

GREEN GROWTH

**POLITICAL IDEOLOGY, POLITICAL ECONOMY
AND THE ALTERNATIVES**

GARETH DALE, MANU V. MATHAI
and JOSE PUPPIM DE OLIVEIRA



Zed Books
LONDON

Green Growth: Political ideology, political economy and policy alternatives was first published in 2016 by Zed Books Ltd, The Foundry, 17 Oval Way, London SE11 5RR, UK.

www.zedbooks.co.uk

Editorial copyright © Gareth Dale, Manu V. Mathai
and Jose Puppim de Oliveira 2016.
Copyright in this collection © Zed Books 2016.

The rights of Gareth Dale, Manu V. Mathai and Jose Puppim de Oliveira to be identified as the editors of this work have been asserted by them in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

Typeset in Sabon by seagulls.net
Index:
Cover designed by

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior permission of Zed Books Ltd.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-78360-488-3 hb
ISBN 978-1-78360-487-6 pb
ISBN 978-1-78360-489-0 pdf
ISBN 978-1-78360-490-6 epub
ISBN 978-1-78360-491-3 mobi

CONTENTS

.....

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Contributors</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>I</i>
GARETH DALE, MANU V. MATHAI and JOSE A. PUPPIM DE OLIVEIRA	

Part I: Contradictions of green growth

1	Can green growth really work? A reality check that elaborates on the true (socio-)economics of climate change ULRICH HOFFMANN	22
2	What is the ‘green’ in ‘green growth’? LARRY LOHMANN	42
3	The <i>how</i> and for <i>whom</i> of green governmentality ADRIAN PARR	72
4	Degrowth and the roots of neoclassical economics JAMES MEADWAY	90

Part II: Case studies

5	Giving green teeth to the Tiger? A critique of green growth in South Korea BETTINA BLUEMLING and SUN-JIN YUN	114
---	---	-----

6	Lessons from the EU: Why capitalism cannot be rescued from its own contradictions BIRGIT MAHNKOPF	131
7	The green growth trap in Brazil RICARDO ABRAMOVAY	
8	Green jobs to promote sustainable development: Creating a value chain of solid waste recycling in Brazil ANNE POSTHUMA and PAULO SERGIO MUÇOUÇAH	166
9	Trends of social metabolism and environmental conflict: A comparison between India and Latin America JOAN MARTINEZ-ALIER, FEDERICO DEMARIA, LEAH TEMPER and MARIANA WALTER	187

Part III: Emerging alternatives?

10	Beyond ‘development’ and ‘growth’: The search for alternatives in India towards a sustainable and equitable world ASHISH KOTHARI	212
11	Reconsidering growth in the greenhouse: The Sustainable Energy Utility (SEU) as a practical strategy for the twenty-first century JOB TAMINIAU and JOHN BYRNE	233
12	Alternatives to green growth? Possibilities and contradictions of self-managed food production STEFFEN BÖHM, MARIA CECI ARAUJO MISOCZKY, DAVID WATSON and SANJAY LANKA	253
	<i>Notes</i>	271
	<i>Index</i>	315

CHAPTER 10

.....

Beyond ‘development’ and ‘growth’: The search for alternatives in India towards a sustainable and equitable world

Ashish Kothari

Introduction: crisis and response*

This chapter is written within the broad context of the ecologically unsustainable and deeply inequitable pathways that humanity has followed across the earth, as also the inadequacy and shortsightedness of many ‘reformist’ approaches towards being ecologically sustainable and more inclusive or equitable, including ‘green growth’ or the ‘green economy’ that are currently being pushed as part of the post-2015 sustainable development agenda. It does not go into detail on the above, given the substantial amount of literature already existing and a number of other chapters in this volume dealing with these issues. The chapter takes as its starting point the consequent search for alternatives that can provide for human well-being, equity and justice within planetary and ecological limits.

A more specific context for this chapter is what is happening in India (or, more broadly, South Asia). Behind the glitter and swagger of the twenty-first-century urban pockets that India proudly showcases, lie vast stretches of poverty, hunger, malnutrition, exploitation,

* Parts of this article are adapted from or based on Kothari 2014a: 62–72. On this version, useful comments were received from Joan Martinez-Alier, Daniela Del Bene, Manu Verghese Mathai, Gareth Dale and Jose A. Puppim de Oliveira. The author is also grateful to Aseem Shrivastava, whose collaboration in developing the idea of Radical Ecological Democracy while writing the book *Churning the Earth: The Making of Global India* has been invaluable.

inequality and ecological ruin. In a recent book, a colleague and I have provided detailed facts and figures, and extensive analysis, to show that India is decidedly on the path of ecological unsustainability, continued and new forms of impoverishment, and increasing inequalities, even while 'development' has benefited some of the middle classes and created an even more enriched upper class.¹ 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 among the lowest positions in most global surveys of human development and social welfare, including UNDP's Human Development Index, and various measures on the gender gap, malnutrition and undernutrition, and hunger. In such a 'business as usual' scenario, we predict increasing ecological collapse and socio-economic inequity, and serious regional and class conflicts.

This is not to say that the situation in India is irretrievably dismal. Indeed, there are a number of exceptional initiatives by the state and civil society relating to poverty, environment, employment and empowerment, which are elements of a more sustainable and equitable future. However, at present these are submerged and overwhelmed by the sheer bulldozer effect of current macroeconomic development discourse and related political governance structures. Substantial exploration at practical and conceptual levels is needed to overcome the present course and pursue holistic human well-being in tune with ecological finitude. What would such a future look like, and how would we get there?

Stories of the future: towards a Radical Ecological Democracy

In 2013, history was created in many parts of India, albeit without fanfare. Twelve village assemblies of the Dongria Kondh adivasis (indigenous group) in the state of Odisha decided, several of them by consensus, not to allow a multinational mining company to take over their lands; they cited sacredness of the land and forest, and their own notions of well-being, as the main reasons. In Mendha-Lekha, a Gond adivasis village in the state of Maharashtra, all the farmers voluntarily donated their private agricultural lands to the community, under an

old law promoting the ‘commons’ that has almost never been used in the country. This followed a successful move by the village to claim control over forests surrounding it, reversing two centuries of colonial, state-centred control, and to declare ‘tribal self-rule’. These are two of very many examples across India encompassing adivasis and non-adivasis rural communities (hunter-gatherer, agricultural, pastoral, fisher, and artisanal) that have, over the last two to three decades, demonstrated strong attempts at sustainable and equitable ways of achieving well-being. Increasingly collectives in urban areas too are experimenting with alternatives of various kinds.

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 of a different future for India. They point to a paradigm or vision of the future, which 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.*²

Here, ecological sustainability is the continuing integrity of the ecosystems and ecological functions on which all life depends, including the maintenance of biological diversity as the fulcrum of life; human equity is a mix of equality of opportunity, access to decision-making forums for all, equity in the distribution and enjoyment of the benefits of human endeavour, and cultural security. RED is comprised of a set of intersecting elements or spheres, covering the political, economic, ecological, socio-cultural, and ethical and spiritual aspects of life. Each of these has multiple facets, explored below with the help of practical initiatives taking place in various parts of India.

Importantly, such a paradigm has emerged more from the lived experiences of grassroots movements and initiatives (many of which are described below). This is not to deny the influence of key ideologues, activists and figures of Indian and global history, both on me

and on many of these initiatives, including of Buddha, Gandhi, Marx, Ambedkar, Tagore, and tribal or other traditional revolutionaries and rebels. In my own mind RED is an eclectic mix of all these, plus strands of deep ecology and social ecology from Western thought and action.

An alternative politics: power to communities

Decentralized, embedded political governance is one of RED's crucial elements. This goes well beyond the 'representative' democracy that countries such as India have adopted, towards more direct, radical democracy.

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* (smaller units within wards) in cities, or another equivalent body where it is practical for all the adults of the individual hamlet or village or urban neighbourhood to participate in decision-making. All critical decisions relating to local natural resources or environmental issues should be taken at this level, with special provision to facilitate the equal participation of women and other underprivileged sections.

Mendha-Lekha village, mentioned above, adopts 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 full 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.³ Since then the village has conserved 1,800 hectares of surrounding forest, and recently 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.⁴ It has moved towards fulfilment of all basic requirements of food, water, energy and local livelihoods, including through the sustainable harvesting of bamboo from the forest.

In the state of Nagaland, a state government initiative called 'communitization' has devolved aspects of decision-making regarding health, education and power (e.g. salaries and transfers of teachers) to village and town communities.⁵ Cities such as 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.⁶ In the Udaipur district of Rajasthan state, several villages facilitated by civil society groups have carried out detailed resource mapping and planning, and have mobilized to ensure that government budgets earmarked for them are spent in line with community-set priorities.⁷

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 landscapes (and seascapes), countries, regions, and indeed the earth. The need for environmental governance at the global level is widely recognized and pursued on a range of issues. In a RED scenario, such larger level governance structures need to emanate from the basic decentralized decision-making units. These are envisioned 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 river basin planning authorities in India.

Landscape and trans-boundary planning and governance (also called 'bioregionalism', or 'ecoregionalism', among other names) are exciting new approaches being tried out in several countries and regions. These are as yet 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 programmes for land, agriculture, water, wildlife and development.⁸ 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 the management of the Waghad Irrigation Project, the first time a government project has been completely devolved to local people.⁹

Though communities (rural and urban) will be the fulcrum of the alternative futures, the state has a critical supporting and enabling role to play. It needs to retain, or rather strengthen, its welfare role for the weak (human and nonhuman), assist communities in situations where local capacity is weak, rein in business elements or others who behave irresponsibly towards the environment or people. It will have to be held accountable to its role as guarantor of the various fundamental rights that each citizen is supposed to enjoy under the Constitution of India, including through policy measures such as the Right to Information Act 2005. Finally, it will retain a role in larger global relations between peoples and nations.

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 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 and supporting 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 learnt from ancient Greek and Indian democracies, and from experiments in Latin America.¹⁰ 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, having to report back, etc. This will of course be more challenging at larger scales of decision-making where delegates or representatives are far away from the local units.

An alternative economics based on localization

Radical or direct democracy cannot work in isolation from the democratization of economic life. The second key element of RED is an economic system that acknowledges and respects ecological limits, places control over the means of production in the hands of communities, and empowers producers and consumers to democratically manage the economy as it relates to them.

Congruent with decentralized governance is economic localization, reversing the trend towards economic globalization. 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 two centuries of government-dominated policies have effectively crippled community institutional structures, customary rules, and other capacities. There is also the issue of non-resident local communities having significant dependence on the local resource, e.g. in the case of nomadic or mobile pastoral peoples. But with such complexities built in, 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. The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Indian Constitution mandate decentralization to rural and urban communities. To give some live examples:

Sustainable agriculture using a diversity of crops has been demonstrated by thousands of farmers (including the most marginal, caste-discriminated women farmers) where the community groups Timbaktu Collective and Deccan Development Society work in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, by communities working with Green Foundation in Karnataka, by farmers of the Beej Bachao Andolan, and the Jaiv Panchayat network of Navdanya.¹¹ Sustainable pastoralism has been sustained or revived among nomadic or resident

pastoral communities with whom the group Anthra works.¹² Community conservation of forests, wetlands, grasslands, and coastal/marine areas, and also wildlife populations and species, is spread over several thousand sites in Odisha, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand, Nagaland, and other states.¹³ 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 Alwar district of Rajasthan by Tarun Bharat Sangh, and in Kachchh by Sahjeevan and other groups.¹⁴ In Bhuj town (Kachchh, Gujarat), groups such as 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 livelihood for poor women, create adequate sanitation, and provide dignified housing for all.¹⁵ Here and in Bengaluru, Pune and other cities, increasingly vocal citizens are invoking the 74th Amendment to urge for decentralized, local development planning and resource allocation through programmes such as participatory budgeting.¹⁶

Again, just as localized power is not adequate to deal with political relations at larger scales, localized economies cannot survive in isolation, especially in a world so intricately connected through economic relations. 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 among villages get stronger.¹⁷ In the Nilgiris of Tamil Nadu, the initiative Just Change has brought together producers, consumers and investors into a single cooperative, enhancing the localization of exchanges that are benefiting several hundred families.¹⁸

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 into 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 much of their 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 actions will spread where rural communities have a greater say in deciding what happens to their resources, and city-dwellers become more aware of the impacts of their lifestyles.

Such approaches provide massive opportunities for livelihood generation. There needs to be a renewed emphasis on labour-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 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.¹⁹ 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.²⁰ The social enterprise SELCO has enhanced 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.²¹

Given the extent of land and water degradation in India, their regeneration, and consequent increase in productivity, could provide a huge source of employment, and create permanent assets for sustainable livelihoods. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), one of the government's flagship

programmes, as also other schemes such as the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), could be further oriented towards such environment–employment combinations.²²

RED also entails the democratization of the economic relations of production and consumption. This means decentralized production, which is in the control of the producer, linked to predominantly local consumption that is in the control of the consumer. India already has several dozen producer companies and cooperatives, of farmers, craftspersons, fishers, pastoralists and others; most of them run on democratic lines of decision-making and revenue-sharing. Apart from the Just Change initiative mentioned above, there are several dozen more producer companies or cooperatives run democratically. 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.²³

At several places in India where villages have been revitalized through locally appropriate development initiatives, rural–urban migration has slowed down and even got reversed. On a visit to Jharkhand state, I met families whose sons had come back from urban jobs to work in the village after Jharcraft (mentioned above) had enabled more secure, enhanced livelihoods. The Kudumbashree programme (also mentioned above) has reduced outmigration. Similar results are seen in villages such as Ralegan Siddhi and Hivare Bazaar in the state of Maharashtra, many in 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. Just Change, mentioned above, is making a beginning in this direction. Considerable local trade could revert to locally designed currencies or

barter, and prices of products and services even when expressed in money terms could be decided between givers and receivers rather than by an impersonal, non-controllable distant ‘market’. A huge diversity of local currencies and non-monetary ways of trading and providing/obtaining services are already being used around the world.²⁴ Simultaneously, a host of localized, community-based banking and financing systems have also cropped up over the last couple of decades; these could begin to challenge the mega-concentrations that the big banks and financial institutions represent. None of this is going to be easy. The pervasive monetization of the economy even in so-called ‘remote’ parts of India is a massive challenge to such alternatives. But the continuation of barter-like exchanges in many parts of the country, a memory of the possibilities of this even where actually lost, and examples from other parts of the world provide the grounds for an increase in such alternative forms of exchange.

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. A draft National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan produced in 2004 laid these out in detail, but they were never taken up as the Plan was rejected by the government as being too radical.²⁵ However, elements of this have come into a few recent Five-Year Plans at centre or state level, such as incentives for renewable energy, schemes to support organic farming, and tax breaks to urban neighbourhoods installing water harvesting and energy-saving technologies.

Equity and diversity: 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 Deccan Development Society in Andhra, dalits and ‘higher’ castes interacting with much greater equality in the Kuthambakkam village of Tamil Nadu where mixed housing too has 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 the girl child to access education and other services earlier denied to them by a highly patriarchal society.²⁶ 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.²⁷ Many alternative educational institutions are explicitly oriented towards creating the conditions of greater equality and equity. Several progressive policies and laws favouring the disadvantaged (such as reserving positions in educational institutions and government jobs for women, 'lower' castes, and adivasis) have been important (even if inconsistent) tools for empowerment.

Being mindful of exploitative and iniquitous structures is important to avoid falling into another trap: that of revivalism, or promoting the 'golden past' as an ideal for the future. Some religious or faith groups, and even some environmental groups, are wont to project such a past, sandpapering the warts and blemishes that have been part of India's history. These also tend to be intolerant to other faiths and religions; the recent alliance between environmentalists and right-wing Hindu chauvinists around the campaign against the Tehri Dam in Uttarakhand, or the attempt to clean up the temple town of Vrindavan are examples of precisely what needs to be avoided.²⁸ This is especially crucial since a right-wing party, BJP, took power in Delhi in the 2014 elections.

Finally, a just society needs also to nurture and promote diversity: of cultures and languages, ideas, lifestyles, and so on. India is home to enormous socio-cultural diversity (including nearly 800 distinct languages, according to a recent Peoples' Linguistic Survey led by Prof. Ganesh Devy),²⁹ with close links to its biodiversity. Development and modernity have wiped out substantial parts of this diversity, but a number of initiatives at alternative living are successfully resisting this. The women of Deccan Development Society, for instance, regularly celebrate festivals and occasions related to all religions (including

highlighting the links between cultural and biological diversity), and ensure that the students of their school Pachaasaale are also imbibing respect for such diversity.

Knowledge democracy and ethics

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. Ecological and human systems are not constituted by such neat boxes; landscapes are not amenable to easy boundaries between the ‘wild’ and the ‘domesticated’, the ‘natural’ and the ‘human’ (especially considering that humans are part of nature). The more we can learn and teach and transmit knowledge and conduct research in holistic ways, giving respect not only to specialists but also to generalists, the more we can understand nature and our own place in it.

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 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.³⁰

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.

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. These need to tread a careful line between those who believe that dedicating one's life to changing oneself is adequate (which can tend towards detachment from society), and others who feel that one's entire life needs to be dedicated to the collective (which can stifle personal space and creativity).

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 among regions of the world have often enriched human societies. With its focus on localized economies, cultural diversity and ethical lifestyles, and the elimination of the homogenizing, road-rolling effect of global finance and development hegemonies, RED would actually make the flow of ideas and innovations at global levels much more meaningful, leading to enrichment of all cultures rather than of a few at the cost of 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 global exchange is to share the various ideas and visions of alternatives that are being discussed or practised 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') articulated by indigenous peoples of South America; put together, these could be a powerful antidote to the materialist growth oriented mindset of currently dominant system. The rich in India could learn from some of the *décroissance* or 'degrowth' processes or 'voluntary simplicity' initiatives in Europe and the US. The state may be able to learn from the way Bhutan is attempting to employ the Gross National Happiness approach, or the kind of

constitutional, legal and planning provisions articulated (though not necessarily well implemented) in the last few years in Ecuador, Venezuela and Bolivia, or the prominence given to sustainable farming and participatory science and technology in Cuba.³¹

More practically, India needs to build much better relations with neighbouring 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). More globally, strengthening various treaties on peace, rights and the environment is a key agenda; these could dovetail into the new post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals framework, *if* it is based on sustainability and equity as core themes running across all goals.³²

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. The following is a preliminary list. Clearly, they are different if not outrightly opposed to the principles displayed in today’s capitalist or state-dominated economic and political systems (including their ‘green economy’ and ‘green growth’ narratives, which may incorporate some of these, but, without effectively building in *all* of them, remain trapped within the status quo):³³

- The functional *integrity and resilience of the ecological processes and biological diversity* underlying all life on earth, respecting which entails a realization of the ecological limits of human activity, and enshrining the *right of nature* and all species to survive and thrive in the conditions in which they have evolved.
- *Equitable access* of all people, in current and future generations, to the conditions needed for human well-being (socio-cultural, economic, political, ecological, and in particular food, water, shelter, clothing, energy, healthy living and socio-cultural sustenance); equity between humans and other elements of nature; and social, economic and environmental justice for all.

- The *right of each person and community to participate* meaningfully in crucial decisions affecting her/his/its life, and the enabling conditions for such participation, as part of a radical, participatory democracy.
- Linked to the above, governance based on *subsidiarity and ecoregionalism*, with local rural and urban communities (small enough for all members to take part in face-to-face decision-making) as the fundamental unit of governance, linked with each other at bioregional, ecoregional and cultural levels into landscape/seascape institutions that are answerable to these basic units.
- The *responsibility* of each citizen and community to ensure meaningful decision-making that is based on the twin principles of 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, in so far as they are in consonance with the principles of sustainability and equity.
- *Collective and cooperative thinking and working* founded on the socio-cultural, economic, and ecological commons, respecting both common custodianship and individual freedoms and innovations within such collectivities.
- The ability of communities and humanity, as a whole, to respond, adapt and sustain the *resilience* needed to maintain ecological sustainability and equity in the face of external and internal forces of change.
- The inextricable *interconnectedness* among various aspects of human civilization, and therefore among any set of 'development' or 'well-being' goals: environmental, economic, social, cultural and political.
- Individual and collective worldviews of *simplicity* and *enoughness*, with *satisfaction* and *happiness* derived from the quality of relationships starting with the most proximate ones within the family, among neighbours, friends, colleagues, the wider community and ultimately the rest of nature and humanity, and from the pursuit of learning and spiritual wisdom, rather than from ever-increasing material accumulations.

It is important to note that these principles and values need to go together, in an integrated manner, else there is the risk of falling back on a piecemeal and failed approach to sustainability and equity – such as the one being attempted by the green growth discourse. In particular, the first three of the above principles are often articulated as part of neoliberal democracies, but their true implementation depends on incorporating the remaining principles. It is simply not possible for capitalist or state-dominated regimes to pursue the full set of these principles without contradicting their own fundamental characteristics.

This list of principles will undoubtedly be added to on the evolutionary path that RED takes, for any such pathway must be a continuous dialogue among human beings, and between humanity and the rest of nature. Nor is RED *the* solution or blueprint, but a framework deduced from a great variety of initiatives pursuing alternatives reflective of the diversity of human and other life.

Challenges and opportunities for the transformation

For its wider implementation, RED calls for massive mindset, structural and behavioural 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, and corruption of various kinds, continued militarization of the subcontinent and the vested interests that the military represents, and a feeling of ‘helplessness’ or apathy among the general public.

But in India as in many other parts of the world, there are many signs that a transformation is possible over the next few decades. These include a marked increase in practical initiatives that attempt to be ecologically sustainable (e.g. conversion from conventional to organic farming), equitable and just (e.g. in reclaiming community rights to resources, and women’s access to decision-making) ways of meeting needs and aspirations. They include also strong resistance by communities and civil society against the imposition of destructive ‘development’ projects and processes, and the commercialization of

life and knowledge, such that at any given moment dozens of dams, mines, highways, industries, and attempts to steal biodiversity are unable to move ahead or are abandoned. Then there are the attempts at advocacy resulting in progressive policies that expand democratic and sustainability spaces, useful in providing platforms for more fundamental transformation (with possibly the best example being the Right to Information Act 2005, a landmark legislation that grants citizens the right to access information from and relating to most government and government-aided agencies).

Aiding the above are 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. Also supportive are financial incentives for ecologically more sensitive practices, such as schemes that over a dozen states in India have for promoting organic farming; and awareness and concern regarding ecological and social equity issues, as such issues get integrated into educational, media and other forums.³⁴

Who will be the primary agents of transformation?

Peoples' movements and civil society organizations, mostly in the non-party political sector (including progressive worker unions in the formal and informal sector), lead several of the initiatives mentioned above. Such movements and organizations are likely to continue being the main change-makers into the near future, especially those among them that are part of, or are facilitating, the empowerment of rural and urban communities. 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.

Over time several political parties will feel pressure from their constituencies, as power becomes decentralized, to reorient their focus to issues of sustainability and equity. The more progressive sections within them will grasp the opportunities to push from within. So will business, facing pressure from consumers, but I don't foresee the

private sector in its current dominant form remaining, since, in a RED scenario, organizations with profits as their major motive will not have a place; they will be replaced by producer companies (i.e. farmers, artisans, industrial workers, and so on, who organize and share the means of production and distribution), the public sector (managed by the state but under full democratic control), and the emerging category of 'social enterprise' (when it is genuinely public-oriented). International agencies, themselves pressurized from increasingly vocal and active communities in relevant countries and regions, too will play a role, with environment and human rights treaties gaining ground, and multilateral/bilateral aid agencies being reformed towards the new values.

How can the state itself be transformed to play its role as guarantor of rights, facilitator of communities, and regulator of industry, in so far as such a role may be needed in the interim pathways towards a RED future? There are no easy answers here. The experience of the movement for public access to information in India suggests that, under public influence or sometimes on its own accord through enlightened officials and politicians, the state can bring in progressive policies (in this case, the Right to Information Act) that greatly expand democratic and welfare spaces. And perhaps some lessons will be learnt from the ongoing experiments in decentralized governance in Latin American countries such as Venezuela. But these are all ultimately limited by the current nature of the state, as seen for instance in the resistance to allow the RTI Act to be used to expose the full extent of crony capitalism in India, or for instance in the subversion of decentralized governance when it comes to extractive industry in Latin America.³⁵ Each country or region will have to find its pathways of a more accountable state. This is more likely to happen as mobilization at grassroots level grows in number and quality of its engagement. Peoples' movements will also have to recognize the fine line between policy-based expansion of democratic spaces that aid fundamental transformation, and those, like green growth, that the state uses to soften or even co-opt peoples' movements.

One significant factor in the transformation, globally, could be the growing knowledge that we are part of one earth. For perhaps the first time in history, not in small part due to the climate crisis, a truly global consciousness is emerging. As more and more peoples'

forums for regional and global interaction increase (2014 alone has at least half a dozen global forums on well-being and alternatives to development, and will see significant civil society mobilization around the post-2015 goals), this consciousness will be a basis for enlightened action. The 'sandwich' effect of grassroots mobilization and global consciousness and action is likely to be crucial in changing the way governments (stuck in between) behave. Such change will of course not happen without encountering resistance and backlash from the powers-that-be, to withstand and resist which it is crucial to strengthen networking and solidarity across movements at all levels.

A recent move to bring together practitioners and thinkers of alternatives in India is the Vikalp Sangam ('Alternatives Confluence'), which combines documentation and outreach, gatherings and other processes at regional and national levels.³⁶

Finally, the transformation of the self, deepening self-enquiry and advancing spiritual growth is a crucial component of RED.³⁷ Many individual attributes would have to be amplified in all learning and educational pursuits. The ability to see oneself as a human being with inalienable human dignity, immense capability, intrinsic rights and responsibilities towards other human beings who are equal in dignity, and towards nature more broadly, is critical. Similarly the opportunity to connect to nature outside while understanding that each of us is part of nature and the capacity to engage in the qualitative pursuit of happiness (social relations, broadening and deepening one's knowledge, being with nature) rather than mindlessly going after material accumulation need greater appreciation. These have to go hand in hand with social transformation. Engaging in social movements helps in individual change, e.g. by instilling an acute awareness of the 'other' and a sense of responsibility towards such others. In turn, personal self-reflection and spiritual or ethical growth help more meaningful engagement with social causes as they enhance understanding and empathy with others and provide people with the confidence to work in collectivities.

Conclusion: India and the rest of the world

If well-being is about having secure ways of meeting basic needs, being healthy, having access to opportunities for learning, being employed

in satisfactory and meaningful tasks, having good social relations, and leading culturally and spiritually fulfilling lives, there is no reason this has to be achieved through ecological devastation, and no reason why only some humans get to enjoy it. Human well-being can be achieved without endangering the earth and ourselves, and without leaving behind half or more of humanity.

No country or people can undertake such a massive transformation on its own. But the peoples of the Indian subcontinent are perhaps strongly placed to take a lead on many aspects of it, for a variety of reasons: its continued ecological and cultural diversity (substantial parts of which still remain), thousands of years of history (including ancient democratic practices), adaptation, and resilience in the face of multiple crises, the continued existence of myriad lifestyles and worldviews including of ecosystem people who still tread the most lightly on earth, the powerful legacy of Buddha, Mahavir, Gandhi, Tagore, Ambedkar, Aurobindo and other progressive thinkers including many in the modern era following these giants or learning from outside scholars and revolutionaries like Marx, the equally important legacy of rebels and activists and poets from among adivasis, dalits, and other subordinated sections of Indian society, the solid base of civil society activism and relatively free media, the many peoples' movements of resistance and reconstruction, an increasingly vocal home-grown version of feminism, and the equally numerous opportunities for spiritual transformations of the self.

Yet again, though, India will succeed in the transition to a sustainable and equitable world only if it also engages with other peoples. As mentioned above, a number of indigenous and civil society movements are coming up with alternative frameworks and practices that we can learn from and contribute to. Through its history Indian peoples have exchanged ideas and worldviews and materials with other peoples of the world; it has challenged, taught and learnt from other peoples; it will need to do all this and more, at even more intense levels, if humanity is to transcend its greatest crisis and emerge as a wise, gentle custodian of the earth.