacred, life and death' (Gomez, 2019). Minobimaatisiiwin and other worldviews of the native peoples of North America offer similar alternatives to extractivist modernity (McGregor, 2019). In Africa, *ubuntu* and its various equivalents across the continent refer to the belief in collective life, the commons; *agaciro* from Rwanda as a belief in dignity and self-worth is invoked for arguments to define one's own model of well-being and development (Le Grange, 2019; Ndushabandi and Rutazibwa, 2019). In Asia too several such concepts and worldviews continue to exist or are being revived. *Hurai* is about the relationship of people with the rest of nature, guiding the lives of the Tuva people in China; so is the Tao worldview of indigenous people in Taiwan; in Japan, *kyosei* refers to conviviality or symbiosis; in Bangladesh, *sohoj* means an intuitively simple, non-hierarchical, bio-spiritual way of life and is invoked in the Nayakrishi (new agriculture) movement (Fuse, 2019; Hou, 2019; Hugu, 2019; Mazhar, 2019). Several initiatives and movements from the Global North also embed the ethics of responsibility, equality, and harmony. Eco-feminism (in its many variants across the globe), degrowth in Europe, conviviality as powerfully described by Ivan Illich, the transition and ecovillage movements, and pacifism are

examples (Barkin, 2019; Chaves, 2019; Demaria and Latouche, 2019; Deriu, 2019; Hopkins, 2019; Illich 1973; Kin Chi, 2019; Terreblanche, 2019; Underhill-Sem 2019). Struggles of autonomy such as that of the Zapatista in Mexico and of the Kurds in western Asia, referred to earlier, are also heavily based on such ethics. A recent publication contains descriptions of over 90 such radical alternatives, including socially relevant interpretations of the world's religions (Kothari et al., 2019).

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: *ECO-SWARAJ* OR RADICAL ECOLOGICAL DEMOCRACY

Across the world, people and 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. None is perfect; all have issues that need resolution, and many even have internal contradictions, but they 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*: *a socio-cultural, political, and economic arrangement in which all people and communities have the right and full opportunity to participate in decision-making, based on the twin fulcrums of ecological sustainability and human equity.*[32]

The term *swaraj* is ancient and has been variously used by prominent figures of Indian history, including by Radhakrishnan, Tagore, and Gandhi. It was made most popular by Gandhi during the independence struggle, but he was careful to point out that it did not simply mean freedom from colonial rule. It is a combination of both internal and external rule by the self, the rights of autonomy coupled with restraint in thought and behaviour, and responsibility towards others (Shrivastava, 2019). Extending the 'others' to include non-human species and all of the rest of nature, one can consider

eco-swaraj as being a paradigm that combines direct democracy, socio-economic justice, and ecological sustainability with a foundation of ethical and spiritual values.

Importantly, such a paradigm has emerged more from the lived experiences of grassroots movements and initiatives (such as those mentioned in various sections earlier), 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 on many of these initiatives, including of Buddha, Gandhi, Marx, Ambedkar, Tagore, and tribal, Dalit, feminist, or other traditional revolutionaries and rebels. RED or *eco-swaraj* is an eclectic mix of all these, plus strands of deep and social ecology from Western thought and action. An elaboration of this has emerged from a process of countrywide gatherings of people working on initiatives in various sectors, called Vikalp Sangam or Alternatives Confluence.[33]

Utopian visions are crucial; they give us a sense of direction, even if we know we may never reach an ideal state. But end-goals too are of little point unless we can generate pathways of trying to head to them. To some extent the many examples in India and elsewhere are already showing pathways and the potential for larger transformation. But they are scattered, mostly too small to change the macro picture. Much greater networking among initiatives from different sectors, collaboration with resistance movements (where they are not already part of such movements), and joint forums for greater political mass are crucial. Greater documentation and publicity of these initiatives (if their actors consent), using all possible media, will help inspire others to try their own transformations. Using this documentation as material for learning in educational institutions would create a generation of youth more exposed to ways of thinking, acting and behaving that is different from the usual rat-race. Influencing, enabling, and networking key figures in *gram sabha*s, *panchayat*s, district planning bodies, urban wards and area *sabha*s, and other such institutions of governance is crucial. Continued advocacy for policy changes can create greater space for grassroots initiatives or at least remove the hurdles in their way. These are only some of the pathways, all worth trying out, none individually capable of making sustained transformation happen.

VIKALP SANGAM, OR ALTERNATIVES CONFLUENCE

One small and humble attempt at networking multiple emergent alternatives is the Vikalp Sangam, or Alternatives Confluence. Initiated in 2014 by the civil society group Kalpavriksh in partnership with several other groups, this process attempts to bring together movements and organizations working on the entire range of alternatives, for greater documentation and public exposure of initiatives, cross-learning across sectors, collaborations to make each other's work more holistic, critical collective thinking, and joint visioning of alternative futures. As of 2021, over 20 *sangams* have been held at regional and thematic levels, the Vikalp Sangam website[34] has collected over 1,500 stories of hope and inspiration, over 100 films have been made and several case studies for deeper analysis have been generated, and a continuously evolving framework note of an alternative society, mentioned earlier, has been created.[35] The Sangam process can be considered one of collective visioning and dreaming about an ideal society, rooted in grassroots practice (Kothari, 2019).

Vikalp Sangam is not a formal organization, but a platform that anyone interested in alternatives can use to convene gatherings, do documentation and outreach, or take on policy advocacy, as long as they are agreeable to its core principles as laid out in the document mentioned earlier. But while this informal non-structure is crucial for encouraging inclusive, non-hierarchical, and non-threatening relations within the process, the enormity of the initiative also necessitates some level of structure. For this purpose, there is a national core group of over 80 organizations, networks, and movements (as of late 2021) that acts as an advisory body, or helps convene specific activities.[36] One organization (currently Kalpavriksh) acts as the overall coordinator, which is envisaged to be a rotating function. A larger facilitation team, chosen from the core group, helps in this.

While the Sangam's objectives of bringing people from diverse sectors and enabling exchange of views and information, facilitating collaborations, and jointly conceiving a vision of the future are being met to some degree or the other (much more is needed, of course!), what had until recently not happened was the objective of also making it a forum for macro-change. In early 2019 it took its first collective step towards advocacy, by drafting a 'People's Manifesto for a Just, Equitable and Sustainable India'.[37] This was

oriented towards the mid-2019 national elections in India but was also meant to help constituent groups orient their own work and help with advocacy at various other levels. Another was produced for the Western Himalayan region, with similar objectives (Singh, 2019).

The Vikalp Sangam process has also inspired a move towards a worldwide confluence, the Global Tapestry of Alternatives[38] launched in May 2019.

While one can see glimpses of the radical transformation underway in many parts of the world, the challenges and hurdles in arriving at the vision of RED (or any others mentioned earlier) are humungous. RED calls for big mind-shifts and changes in human behaviour, away from complacency and an increased ability to learn from mistakes. It needs a continuously enhanced understanding of the impacts of human activities on the environment and of the workings of nature. It has to contend with the continued power of capitalism (including its ability to constantly reinvent itself) and patriarchy or masculinity, the ecological illiteracy and centralizing tendency of the state, the hegemony of modernity and the continuing tension between various knowledge systems, corruption of various kinds, the awesome power of the military, and a feeling of 'helplessness' among the general public. Organizations frozen in their orthodox, un-evolving ideological positions, including from within Leftist, Gandhian, Ambedkarite, feminist, or other such persuasions, are also hurdles, as they refuse to acknowledge that the walls they build around themselves do not enable even a recognition that they hold the goal of justice in common with others. And then there is the old bugbear of Indian civil society, a lack of maturity to let go of personal egos and 'territorial' behaviour, as repeatedly encountered by this author in various networking initiatives.

These challenges cannot be a reason for giving up. The most oppressed and marginalized of society have shown us that even in what seemed to be hopeless situations, they have created a revolution. Those of us who have the luxury of reading and writing about such things, who most likely do not have the worry of where the next meal is coming from, simply do not have any right to throw up our hands and say it is all pointless. We must continue to dream and envision our collective utopias, and co-learn and co-generate the paths of progressing towards such visions along with the most marginalized of peoples and the rest of nature.

POSTSCRIPT

The COVID-19 pandemic affecting most of 2020 and continuing to affect the world in 2021 has thrown up an unprecedented challenge to humanity. Either we learn the hard lessons it teaches us – especially the perils of destroying and exploiting nature in the name of 'development', and the nature of precariousness that much of the world lives in due to shameful levels of inequality and socio-economic exploitation – and radically restructure our economy and polity or we try to go back to 'normal' and lurch through crises after crises. Most governments and mega-corporations not only appear to not be wanting to learn the lessons but in fact have used the opportunity to become more authoritarian and profit-seeking. On the other hand, communities and collectives, and some governments, have also shown alternative pathways that provide hope. In India we have documented several dozen stories of food, health, and livelihood resilience by communities, which have crucial lessons for public policy and collective action.[39] As of the time of finalizing this, though, the Indian government continues to stumble along the worn path of unsustainable development; it is up to its people to build stronger and stronger countertrends that may help avert future such crises.

NOTES

1. This chapter was written before the COVID-19 hit, and while it has been possible to introduce some elements of the 2020–21 period at the final stage of going to press, the kind of restructuring I would have liked to do of the chapter to take into account lessons of this period has not been possible.
2. A useful resource for movements, brought out annually, is the Kriti Team's diary, see https://krititeam.blogspot.com/search/label/annual%20 movement%20diary, accessed on 21 December 2021.
3. Even as this chapter was undergoing final revision for publication, farmers had been on protest for several months, starting late 2020, against three farm laws that further corporatize agriculture and remove essential state guarantees for minimum prices to their produce. Finally in December 2021 they won a significant victory as the central government announced withdrawal of the

laws, as also agreeing to a number of other demands. This is widely seen as one of the most significant mobilisations of farmers, with support from a cross-section of society including other workers, environmentalists, feminists, and Adivasi and Dalit groups, since independence.

4. See https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/which-municipalism-lets-be-choosy/, accessed on 21 December 2021.

5. See also http://tarunbharatsangh.in/river-arvari-parliament/, accessed on 21 December 2021.

6. See www.sacredheadwaters.org.

7. 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, accessed on 21 December 2021.

8. See Devika (2014); see also www.kudumbashree.org.

9. See www.ddsindia.com.

10. See https://foodsovereigntyalliance.wordpress.com/, accessed on 21 December 2021.

11. For a detailed study of one remarkable revival of a craft, handloom weaving in Kachchh, see https://vikalpsangam.org/article/sandhani-weaving-transformations-in-kachchh-india-key-findings-and-analysis/, accessed on 21 December 2021.

12. See www.justchangeindia.com.

13. There are many initiatives in the name of 'social enterprise' in India now, but it is not clear whether the majority of them are motivated more by social and less by profit-making motivations.

14. See https://www.ofmtn.in.

15. See https://www.facebook.com/milletmama.bengaluru/.

16. See http://shaheedhospital.org; http://vikalpsangam.org/article/shaheed-hospital/; see also film at http://vikalpsangam.org/article/more-videos-for-vikalp-sangam-by-video-volunteers/#.XPOQrS2B1E4, accessed on 21 December 2021.

17. See also http://homesinthecity.org/en/.

18. See https://punecycleplan.wordpress.com, accessed on 21 December 2021.

19. See https://vikalpsangam.org/article/why-do-we-wait-so-restlessly-for-the-workday-to-end-and-for-the-weekend-to-come/, accessed on 21 December 2021.

20. See the film *Ode to Equality*, http://www.vikalpsangam.org/article/videos-for-vikalp-sangam-by-srishti-school-of-art/#.XPPSFC2B1E4, accessed on 21 December 2021.

21. See the film *Football As a Tool to Advance Sexual and Reproductive Health of Women*, http://www.vikalpsangam.org/article/videos-by-video-volunteers/#.XPPSuS2B1E4, accessed on 21 December 2021.

22. I prefer using this term rather than the more popular 'fundamentalists', which I believe is a distortion, for the fundamentals of all religions are about ethical behaviour, love, caring, solidarity, respect, and other such values that the superficialists suppress to spread their message of hatred and 'otherness'.

23. See http://www.peopleslinguisticsurvey.org.

24. See www.narmada.org/ALTERNATIVES/jeevanshalas.html; www.marudam farmschool.org; http://adharshilask.tripod.com/aboutadh.html; Coelho and Padmanabhan (2018); www.Adivasiacademy.org; www.navdanya.org/earth-university; http://bhoomicollege.org/; www.swarajuniversity.org.

25. See www.secmol.org; www.kfionline.org/education-centres/.

26. See https://vikalpsangam.org/article/extraordinary-work-of-ordinary-people-in-multi-language-translation/, accessed on 21 December 2021.

27. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmVgyOUggsA, accessed on 21 December 2021.

28. See for instance, https://decolonialatlas.wordpress.com and https://www.arcticbiodiversity.is; see also Santos (2014).

29. See www.iccaconsortium.org; see also Borrini-Feyerabend and Farvar (2019).

30. For a global overview and regular updates of developments, see https://www.therightsofnature.org.

31. For more details, see https://vikalpsangam.org/about/the-search-for-alternatives-key-aspects-and-principles/, accessed on 21 December 2021.

32. An early treatment of this concept is in A. Kothari (2009); subsequent development is in Shrivastava and Kothari (2012); A. Kothari (2014a, 2014b).

33. See http://www.vikalpsangam.org/about/ accessed on 21 December 2021.

34. See www.vikalpsangam.org.

35. See https://vikalpsangam.org/about/the-search-for-alternatives-key-aspects-and-principles/, accessed on 21 December 2021.

36. The full list of members and their profiles are at https://vikalpsangam.org/members/, accessed on 21 December 2021.

37. See http://vikalpsangam.org/article/peoples-manifesto-for-a-just-equitable-and-sustainable-india-2019/#.X41Gty1h1hE, accessed on 21 December 2021.

38. See https://globaltapestryofalternatives.org.

39. See series of reports called 'Extraordinary Work of 'Ordinary' People: Beyond Pandemics and Lockdowns', at www.vikalpsangam.org; see also https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/india-needs-a-rainbow-recovery-plan/article32776442.ece, accessed on 21 December 2021.

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