

# Ecoswaraj - Radical Ecological Democracy

## Rainbow Pathways out of Global Crises



Ashish Kothari

Kalpavriksh / Vikalp Sangam / Global Tapestry of Alternatives


# Multiple global crises



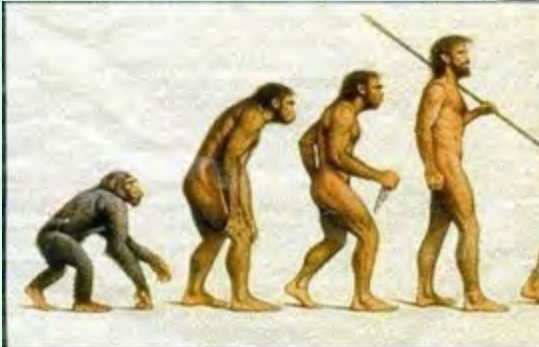
'ROAD TO NOWHERE'

- **Ecological:** biodiversity, climate, pollution
- **Socio-economic:** inequality, deprivation
- **Political:** conflicts, authoritarianism
- **Cultural:** colonisation & homogenisation
- **Personal:** alienation, depression, meaninglessness

# 'Development'



All over the world, nature's mighty barriers separate oil, gas, minerals and water from their destinations. Only a handful of international giants can bridge these gaps. One of them is Indian, Dodsal. Ripping through jungles in Indonesia... Moving the earth in India... Laying pipelines.



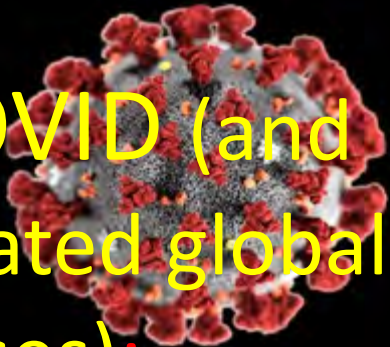
**Somewhere, something went terribly wrong**

Capabilities for crossing rivers and starting through gaps. Dodsals' rock-sliding engineers have been inspired by Niro Akbar, Sweden.

**Dodsal**  
The Indian hand... worldwide.

Violence against nature, communities, cultures, & individuals  
... from livelihoods to deadlihoods

# COVID (and related global crises):



an excuse for more authoritarianism, profit-making, unsustainability or opportunity for systemic transformation towards justice, equity, sustainability?

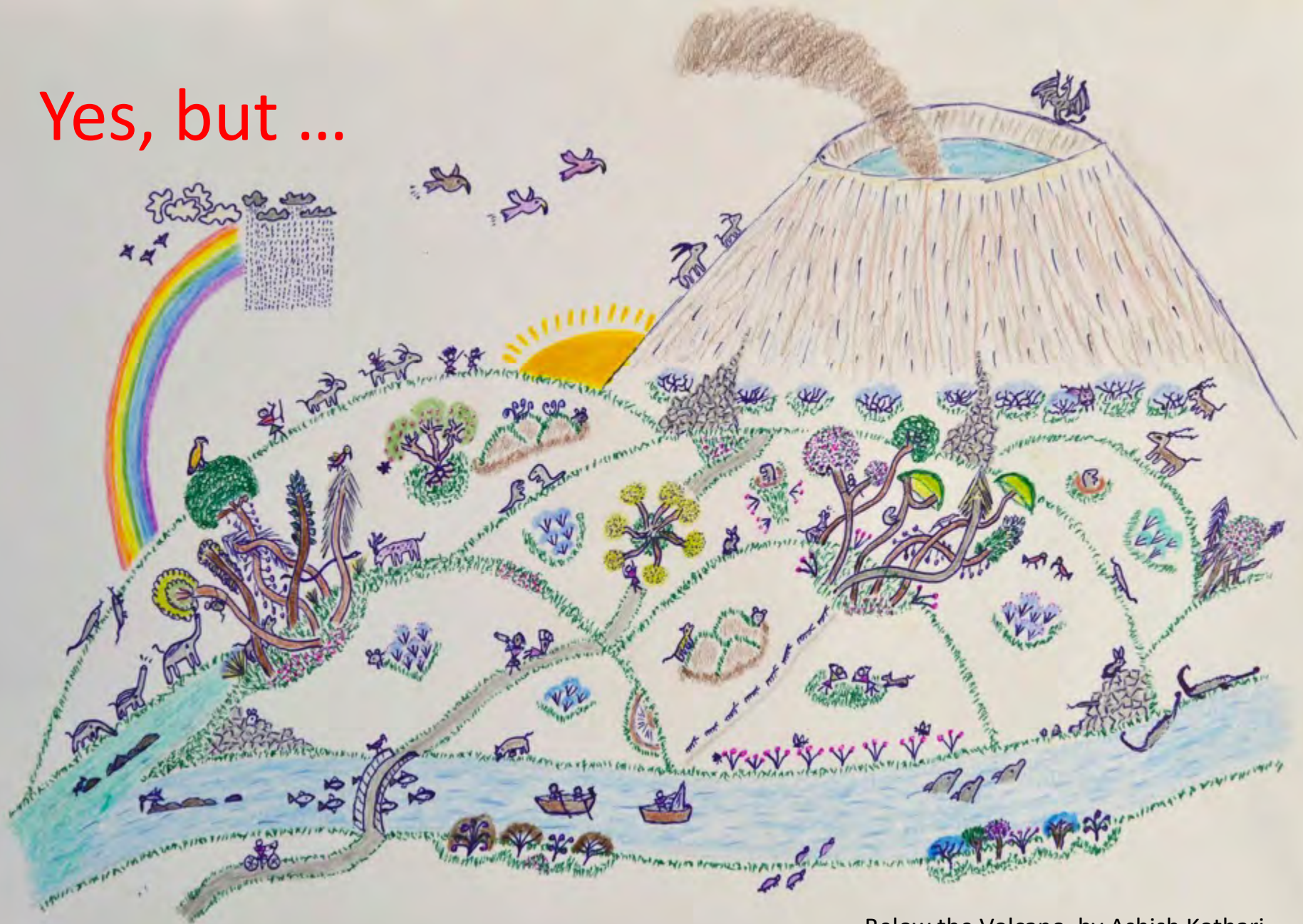
## Billionaires made \$3.9 trillion during the pandemic - enough to pay for everyone's vaccine

JULIANA KAPLAN | JAN 26, 2021, 19:17 IST



# Are there alternatives?

Yes, but ...



Below the Volcano, by Ashish Kothari

**Beware of false, partial, or 'post-truth' solutions:**  
**Technofixes, market mechanisms, green growth, REDD/REDD+, CDM, geoengineering, net-zero carbon, 30X30, half-earth ...**  
**'sustainable development'**



'MORE PLANTED'

A photograph of a large group of people, including men, women, and children, holding hands in a long line across a rocky riverbank. The scene is set at sunset, with the sun low on the horizon, casting a warm glow over the water and the people. The background shows a wide river and distant hills under a cloudy sky. The people are dressed in simple, light-colored clothing. The overall mood is one of solidarity and community.

Systemic alternatives include  
**resistance ...**

(to capitalism, state domination, patriarchy,  
human-centredness, etc)

... other ways of being, knowing, doing,  
dreaming

Satyagraha (insisting on truth; speaking truth to power):

# Civil disobedience against injustice, across world (including COVID period)

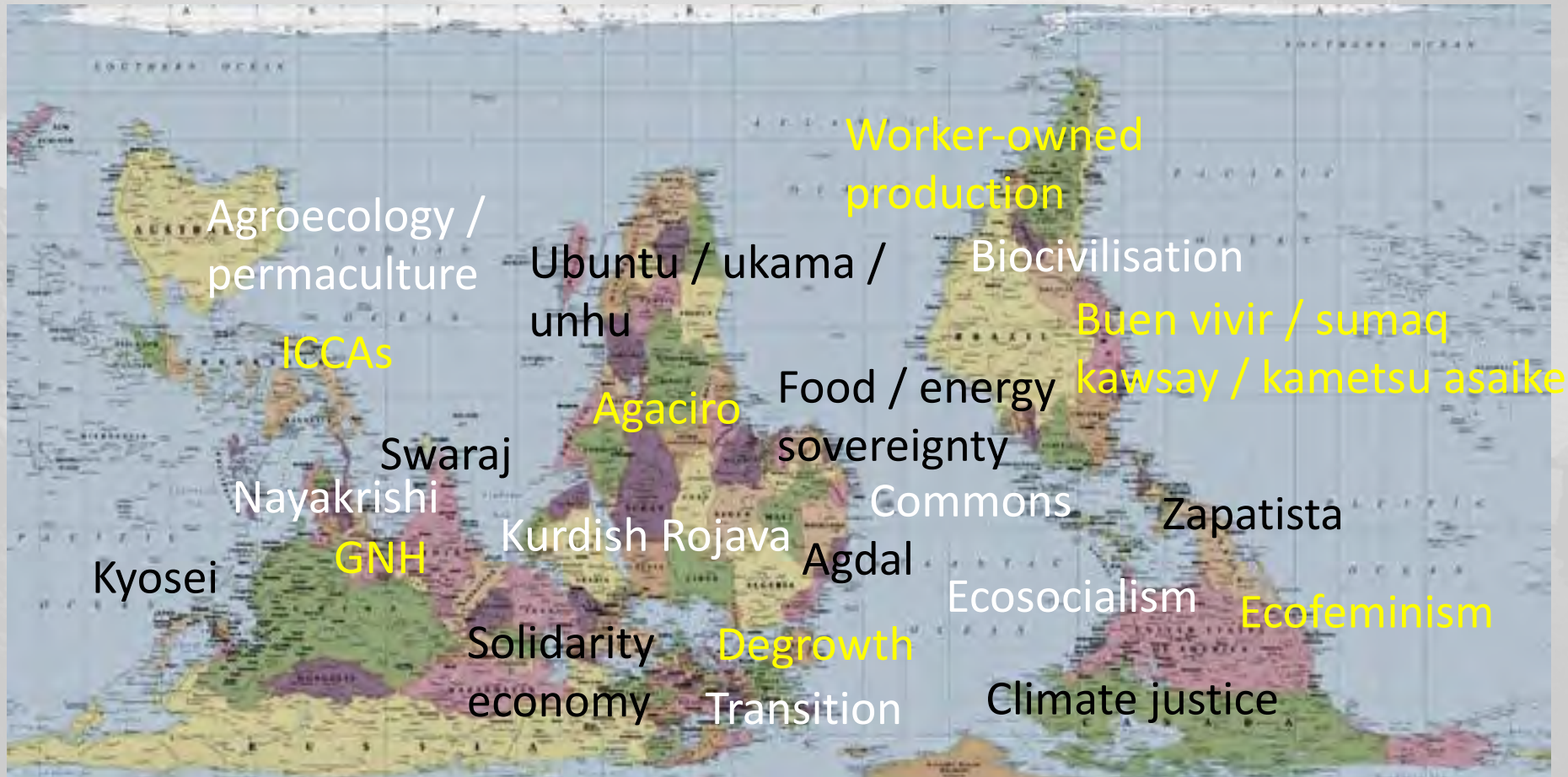


noise barrage at night





# Radical alternatives are also about constructive solutions



# South Asia: alternative initiatives for well-being



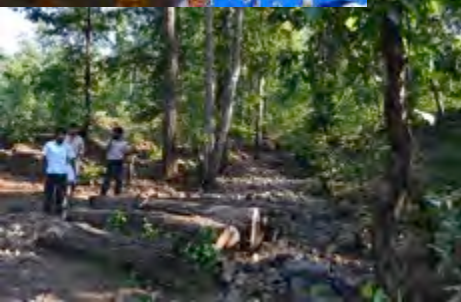
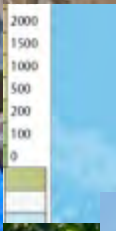
Energy  
Conservation  
Water  
Shelter  
Urban sustainability  
Livelihoods  
Village revitalisation  
Producer companies

Gender  
Learning  
Governance  
Food / agriculture  
Crafts / manufacturing  
Health



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Health



# Deccan Development Society: conservation, equity, food sovereignty, livelihood security

- Empowering *dalit* women farmers, through collectives
- Securing women's land rights
- Reviving traditional agricultural diversity / practices (millets)
- Community radio & film-making



# Maha Gram Sabha, Gadchiroli (Maharashtra, India)

- Federation of 90 villages
- *Aims: stopping mining, sustainable livelihoods, forest rights & conservation, local governance, women's empowerment, cultural identity*



Mendha-Lekha: 'we are govt in our village'



Vol. 1 | May 2020

# EXTRAORDINARY WORK OF 'ORDINARY' PEOPLE

BEYOND PANDEMICS  
AND LOCKDOWNS

# COVID-time resilience through community mobilisation ... and collective rights

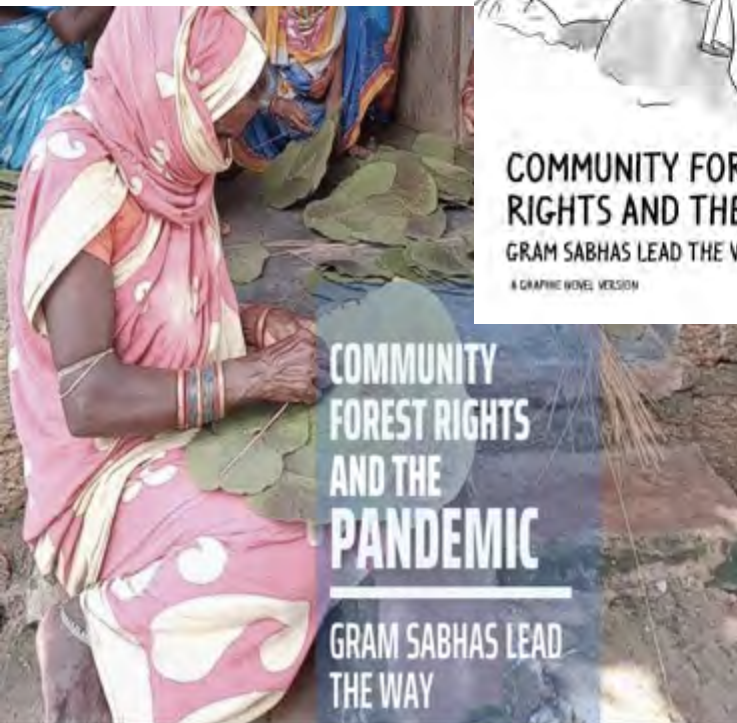


March 2021



## COMMUNITY FOREST RIGHTS AND THE PANDEMIC GRAM SABHAS LEAD THE WAY

A GRAPHIC NOVEL VERSION



## COMMUNITY FOREST RIGHTS AND THE PANDEMIC

GRAM SABHAS LEAD THE WAY



## YOUTH STORIES OF HOPE, RESILIENCE & COLLECTIVE DREAMING

Volume 5  
of the Extraordinary Work of 'Ordinary' People:  
Beyond Pandemics and Lockdowns  
April 2021



## SEEDING HOPE Women's Collectives Create Pathways for Change

Volume 4  
of the Extraordinary Work of 'Ordinary' People:  
Beyond Pandemics and Lockdowns



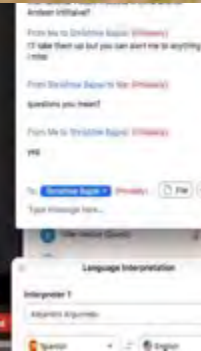
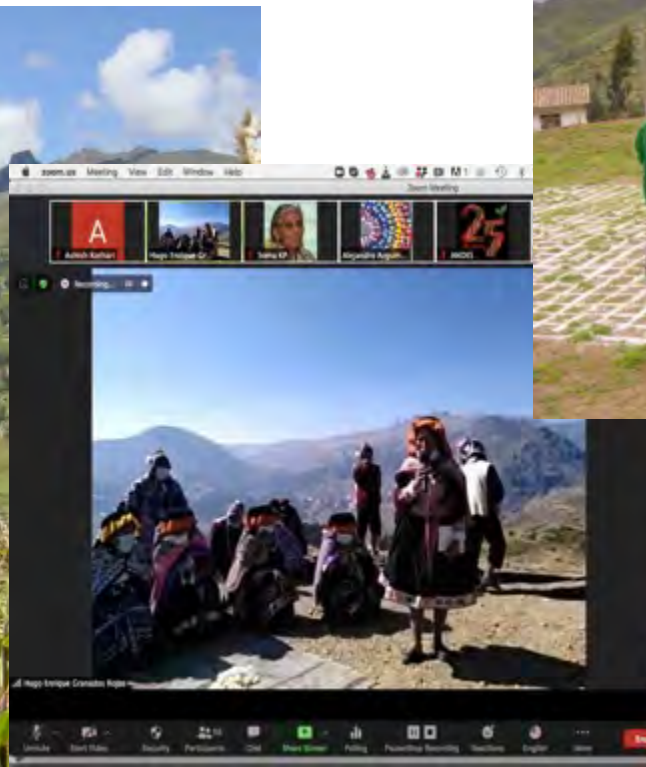
## PANDEMIC RESILIENCE IN THE WESTERN HIMALAYAS

Volume 3

of the Extraordinary Work of 'Ordinary' People:  
Beyond Pandemics and Lockdowns

# Parque de la Papa, Peru: **biocultural landscape conservation, food sovereignty, livelihood security**

- 5 Quechua indigenous communities governing Andean landscape
- Conserving/using >1300 varieties of potato (in centre of origin)
- Asserting self-determination & direct democracy with gender justice
- Contributing to food relief in Cusco town



# Sapara self-determination, Ecuadorian Amazon



Asserting the dream/spirit world,  
fighting oil, exploring economic  
alternatives, reviving language,  
helping outsiders heal





# Territories of Life (ICCAs): community-led conservation and sustainable livelihoods



[www.iccaconsortium.org](http://www.iccaconsortium.org)



# Kurdish Rojava women's movement

- Autonomy, direct democracy, ecofeminist ('jineoloji') principles in midst of war zone



Images: courtesy Kurdish Women's Movement

# Solidarity economy, commons, alternative currencies, open software



In India:

- Open software / ethical hacking
- Alternative media
- Transformatory arts (e.g. 'Justice Rocks')
- Millet/organic food restaurants
- Non-profit shops

# Producers in control of production

- Viome factory, Thessolniki, Greece

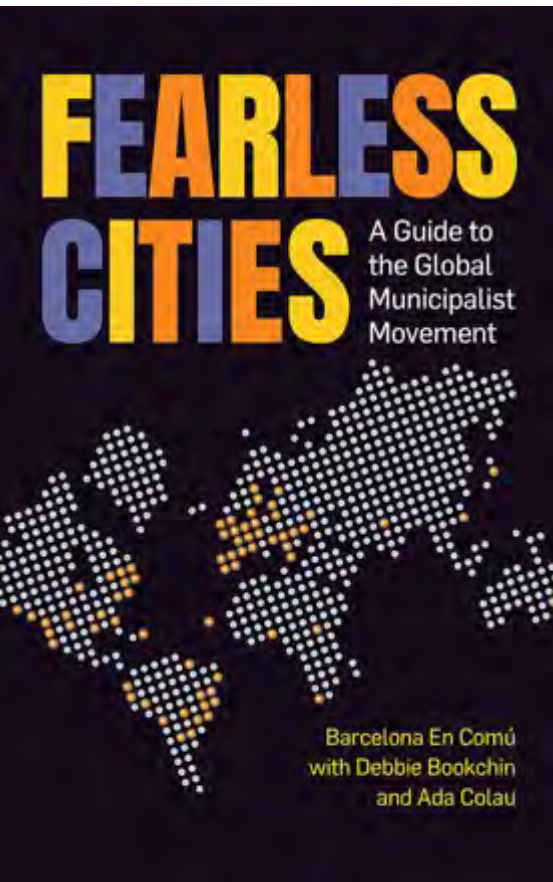


Christiania, an “experiment” at anarchic or self-governed living, began 40 years.



# Making politics more human: feminist municipalism

- Governance based on solidarity and collective action, not hostile competition (e.g. Barcelona)
- Cities of dignity



**Learning / education:** rooted in cultures & ecologies, decolonising, encouraging creativity, combining head-heart-hand-feet ...

- Adharshila, Jeevanshala, SECMOL, Imli-Mahua, Marudam, Bhoomi, KFI scholls, Beeja (India)
  - Multiversities / pluriversities (several countries)
  - Zapatista autonomous schools (Mexico)
  - Forest schools (Czech Republic)
- and many more ...



***Skhole = leisure!***




# Democratising technology & media

**Technological innovations** to reduce ecological impact, governed democratically

**Community-run media:** radio, TV channels, 'social' media, newspapers





Can we discern elements of holistic frameworks  
from these initiatives?



# Flower of transformation: 5 spheres of systemic alternatives



# Sphere 1. A NEW POLITICS

**Direct democracy** (local to national): decentralised and nested decision-making; referendums

Delegated/representative democracy, with mechanisms of **accountability** (right to recall, public audit, reporting back...)

**Bioregional governance** across states and countries ... political units aligned with ecological and cultural ones? Borderless world?

*Conditions: Rights, Capacity, Forums, and Maturity*



Can we think of bioregional governance of South Asia, beyond boundaries?



## Sphere 2

# A NEW ECONOMICS: *Earthshastra*

Economics as part of ecology

Open **localisation**: self-sufficiency/sovereignty in basic needs, larger trade built on this

Production, consumption (*prosumption*) locally controlled

Re-integrating **work & leisure**: *livelihoods*

Re-**commoning** private & state property

**Demonetisation** & decentralisation of currencies: Relations of caring/sharing, local exchange systems

## Ingredient 3: A JUST SOCIETY

Towards **equity** amongst

classes

castes (*eradication of*)

genders

ethnic groups

species

'able'ities



Towards universal **rights-based approaches**, infused with responsibilities ... *sarvodaya*



# Ingredient 4: CULTURE AND KNOWLEDGE

Respecting inclusive **diversity** of languages, cuisines, knowledges



**Decolonising** the mind, epistemologies, ontologies

**Democratic R&D / S&T / knowledge** / innovation: in public domain, participatory, transparent



Media and arts commons

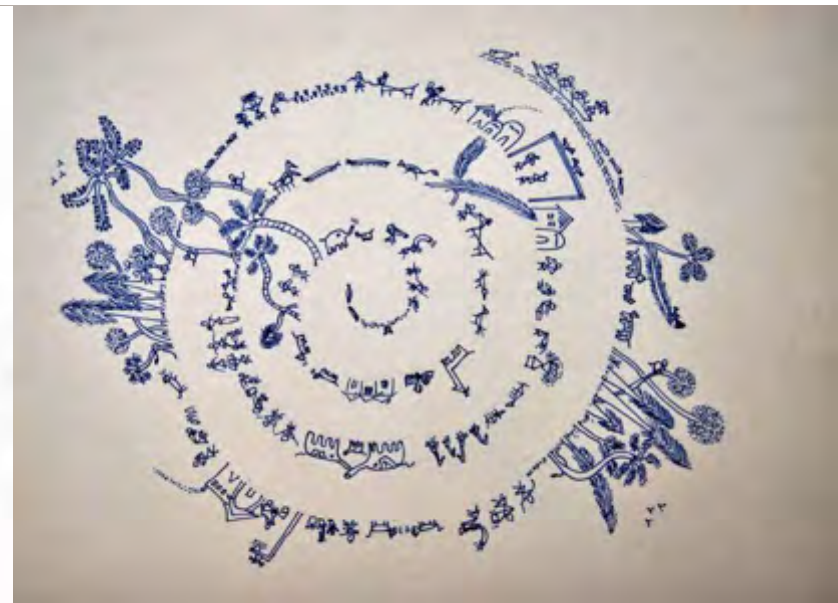
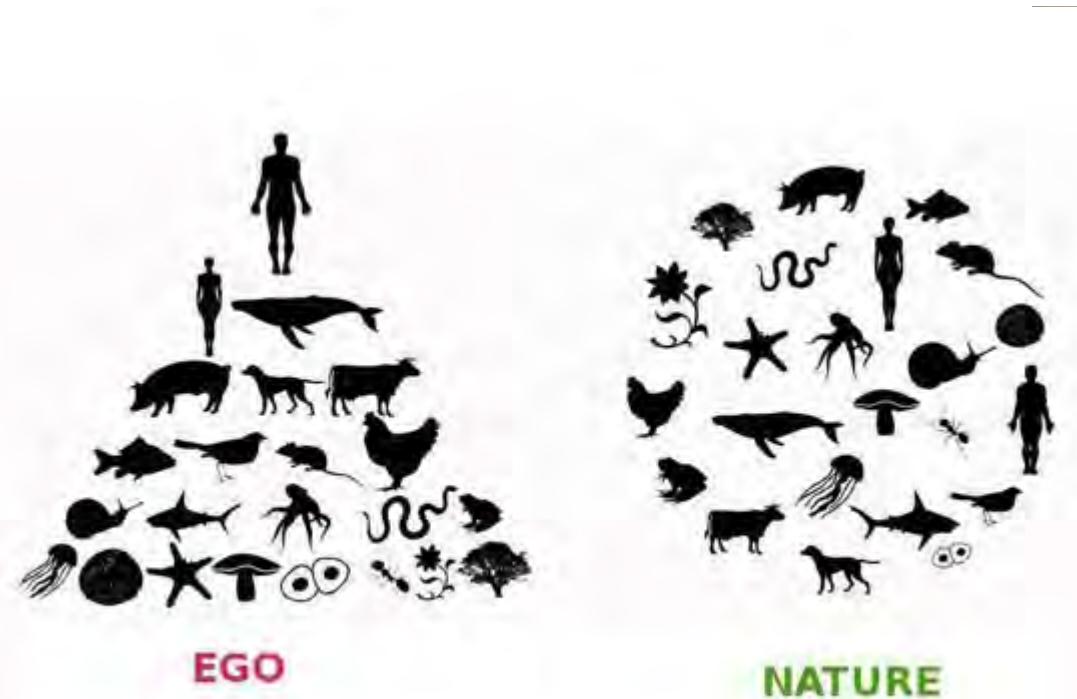
Opportunities for **spiritual / ethical** growth (without falling into trap of communal religious institutions)



## Ingredient 5.

### RENEWED RELATIONSHIP WITH/IN NATURE

- Recognising humans as part of nature
- **Respecting** rest of nature (*ethical* / *spiritual* / *rights*)
- Conservation, sustainable use, reciprocity



# Flower of transformation: 5 spheres of systemic alternatives

**Ecological resilience  
& wisdom**

(rights of nature, conservation)

**Radical democracy**

(direct citizens' power, accountable representative institutions, ecoregional governance, borderless world)

**VALUES**

**Economic democracy**

(producer sovereignty, localised self-reliance, caring/sharing, commons)

**Culture & knowledge  
diversity**

(new learning, knowledge commons, celebrating creativity, cultural co-existence, spiritual deepening)

**Social justice &  
wellbeing**

(justice, equity of genders, ethnicities, castes ...)



# Values & principles of transformative alternatives ...

- Diversity and pluralism (of ideas, knowledge, ecologies, economies, ideologies, politics, cultures...)
- Self-reliance for basic needs (*swavalamban*)
- Self-governance / autonomy (*swashasan / swaraj*)
- Cooperation, collectivity, solidarity, commons, conviviality
- Rights with responsibilities of meaningful participation
- Dignity & creativity of labour (*shram*)
- Qualitative pursuit of happiness
- Equity / justice / inclusion (*sarvodaya*)
- Simplicity / sufficiency / enoughness (*aparigraha*)
- Rights of nature / respect for all life forms
- Non-violence, peace, harmony (*ahimsa*)
- Reciprocity and interconnectedness
- Fun!

**WORLDVIEWS THAT CELEBRATE LIFE!**



# Swaraj

- Sangharsh (resistance) to nirman (reconstruction)
- Individual / collective autonomy, responsible to others' autonomy
- Personal = political
- Politics & spirituality integrally linked for power to be emancipatory

# *Eco-swaraj:* Radical ecological democracy

(**Radical** = going to the roots, challenging the conventional)

- achieving **human well-being**, through:
  - empowering all citizens & communities to participate in **decision-making**
  - ensuring socio-economic **equity & justice**
  - respecting the **limits of the earth**

**Community** (at various levels) as *basic unit of organisation*, not state or private corporation

# Pre/Post-development worldviews from elsewhere

## ... a pluriverse

- **Indigenous peoples'** territorial struggles and notions of well-being
  - *buen vivir: sumak kawsay (Andes), suma qamana (Bolivia), kume mongen (Chile), kamatse asaike (Peru)*
  - *ubuntu (S. Africa), umuntu (Uganda), ukama (Zimbabwe), eti uwem (W. Africa)*
  - *kyosei (Japan), sentipensar, minobattsiiwiin (native American),*
- **Roots & radical re-interpretations of major religions**
- **Degrowth, Commons, Solidarity economy, Biocivilisation, Ecosocialism, Ecofeminism ...**



We need ... not just a Green New Deal ...  
but revolutions of multiple hues ...



'Double rainbow' by Ashish Kothari

# A Rainbow Recovery

## Building Bridges, Not Walking on Backs:

A Feminist Economic Recovery Plan for COVID-19

Hawai'i State Commission  
on the Status of Women  
Department of Human Services  
State of Hawai'i



# #FEMINIST BAILOUT

Action Week: June 1-5

awid



based on creating dignified  
livelihoods, protecting nature,  
ensuring justice for all, reviving  
solidarity ...

**not bailing out corporations and  
banks!**

# Scale: how can these alternatives achieve macro-change?

*Outscaling*, not upscaling

- Resistance + constructive alternatives
- Networking, solidarity, co-learning: achieving critical mass
- Local to global connect
- Advocacy for policy shifts: transitions towards transformation
- Collective visioning

Respecting a *pluriverse* of ways of knowing, being, acting

# Issues for dialogue....

How do we **transition** to a just world? Who will **catalyse** the transformation?

Role of **youth**?



Would there be a **state**? Its form and role?

What would be the nature of **global governance**? (*Beyond the UN*)

Would there be a **private** business sector?

How would **professions** have to change ...  
or **deprofessionalise** life?





# Vikalp Sangams (Alternatives Confluences) in India: practical collaborations, bottom-up visioning



# Global Tapestry of Alternatives

A group of people, including men, women, and children, are standing on a rocky shore next to a river. They are holding hands in a long line, extending from the foreground into the water. The scene is set at sunset, with the sun low on the horizon, casting a warm glow over the water and the sky. The background shows a line of trees and a hazy horizon.

Confluences of resistance and alternatives  
across the world

Sharing/exchanges/collaborations

Collective visioning of a just world ... and how  
to get there!

<https://globaltapestryofalternatives.org>

# Global Tapestry of Alternatives

(Un Tejido Global de Alternativas)

A worldwide confluence ...

## Structure

- A process, not an organisation
- No central control mechanism
- **Decentralised weaving** of movements
- Currently a core team of volunteers holding the space
- Endorsing organisations and individuals (providing credibility)

# Global Tapestry of Alternatives

(Un Tejido Global de Alternativas)

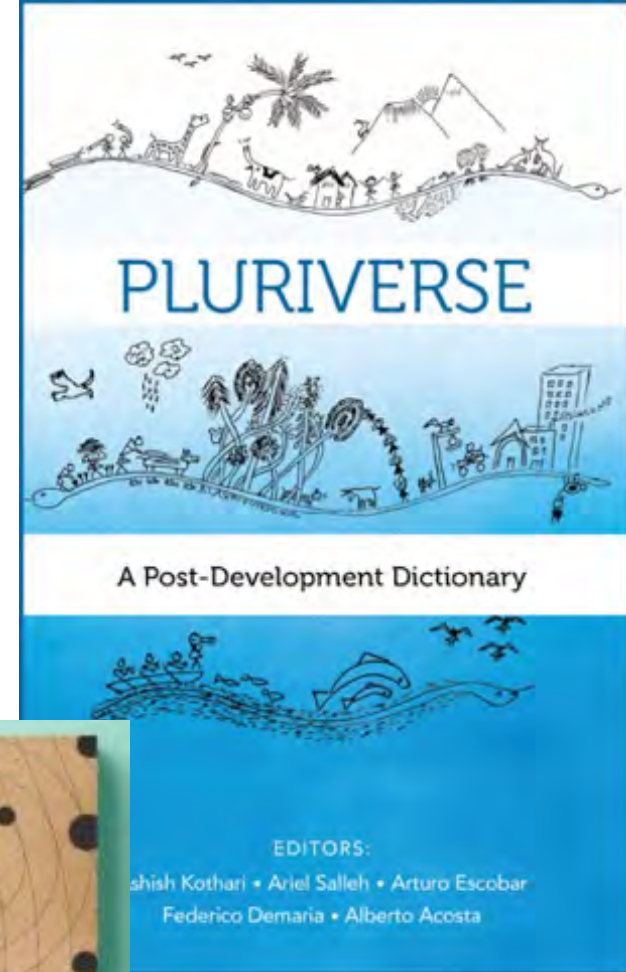
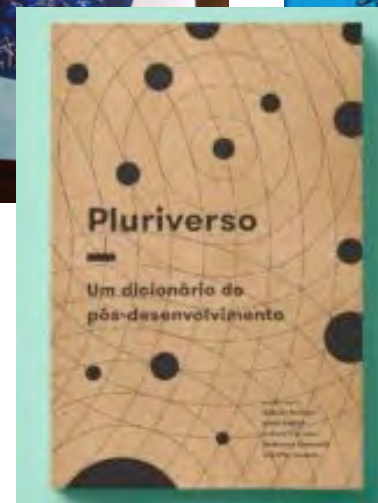
A worldwide confluence ...

PeDAGoG

Post-Development Academic-Activist Global Group

- Sharing of alternative courses, pedagogies, methods of learning/teaching
- Devising collective courses, esp. for youth from global South

Radical alternative practices & worldviews across world  
120 authors, >100 essays



Alternative visioning for India: political, social, cultural, economic, ecological

# Radical Ecological Democracy

Searching for alternatives to unsustainable and inequitable model of 'development'



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Action Analysis Ideas Stories

## Landscapes of Renewal – Jukajoki, Linnunsuo and the Finnish Boreal

November 28, 2019 Capitalism, Climate Change, Community, Conservation, Energy, New Politics, Power Dynamic,

### Bodies, Flowerbeds

The earth, carved up, engraved with bodies, this hollow vision of death: people resting together, bodies beneath a bed of flowers.

We soften death into poems and stories. The art of writing is just a way of wailing for the earth, carved up, sculpted by bodies.

In Cameroon, hair from the dead is carried, mixed with camwood and kept; the living remember bodies beneath beds of flowers.

What we seek through our endless studies sits beyond death, but the path to it is sinking into a carved-up earth, paved with bodies.

For further dialogue ...

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RED: [www.radicalecologicaldemocracy.org](http://www.radicalecologicaldemocracy.org)

GTA: [www.globaltapestryofalternatives.org](http://www.globaltapestryofalternatives.org)

Please let me know (put into chat) if you want to be on GTA and RED lists!