

# Expressions

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# Expressions Annual 2006-07

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## Enriching the Cultural Soils

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For more than a decade, we at Abhivyakti have been creating and using various media forms to stimulate community dialogue and actions. We believe media is an effective tool for generating social change. We partnered with many local community organizations and together devised communication strategies. These ranged from producing media forms, designing messages on issues we considered important for the community, disseminating media, hosting discussions on a variety of topics, and facilitating workshops. All of this was intended to strengthen the communication skills and efficacy of activists. Our conviction was fuelled by three considerations. One, our intervention through media would create awareness of the content presented in the media; two, the discussions would lead to people's participation; and three, this process would motivate the community to initiate desired actions for the benefit of the entire community.

Out of these processes, many campaigns were designed and launched. We partnered with different social organizations and worked on many issues, like forest rights of indigenous tribal people, women's equality, AIDS awareness, among others. Gradually, it began to dawn on us, after so much of media experience and consultation, whether our approach was in the right direction?

Three areas needed attention. The first concerned our role as the producer of the media; the second was about our identity as outsiders; and the third was how the issues we considered important were chosen without any serious efforts to understand community dynamics. Our entire strategies were based on perceived assumptions about the community. We viewed them in need of outside help to better their conditions. Also, our media rarely focused on local culture. The media that we produced were geared more towards reaching small groups than assessing local conditions. This included posters, puppet shows, flannel stories, video films and audio cassettes. All were introduced in the communities as examples of low-cost, easy-to-make (for whom?), though sometimes dependent on high technology (such as video), alternatives to the mass media (which was seen as anti-people).

When our perspective about communities shifted to appreciate its enormous creative resources, so did our approach to media. Instead of focusing on making something for someone else, we decided to broaden our viewpoint and started exploring the existing media/arts of the community. We tried to understand how they had been generated, why they exist today, and the network of relationship associated with them. The wide variety of expressions that exist in a community — the ways people speak, interact, quarrel, sing, share, grow food, weave, create and celebrate together — give a distinct colour and identity to the local culture. The question before us was, "How do we, as 'initiators of change', relate to such diverse creative and artistic expressions?" Why do we not acknowledge their presence as authentic media forms? These myriad forms became harbingers for us. They were naturally community media and compelled us to expand

our vision to see their rich texture, innumerable forms and organic sources of production.

However, in the present age of globalization and global media, communities in rural and tribal regions are facing massive erosion in many of their traditional practices. Local cultures are undergoing rapid processes of change. Community ties, local art, and dialogue are rupturing. As satellite TV is beaming images non-stop, people are seduced into becoming viewers. Passivity is replacing active participation in community cultural life. People are feeling awkward; they have less time to talk and listen to each other and connect. It seems easier and safer to sit in front of television or radio and get 'entertained'. This is greatly fracturing self-image and identity. Vibrant and diverse communities are doubting their own potential, strengths and resources. Conforming to a centralized notion of 'how they should be' has impacted local culture immensely. That is why we see proliferation of a global consumer culture everywhere, in rural as well as in urban areas. This culture is alien, driven by technology and aims to promote consumerism. The huge explosion of multiplexes, malls, and digital communication exemplifies it. Face-to-face dialogue is slowly being replaced by mobiles, internet chat and SMS messages. Interactions, relationships and a sense of rootedness, which were the core of local cultures, distinct for each location, are disappearing.

At another level, we also examined our initiatives and whether they contributed in strengthening the local landscape and its rich tapestry? The need to re-look at the 'local' was necessary - not only to understand its rich source of culture, but also appreciate its complex politics, economies, spirituality, natural ecologies and the way its learning and life was organized. There was a need to

challenge the notion that knowledge is available in textbooks or is with the school-educated. The practices of generating knowledge from own experience and reflections, and from dialogue with each other and from relationships have been embedded in our culture for a long time. They were sidelined with modernity which put more emphasis on institutions and took control over our lives. From our dialogue with different community members we experienced the richness of its soil and the diversity that lay within – and it was sad to see its disintegration. Do we allow the enormous amount of knowledge, local economies and its diverse sustainable ways to fade away to be replaced by the globalised and homogenous ways of life that only wants us to be passive consumers?

Our reasons to focus on community media in the context of localization emerged from these shifting realities. Do we want to continue with this direct-to-home, wired type of media world, which doesn't respect our creations and expressions? Do we want see our diverse cultural landscape reduced to one-way transmissions to 'infotain' and 'edutain' us? Don't we have any concerns about becoming flaccid consumers of this ready-made world? What is our understanding of our life in such a situation? Do we feel rooted in any community? What is the level of our belonging and connections? Are we contributing to growing and making meaningful our relationships?

The choice between the fake and the real was never so critical for humanity to make. That was why we at Abhiviyakti decided to change tracks.

The first thing we did, a couple of years ago, was look within, individually and collectively. We put our programmes under a microscope. In the process, the nature

of our celebrations changed. Birthday gifts became precious when they were handmade from things discarded as waste, instead of buying from the market. One of our colleagues started making paper from 'raddi' (old newspapers) with the idea that it could replace the chart paper used in our meetings. That goal is still unrealized but the proposal is inspiring. Similarly, after lot of deliberation and consultation, we fine-tuned our strategic thrust. We changed our role from 'expert' to co-creator, co-learner and co-facilitator, willing to walk along with other members of the community. We were ready to examine ourselves and our roles, to make the process of change mutual through collaborative relationship with members of other communities.

Basically, we believe that each one of us is gifted with enough inner assets to generate creative expressions and critical outlooks. However, due to the domination of a singular worldview, most of us, and certainly those who are vulnerable, do not believe in this inner potential. We changed directions in our programme to try to release these important resources in grassroots activists, to strengthen the emergence of creative and critical communities. We are encouraging members to believe in the strengths of their expressions, in their abilities to produce their own media, be it a puppet, a story, a song, or a documentary. Through their expressions, they generate opportunities to dialogue on different aspects of community life. What emerged was community media.

For the past two years, Abhivyakti been engaged in serious dialogue with many media activists and youth in our region in Maharashtra. We have identified several people in remote corners of rural Maharashtra. These media activists, as we call them, are using different forms

like the songs, theatre, music, video, photography, folk forms among other. They believe in their craft. Most of them are from marginalised and lower socio-economic communities, so asserting their identities has been their main reason for using media. Some work individually, while others have formed small groups. Our intention of reaching out to them is two-fold: one, to form a loose network of media activists, and two, to channel their energies towards strengthening communities at the local level.

Youth, especially, see very little in their own soils and culture that inspires them. Over the past three years, we met many media activists who had some skills but were hesitant to see their potential in the context of localisation. They had dreams in their hearts of making it 'big' in the cities. This was a serious issue. Why does one's own context, tradition and community seem uninspiring? We could observe the loss of self-image and the crisis in individual and collective identity, yet we were unable to locate any significant initiatives to combat it at the local level. For us, it was a challenge to engage with alternative possibilities in creative ways. We felt that the focus of the community needed to be shifted to their own backyards, which was rich in history and resources. Motivating those interested in creating and using media, to tell their own local stories, seemed the way to do it.

So far, our experience has been positive. It has multi-pronged advantages. Because its scope is local, its producer and user share a common context and belonging. Community media evolves from inherent interest in regenerating local learning spaces and relationships. The making of the media, and its subsequent use, revolves around complex local realities. It helps to generate

community imagination and wisdom for enlightened decision-making and constructive actions. It supports dialogues among a cross-section of the community on issues which affect them, and promotes a continuous exchange of thoughts and feelings among the community. The raw material comes from the local area, so its cost remains low and manageable. The maker and the user are known to each other; and the media-making and sharing practice only strengthens their relationship further. It is important to clarify that community media, while focusing on the local, is not isolationist. There is strong scope for having meaningful dialogue and exchange across local communities. These dialogues start with respecting the diversity of the Other.

Community media has significantly revitalized local dynamics. We discovered many writers, actors performing theatre, singers, puppeteers, dancers, photographers, folk artists, among others, in communities. However, two trends were disturbing. First, most of the artists are obsessed with their performance. While this is an important and critical factor, our dialogue with them revealed that the performance was more about fame, wealth and recognition from mainstream players. Their focus was on how they were perceived and appreciated by others outside of their immediate community.

For example, we met a dalit poet in Dabhadi who felt resentful for being sidelined during the regional *Kavi Sammelan* (Poets' Convention) by the dominant caste members. When he sang his poetry in his village community, it immediately touched his brethren and became a means for sharing common concerns. Yet, according to him, his lower caste status was depriving him of his rightful place in the community of poets. He was



deeply hurt.

The problem was complex and multi-layered. It was about the fundamental causes of social-cultural division and tensions. How do we address this sensitive issue that is disturbing one of the recent members of our network? Would it be enough to dialogue with the poet and question his deep-rooted need to find recognition in the dominant system, which is external to his immediate local existence? Who decides and awards this recognition and why is it so important? How can we learn to distinguish issues of behaviour from identity? What is the role of poetry in communities? At the same time, is it possible to work with those who constitute the dominant community of poets? Would they listen to the pains suffered by others who belong to the minority? Is there a space for dialoguing about the

caste system and reaching common ground? We decided to dialogue on these issues in our network meetings, as well as with the poet, so as to strengthen inner core of the persons – what they believe in, their core vision and its pursuit, and dealing with obstacles.

The second challenge with artists was that their content was externally driven and set to be consumed outside of their community. In several parts of Maharashtra, we came across theatre performers who had designed their plays on a commission basis for some clients. Although the content had social ‘messages’, it was generic and had no local context, nor was it connected to any internal/personal positions. Their natural skills were used to serve someone else’s interest, ‘marketed’ for earning their livelihood. Most of the issues presented were AIDS, alcoholism and child marriage. Since it was client-centric, their personal view of the issue was not important. The artist had become the expert, and his/her energy was directed towards ‘giving’ a message to a captive audience.

In our dialogue together, we asked what it meant to be an artist? They stressed two factors: their performance and what their media (art?) served. Both factors were externally-determined. The media ‘product’ did not evolve from their deep reflection and internal passion, nor was it satisfying their psychological needs, strengthening their relationship, or political development of the community. The content was defined by someone else and was shaped to ‘advise’, without taking into account that community’s historical, social and cultural practices. The expert ‘hat’ was easy to wear, because it came with one-sided considerations and assumptions about the lesser Other, the marginalised, vulnerable communities. The question to consider is would such product/service for ‘others’ could

be called art? What then is the role of the artist in a community?

For us, the artist is an important source of creativity and critique in the context of localization. The creativity drives the design and aesthetics of the art form. It stems from their understanding of the local reality. The criticality shapes and sharpens the content. The artist’s perspective, passion and clarity give birth to their art. It evolves from their roots in the community, how they are affected by an issue(s), by their own position vis-à-vis the community. The artist’s relationship within the community also shapes the production process of the art form and its dissemination — the vital peg on which community learning evolves.

Village-level activists, who used to put a lot of emphasis on ‘speeches’ before the community, have now started to produce media forms based on their experiences. Of course, it is a challenging for them to realise their ‘artistic’ potential. We have had poster exhibitions on natural farming and vermi-compost, puppet shows on caste discrimination and gender violence, and video films on local issues. They have emerged from long processes of internal realisation and experimentation.

The artist’s role in initiating the dialogue is indeed crucial. The facilitator’s role is melded into that of the artist. The dialogue is as much socio-cultural as political. It is a conscious attempt to engage the members of the community to participate actively. That is why it is important for the artist-facilitator to invite diverse members to the dissemination process. It is not a space to seek appreciation for one’s art, but more to make the space vibrant by listening to different perspectives and facilitating a collective understanding of the reality, as it unfolds. While

generating a consensus for community action is desirable, it is not always the case. Our experience also shows that the action takes several different shades. Individually, it might move them from indifference to feeling involved; while on the collective front, it might mobilise the community to come together and realise their strength.

In Girnare village near Nashik, Ram, a media activist, who is also a local journalist and farmer, has been rejuvenating the cultural landscape. The recent spate of farmer's suicides in the region prompted him to bring the village community together to reflect on the tragic deaths. After intense dialogue, which initially put the blame on the government policies, the villagers started to seriously engage with the issue and how it is affecting their own lives. They realised that their own lifestyles had undergone dramatic shifts with increased household expenses. One of the several 'big' expenses was on marriages which had become lavish and involved giving dowry. Was there a need to celebrate marriages that required taking high interest loans from moneylenders? the villagers asked themselves. Soon, the entire village was discussing the issue. It was taken up in the village *Gram Sabha* (Village Council). A resolution to ban 'costly' weddings and to do away with the tradition of giving dowry to the groom was passed at the meeting.

The dialogue has helped our media activists to view their role more seriously as an artist-host. The support and motivation now comes from inside themselves and from their local community. They are looking at their community with renewed interest and as an asset instead of a liability. The issues they share are now more locally-defined: organic farming, corrupt local officials, dams, decision-making. By questioning the external influences

on their community, especially politicians and bureaucrats determining the development agenda, the artist-facilitators are energising their community to consider their needs and choices in determining their destinies. Not just political actions, but also small face-to-face interactions — from inquiry about each others' well-being to narrating stories in evening sit-togethers — are changing the cultural landscape from a consumer economy to a more familiar one. Arriving at more human-infused relatedness will only happen if we are clear about the outcomes of our artistic endeavours.

The question of livelihood remains. How does the focus on the local generate a sustainable economy? This doesn't have easy solutions. The challenge is making art forms a source of sustenance, but not turning them into commercial enterprises that then dominate everything else. One possible answer is finding alternative sources of income and utilising the remaining time for artistic creations. Some media activists are trying to see if the community is able and willing to support them through different means of exchange. So while no concrete remedies are available right now, we are not perturbed, as we believe that something surely will emerge. The process is now alive in so many diverse locations, with hundreds of artist-facilitators who have accepted the challenge. The way out of externally-controlled economic pressures will definitely appear.

In this way, community media is as much a resistance to dominant cultures of consumerism and passivity, and as much a symbol of rejuvenating local cultures, diverse voices and expressions. In an environment where the voices of a few dominate, community media makes visible the enormous strengths, value and potential that the local has to offer. It points to alternative and diverse ways in which

life is nurtured and lived by different communities. Community media seeks to highlight and celebrate these plural identities. By doing so, it nourishes an environment that enables each of its members to live their life in dignity. It is a potent and natural way towards 'Swaraj' – self-directed and self-organized living in community.

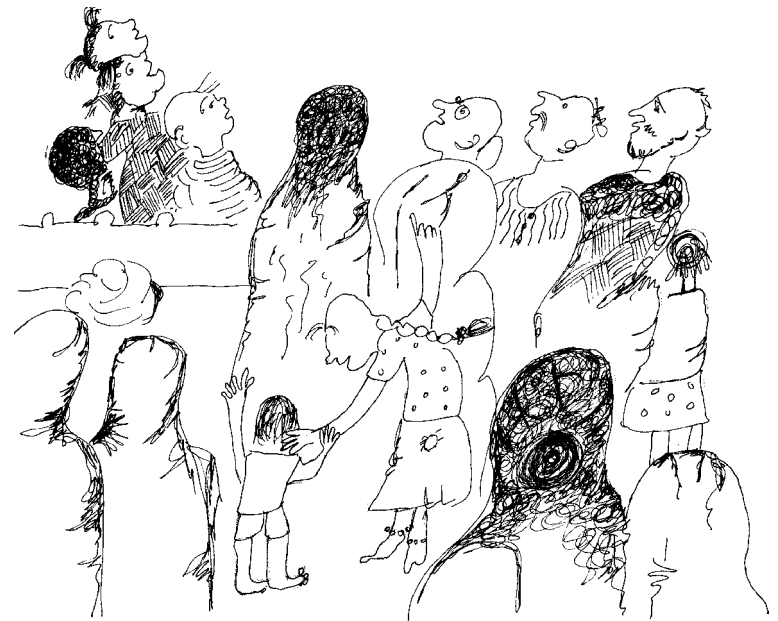
This edition of Expressions Annual focuses on community media in the context of localisation. Since there is no monolithic notion of the local, we have tried to bring to you the different understandings of community media and the process of localisation and how they are challenging the domination of globalisation in our lives. We invite you to notice the points of connection as well as the points of tension. The work done at the local level, especially in media and communication, is the most meaningful part of this journal. It exposes the frailties, as well as the tremendous power, of community media. It gives us hope to tap within ourselves to become co-creators of meaning.

Lastly, we invite you to reflect and raise critical issues arising from the journal, so that our dialogue is not incomplete and one-sided. Authors look forward to the interaction and value the significance such connections offer, particularly on this unique theme of community media and localisation. We are sure your active engagement will broaden the scope of resisting the culture of global consumerism and help us in our quest of making the local real, vibrant and viable.



## Did You Know ?

A study by the Leopold Center found that 16 common crops that grow in Iowa travel an average of 1,494 miles to reach chain groceries there. Bought from local growers, they travel only 56 miles. By buying local goods, you maximize your money's impact and minimize fuel use and CO2 production.



## Localisation : Small Scale on a Large Scale

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**Localisation, broadly speaking, means rebuilding community and local economies for the benefit of people and the planet.**

Modern global economy has separated us from one another and from the natural world.

As a result, we are facing environmental and social crises on an unprecedented scale. Globalised media — television, radio, films, magazines — are the most visible aspect of globalisation and spread the global consumer culture throughout the world. They erode cultural diversity and individual self-esteem. We are already seeing the disastrous consequences in almost every society. Our very well-being has been compromised. If we want a peaceful and sustainable world, where we have a sense of purpose and belonging, then localisation is the way forward.

This will mean using the globalised media primarily for creating a greater resistance to globalisation while using more face-to-face communication to renew community and with it, a healthier sense of identity.

Nearly everywhere you go in the world today, you find multi-lane highways, concrete cities and a cultural landscape featuring grey business suits, fast-food chains, Hollywood films and cellular phones. In the remotest corners of the planet, Barbie, Madonna and the Marlboro Man are familiar icons. From Cleveland to Cairo to Caracas, Baywatch is entertainment and CNN, news. As a result, villages, rural communities and their cultural traditions are being destroyed on an unprecedented scale by the impact of globalising market forces. Communities that have sustained themselves for hundreds of years are simply disintegrating.

Conventional 'development' brings tourism, Western films and products and, more recently, satellite television to the remotest corners of the Earth. All provide overwhelming impressions of luxury and power. Advertising and action films give the impression that everyone in the West is rich, beautiful and brave, and leads a life filled with excitement and glamour. In the commercial mass culture which fuels this illusion, advertisers make it clear that Westernised fashion accessories equal sophistication and 'cool'. In diverse 'developing' nations around the world, people are induced to meet their needs not through their community or local economy, but by trying to 'buy in' to the global market. People are made to believe, in the words of one advertising executive in China, that "imported equals good, local equals crap".

Even more damagingly, people are encouraged to reject their own ethnic and racial characteristics — to feel shame at being who they are. Around the world, blonde-haired blue-eyed Barbie dolls and thin-as-a-rake 'cover girls' set the standard for women. The one-dimensional,

fantasy view of modern life promoted by the Western media, television and business becomes a slap in the face for young people in the 'Third World.' Teenagers, in particular, are made to feel stupid and ashamed of their traditions and their origins. The people they learn to admire and respect on television are all 'sophisticated' city dwellers with fast cars, designer clothes, spotlessly clean hands and shiny white teeth. Yet, they find their parents asking them to choose a way of life that involves working in the fields and getting their hands dirty for little or no money, and certainly no glamour. It is hardly surprising, then, that many choose to abandon the old ways of their parents for the siren song of a Western material paradise.

Besides promoting the illusion that all Westerners are multi-millionaires, tourism and media images also give the impression that we never work — since for many people in 'developing' countries, sitting at a desk or behind the wheel of a car does not constitute work.

People are not aware of the negative social or psychological aspects of Western life so familiar to us: the stress, the loneliness and isolation, the fear of growing old alone, the rise in clinical depression and other 'industrial diseases' like cancer, stroke, diabetes and heart problems. Nor do they see the environmental decay, rising crime, poverty, homelessness and unemployment. While they know their own culture inside out, including all of its limitations and imperfections, they only see a glossy, exaggerated side of life in the West.

### **Poisoning our Children**

For those of us living in the West, the negative consequences are becoming all too clear. In the United States, where

many features of the global monoculture have been in place for several generations, the impact on children is striking. An estimated five million American children are being given at least one psychiatric drug. This disturbing trend is growing rapidly. The number of children aged two to four, for whom stimulant and anti-depressant drugs have been prescribed, increased 50 per cent between 1991 and 1995. In the following four years, prescriptions for anti-depression drugs rose even more steeply, climbing 151 per cent for children in the seven to 12 age group, and 580 per cent for children six and under.

The number of pre-pubescent children with eating disorders is on the rise, with girls as young as four showing signs of anorexia. Cosmetic surgery, another symptom of insecurity and poor self-image, is also on the increase, with the number of teenage girls having their breasts augmented quadrupling, and liposuction procedures tripling, in just the past five years. Since 1996, there have been at least 25 school shootings in the US, claiming the lives of 35 students. The youngest killer was a six-year old boy.

What has made America's children so insecure and troubled? A number of causes are surely involved, all of which can be traced back to the global economy. As corporations scour the world for bigger subsidies and lower costs, jobs move with them, and families as well: the typical American moves eleven times during his or her life, constantly severing connections between relatives, neighbours and friends.

Within almost every family, the economic pressures on parents systematically rob them of time with even their

own children. Americans put in longer hours at work than people in any other industrialised country, and the trend is ever upward. As a consequence, more and more young children are relegated to the care of strangers in crowded day-care centres. Older children are often left in the company of violent video games or the corporate sponsors of their favourite television shows. Time spent in nature — fundamentally important to our psychological well being — is increasingly rare.

Globalisation and the spreading consumer culture thus work to displace the flesh-and-blood role models — parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles, friends and neighbours — that children once looked up to, replacing them with media and advertising images: rakish movie and rock stars, steroid-enhanced athletes and airbrushed supermodels. Children who strive to emulate these manufactured 'perfect' idols, are left feeling insecure and inadequate.

This consumer culture is fundamentally different from all those cultures which for millennia were shaped by climate and topography — by a dialogue between humans and the natural world. This is a new phenomenon, something that has never happened before: a culture determined by technological and economic forces, rather than human and ecological needs. It is not surprising that American children, many of whom seem to 'have everything', are so unhappy: like their parents, their teachers at school and even their television heroes, they have been put on a treadmill that is ever more stressful and competitive, ever more meaningless and lonely.

In the UK, the statistics tell a similar story. In 2004,

nearly 10 per cent of children between the ages of five and 16 had a mental health disorder and that figure is increasing. Substance abuse and violence are also on the rise. Recently, a group of experts gathered to publicise their concern that modern life and 'junk culture' are poisoning childhood. The Archbishop of Canterbury has accused



entertainment companies of creating a consumer culture where children are corrupted and 'sexualised'. Sue Palmer, the author of *Toxic Childhood*, points out that "a sort of sedentary, screen-based existence has crept up on children. They used to be free-range and now they're practically battery children, living indoors, experiencing through the medium of a screen. That, along with the food that they're eating, many of them in great quantities now, actually is inhibiting brain development."

My own experience in Ladakh was a vivid example

of how, in a very short time, globalised media can erode self-esteem and destabilise communities. Traditionally, there was lots of dancing, singing, and theatre. People of all ages joined in. In a group, sitting around the fire, even toddlers would dance, with the help of older siblings or friends. Everyone knew how to sing, to act, to play music. When radio came to Ladakh, you suddenly didn't need to sing your own songs or tell your own stories. You could sit and listen to the best singer, the best storyteller. The result was that people became inhibited and self-conscious. You were no longer comparing yourself to neighbours and friends, who were real people — some better than you at singing, but perhaps less good at dancing — and you were never as good as the stars on the radio. Community ties are broken when people sit passively listening to the very best rather than making music or dancing together. As they lost the sense of security and identity that springs from deep, long-lasting connections to other people, Ladakhis started to develop doubts about who they were. At the same time, tourism and the media were presenting a new image of who they should be.

As people became self-conscious and insecure, they felt pressured to conform, to live up to an idealised image. In the traditional village, where everyone wore the same clothes and looked the same to the casual observer, there seemed to be more freedom to relax and be who you really were. As part of a close-knit community, people felt secure enough to be themselves.

As local economic and political ties are broken, the people around you become more and more anonymous. At the same time, life speeds up and mobility increases — making even familiar relationships more superficial and

brief. The connections between people are reduced largely to externals. People come to be identified with what they have rather than what they are, and disappear behind their clothes and other belongings.

It is heartbreaking to see people buying things to be admired, respected, and ultimately loved, when in fact it almost inevitably has the opposite effect. The individual with the new shiny car is set apart, and this furthers the need to be accepted. A cycle is set in motion in which people become more and more divided from themselves and from one another.

Elsewhere in the developing world, the same processes are underway. The BBC recently held an online debate in the UK on the topic of story-telling in Africa. "Is story-telling a dying art?" they asked. People responded from around all over the African continent, Europe and North America. Chigab Uyo from Nigeria grew up listening to traditional African fables. "There was a story of how the sky used to touch the earth and an old lady used to wipe her hands on the moon after each meal. The sky eventually got angry and moved away from the old lady. Since artificial lighting has brightened our night sky, it drives people indoors after supper. Story-telling is now no longer fashionable."

Story-telling has benefits beyond entertainment. It is a form of participatory, localised media and thereby helps to build community and teach people about their culture and natural surroundings. It encourages a strong sense of place and identity. Camlus Omogo from Kenya has seen a major shift in his culture. "In place of the traditional 'sit-around the fire' and tell or hear stories, families are now

increasingly gathering in front of TVs or listening to music. This not only makes story-telling difficult, it also ruins the cohesion of a family. Less and less time is now available for people to just sit around and talk. In most cases, members of families work at different times thus making gathering together impossible. Consequently, our old folks, who are mostly in the rural areas, are yearning to narrate their stories, but no one is available to listen to them!”

From Mongolia to Patagonia, millions of children are targets of a fanatical and fundamentalist campaign to bring them into the consumer culture. The cost is massive in terms of self-rejection, psychological breakdown and violence. This psychological impoverishment is accompanied by a massive rise in material poverty. Even in America, a decade-long economic ‘boom’ could not lift an estimated 35 million people above the poverty line. And what about the millions, drawn into rapidly growing Third World slums every year, with little hope of escape? What about the factory workers in sweatshops and maquiladoras, and the small farmers in their dying rural communities? What about the indigenous peoples being driven to extinction, and those whose ways of life are so threatened by the forces of globalisation that they turn to fundamentalism, even terrorism? Contrary to the often-repeated claim that global trade is making conflict less likely, a recent World Bank study has found that countries whose economies are highly specialised — precisely what the free traders prescribe — are 20 times more likely to find themselves in civil war than countries whose economies are diversified.

With those in the industrialised world using ten times their share of the earth’s resources, it is a criminal hoax to

promise that everyone in the ‘undeveloped’ world can do the same. The global spread of this fantasy has been profoundly destructive to people’s ability to survive in their own cultures, in their own place on the earth. We need to get on a different path—one determined by culture and nature, not by corporate greed.

### Resistance and Renewal

Localisation, broadly speaking, means rebuilding community and local economies for the benefit of people and the planet. The instruments of globalised media are already in place. Instead of being the victims of globalised media, we can use television, film and radio to resist the pressures of the global economy. We urgently need widespread information campaigns that give a more accurate picture of the effects of conventional development and globalisation. People in the developing world should know of the problems the consumer monoculture causes in the West, while in the West we need to be better informed about the richness and wisdom of cultures in the “less developed” world.

It is equally important, if not more so, to initiate a process of renewal: renewing our connections to each other and to the world around us. Localised media has a very important role to play in rebuilding local economies and strengthening communities. The globalisation of culture and information has led to a way of life in which the nearby is treated with contempt. We get news from Iraq, Japan or Washington, DC; at the touch of a button on a TV remote control, we have access to all the wildlife of Africa, and our immediate surroundings consequently seem dull and uninteresting by comparison. But this knowledge is made up of flat abstractions. It is not the sort of intimate

knowledge gained through face-to-face interaction. People and places are reduced to abstract, simplistic concepts. In this way, the globalised media enables us to build up false generalisations of people from different cultures, thereby breeding prejudice, racism and fear.

There is no substitute for knowledge gained through direct experience. In Scotland, a pioneering project is helping children discover the joy of knowing the living world around them. A teacher of twenty years has set up a nursery, where children spend most of the day outdoors. Dressed in rubber boots and woolly jumpers, they play and learn in sun, rain and snow. According to parents, the children not only love it, they acquire valuable knowledge. Before they even graduate to primary school, the children can identify poisonous fungi and are able to spot dangerous yew berries or foxgloves, the flowers that contain the toxin digitalis. The teacher explains that “in a normal nursery you might have to learn about shapes, but these children know the difference between an oak tree and a birch tree, which is a lot more complex than a square and a circle.”

Globalisation has built for us an abstract world of squares and circles. Localisation can help us create a world where children have a chance to grow up happy and healthy; where they have fresh air to breathe, clean water to drink and wild places to discover.

Clearly, local initiatives must go hand in hand with policy changes if the globalisation process is to be reversed. Rather than just thinking in terms of isolated, scattered grassroots efforts, it is necessary to encourage government policies that would promote *small scale on a large scale*,

allowing space for more community-based economies to flourish and spread. Face-to-face oral communication should be made central again to economic, political and cultural exchanges. Supporting facilities for *regional* entertainment — from music and drama to dances and festivals — would offer a healthy alternative to globalised media. Communities and nations should have the right to restrict the bombardment of their children by violent and commercial media images.

Living experience opens us to a world of richness and diversity. This is what our media should consist of. It is heartening to see this already happening at the grassroots — community radio, independent documentaries, self-published books, and journals, story-telling festivals and so on. Localising media means no longer being limited to a world of dead squares and circles glimpsed on a plasma screen. Let us go outside, touch the living trees, talk to our neighbours, sing, dance and celebrate together the beauty and diversity of the world.



## A Lesson In Cultural Regeneration

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Gustavo Esteva unravels the path taken by the people of Oaxaca to assert their identity and reclaim their traditions.

### Revolution will be televised

For almost two years, the people of Oaxaca have been in increasing turmoil. The immediate cause has been the corrupt and authoritarian administration of the state's governor, Ulises Ruiz, who took office after a fraudulent election in December 2004. But as we resist Ruiz, especially after May 2006, deeper struggles have come to the surface and begun to find expression, in a process of awakening, organization, and radicalization. Here are some images of that process.

Confronted with the government's use of the media against the Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca (APPO, the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca), 3000 women peacefully occupied the studios of the state radio and television network on 1 August 2006. Through its outlets in Oaxaca, the network had continually been used by Governor Ruiz for propaganda against the movement. Now, the occupiers disseminated ideas, proposals, and initiatives of APPO as well as opened both radio and television for people to express their opinions

24 hours a day.

Despite every imaginable technical difficulty (the women occupying the network had no previous training for this), thousands who called the stations made it on to air. On 21 August, a group of undercover police and mercenaries invaded the facilities, shooting and destroying the equipment and injuring some of the APPO 'broadcasters'. In reaction, a few hours later, APPO occupied all private radio and TV outlets in the city. APPO now had 12 options to disseminate information about the movement and to give voice to the people. A few days later, they gave the stations back to their owners, keeping only one powerful enough to cover the whole state. Day and night, "The Law of the People", as the radio station was called, created the opportunity for people to listen to each other. It was a peculiar experience to find everyone in the city or the State following the incidents of the struggle and listening to their own voices.

After several initial skirmishes, state and city police apparently refused to obey the governor's demand to repress their fellow citizens, forcing Ruiz to keep the police in its barracks. As a result, from June until the end of October, no police, not even traffic police, were seen in the city. Instead, APPO continued sit-ins around the clock in front of all of Oaxaca City's public buildings, as well as in all the radio and television stations in its hands. After the midnight of 27 August 2006, a convoy of 35 SUVs, with undercover agents and mercenaries, drove by the sit-ins and began shooting. They were not aiming at the people, but trying to intimidate them. APPO reported the situation instantaneously on its radio stations, and within minutes, people started organising barricades to impede the convoy. In one place, they were able to close the street

with a truck and actually trap one of the SUVs and all its occupants, who later escaped. The vehicle, with its official insignia on the doors, was parked as an exhibit in Oaxaca's central plaza. Since then, every night at 11 pm more than a thousand barricades close the streets around the sit-ins and at critical crossroads, to be opened again at 6 am to facilitate circulation. They became a peculiar emblem of the movement...and a meeting place for discussion and reflection.

The station was jammed at the end of October. *Radio Universidad* (the University station, also occupied on 21 August) continued to disseminate information. On 28 October, when the Federal Police arrived to occupy the city and crush the movement, a non-violent reaction was coordinated through *Radio Universidad*.

These episodes are an expression of the struggle for community radios, which started in Oaxaca a long time ago. For many years, Indigenous peoples struggled to get radio programs in their own languages. The public agency dealing with Indigenous peoples finally created a network of radio stations dedicated to broadcast in their languages 30 years ago. The struggle was then oriented towards the definition of content. The news was probably the first area of the radio network shaped by people pressure, not by bureaucratic decisions. For two or three hours a day, those stations broadcast information provided by the people themselves, mostly personal messages. The radio was thus used as a means of communication in communities lacking telephones or any other means to send urgent messages. These programs were so successful that private networks adopted the format in the countryside.

For more than ten years, struggling continually with

the institutional world, community radios proliferated. Most of the time, they operated out of the law, because private networks tried to prevent their operation, and the government has thus been reluctant to authorise them. Some communities finally got the official authorisation to operate, a few years ago, thanks to massive mobilisations and public pressure.

One of the most important lessons the people of Oaxaca have learned during their current struggle concerns the media. The brave women who took over the state's communications system grew tired of watching the contradictions between their real-life experiences and the stories being reported by the media. At the same time, alternative media, in all technical shapes, which were a heroic effort of some marginal groups or the hobby of young people till then, became a popular tool, used by everyone for a variety of purposes.

### Reclaiming a tradition

In retaliation, the president and the leaders of the main political parties demanded the use of public force 'to restore order' in Oaxaca, but the people of Oaxaca refused to back down under this threat. Instead, they have been facing it with the same non violent disposition they have shown so far. Many other Mexicans are siding with us. In our struggle, they see a sort of mirror in which they can glimpse the future of their own battles to rescue Mexico.

The present movement is the product of a slow accumulation of forces and many lessons gathered during previous struggles. In particular, three different democratic struggles have converged in the single one being waged by APPO.

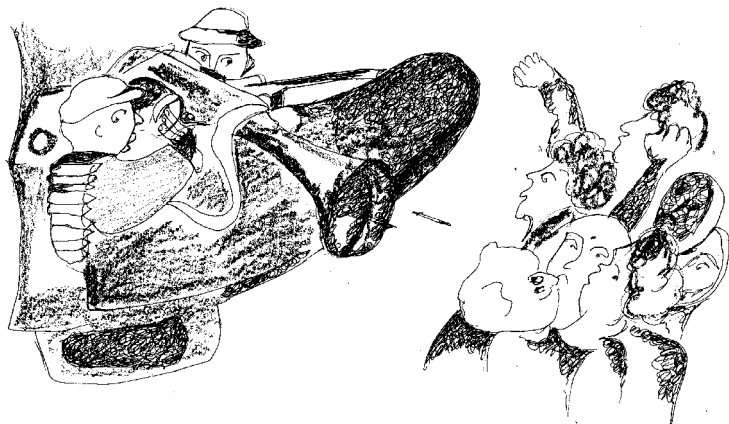
- The first joins together those who wish to strengthen formal democracy whose weaknesses are well-known in Oaxaca. People are tired of fraud and manipulation, and those who wish to rely on the electoral system want it to be clean and efficient.
- The second consists of those who want a more participatory democracy. Besides transparency and honesty, they want more civil involvement in the workings of government through the use of popular initiatives, referendums, plebiscites, the right to recall elected leaders, participative budgeting, and other such tools.
- The third includes a surprisingly large number of individuals and groups who desire to extend and deepen autonomous or radical democracy in accordance with political conceptions that have their own unique sources. Four of five municipalities in Oaxaca have their own particular, autonomous forms of government, following a tradition that dates to the colonial period and before. Although this autonomy has been legally recognised by Oaxaca's state law since 1995, it continues to be the subject of pressure and harassment. What the advocates of autonomous and radical democracy hope to do under the present circumstances is invert this struggle: to pressure and harass the state and federal governments, to subject them to civilian surveillance and control. The ultimate goal is to swing from community and municipal autonomy to an autonomous coordination of groups of municipalities, from there to regions, and eventually to an autonomous form of government for the entire state. The people of Oaxaca are not waiting for the inevitable departure of the local tyrant to put these ideas into action; there are already

many APPOs operating around the state on community, neighborhood, municipal, and regional levels.

While both mainstream and alternative media, at national and international levels, had given APPO immense visibility, it is still a mystery. What kind of organisation is this? It clearly is a contemporary initiative, using very advanced technologies to express and practice very advanced ideas, but it is also rooted in ancient traditions and in a social fabric which has resisted the market and the state, colonizers and developers.

APPO was born from the top down, like most political organisations — reproducing the vertical and hierarchical structure of the state apparatus that they usually want to seize and control, and also reproducing the usual corruption and self aggrandizement of most leaders. In APPO's foundational act, conceived as an *event* (not a process), APPO was barely more than a coalition of leaders of unions, NGOs and social organisations, united against the governor and articulated by a provisional coordinating body of 30 people, using most of their time to process their internal conflicts and contradictions.

A mutation, however, was soon produced. Little by little, at the beginning, and then in avalanche, more and more people and grassroots organisations started to take initiatives on their own, in the name of APPO. The members of the coordinating body were continually forced to try to discover the direction and intention of people's initiatives and the orientation they were giving to the process. They started to command by obeying, like in the villages or among the Zapatistas. One of the marches they organised gathered almost a third of the population of the state.



Popular neighbourhoods in the city were always a puzzle for everyone. The communitarian fabric generated by indigenous migration to the city was apparently combined with all kinds of ideological and vital anarchism. The barricade collectives protected fiercely their autonomy. Some of them started to take bold initiatives, like occupying abandoned public buildings, thus joining the okupa movement now flourishing everywhere.

Indigenous peoples were the last social sector in joining the movement, after they carefully observed its evolution and extensively discussed it in assemblies and special events. But they came to APPO with a very solid position, bringing to the movement, increasingly autonomous and rooted in the assembly tradition, a new orientation.

On 25 November, the campaign which started on 28 October took the shape of state terrorism. After an APPO march, constitutional and human rights of thousands of people were openly and massively violated. On 18 December, the National Commission for Human Rights

presented its preliminary report. It mentions 3,792 cases of human rights violations, 20 dead, 25 disappeared, 349 arbitrarily detained and 370 injured. These are the cases officially documented. There are many more. In spite of this horror, the APPO, the people organised in a thousand different forms and incarnations, seems full of determination and vigor. The people are not intimidated. They are taking unexpected and promissory initiatives and advancing in their reorganisation.

In spite of the fact that APPO is still very young, it deserves an APPOlogy, a serious study about its nature and traits. It also deserves an apology, a discourse celebrating its glorious exploits, which are just beginning.

For the time being, it is possible to affirm that it is not a spontaneous popular outburst or a mere revolt. It cannot be reduced to a rebellion. It is the fruit of a long process of accumulation of forces, in which centuries of indigenous resistance was transformed into a struggle for liberation after the Zapatista uprising of 1994.

Localisation is an alternative to both globalisation and localism. Affirmed on their own feet, in their new commons, the people are no longer enclosed in themselves. They are opening arms, hearts and minds to other discontents and creating extended horizontal coalitions. This is, perhaps, the main Oaxaca tradition reclaimed by APPO and projected to another level. The autonomy of Indigenous municipalities, with their own systems of government and a social fabric based on communality, was well known. What became a surprise was to find the same social fabric, a similar kind of organisation and courageous autonomy in the popular neighbourhoods of the city.

## Cultural regeneration

In Oaxaca, with APPO, or in Chiapas, with the Zapatistas, we are experiencing a profound process of cultural regeneration.

Three years ago, we celebrated a meeting in Mexico City with a hundred people coming from 36 indigenous peoples and 14 countries, to talk and share our reflections on our situation and prospects. It was a continual source of surprise and excitement to discover enormous coincidences. Processes of cultural regeneration were flourishing everywhere. At the end of our meeting, on 9 December 2003, we produced a document outlining some points which apparently define a new consensus of the peoples at the grassroots. This consensus seems to articulate and connect our struggles, while still respecting the diversity and autonomy of our communities and peoples, recognising that we can live this consensus in different ways. We hope that others, in our own and in other communities, can add threads to the fabric of ideas we have woven. So far that fabric includes the following:

*Radical Pluralism.* We want to create a world in which many worlds can be embraced. This means stopping the dissolution of cultures and peoples in order to integrate them into one design, on the terms of the old western project of domination. We want a world in which the cultural differences are appreciated and respected, for them to coexist in harmony, based on a radical pluralistic attitude.

*Personal Dignity.* We celebrate the dignity of each man and woman, which in turn nurtures the dignity of their peoples and cultures. Based on dignity, the richness of their diversity will flourish. The extension of personal and cultural dignity will challenge all the existing political and

economic systems and will demonstrate that they have an oppressive, unjust and irrational character.

*Autonomy.* In dignity, we assert and will continue to construct the *de facto* autonomy of our communities and peoples. At the same time, we will continue to struggle for the legal recognition of that autonomy. Since the time of the colonizers, the legal machinery has always been at the service of the powerful and their governments. We claim legal recognition because we still think, against that experience, that the structure of political and legal procedures is integral to one another and may shape and express a new structure of freedom. Affirmed in our own 'internal normative systems', we will conquer legal autonomy.

*New Political Regime.* We will forge a new political regime based on the constitutional recognition of the existence, autonomy and self-determination of the peoples who form the most profound layer of our societies. Such a regime would be sustained and preserved by the sovereignty of the people, even in the globalizing disorder.

*Subordinate the economy.* We want to reestablish politics and ethics as the center of social life, expelling from it the economic obsession of the dominant system, which only concentrates privileges in the few. Instead of submitting needs and desires to the competitive fury of the great economic powers, to feed their voracity, we will put the economic operation at the service of the persons, the communities and the peoples.

*Radical Democracy.* We are increasingly disenchanted with so-called formal democracy, in which political parties and governments are unable to harmonise

the collective efforts in a just order. Therefore, we seek instead to begin with our 'community democracy', where consensus is woven at the grassroots. In our own places we are reconstructing society, with the participation of everyone, in order to generate new social and political consensus.

*Conviviality.* We generate a convivial way of life in our communities and neighbourhoods. We will protect it from the invasion of the consumer society, in which people become prisoners of their addictions to products and services in whose consumption they have been educated, or prisoners of the envy and the cravings for what they cannot buy.

*Communality.* Against the possessive individualism that continues to affect our daily lives, we raise the banner of communality, as a condition of harmony in our living together, with full respect for liberty and the rights of natural and human persons.

*Remaking the world.* We are already constructing new worlds that are economically feasible, socially just, and ecologically sensible. In the process, we are unmaking the old world, replacing it piece by piece with new ones. We are not intimidated by forces and structures that pretend to determine everything and appear unstoppable. We are stopping them.

*Autonomy in exchanges.* We resist the false choice between 'free trade' and 'protectionism'. The one hands over power to transnational corporations, the other delivers it to bureaucrats who are often at the service of those same corporations. 'Protectionism' does not protect the people; it protects profits. 'Free Trade' does not respect

our freedom; it only frees capital from local constraint. Exchange must be subordinated to our autonomy, so that we determine what we want and what we are willing to do to fulfil our desires.

*Socialisation.* We resist both 'privatisation' and 'state-isation' equally. We are seeking a socialisation of goods and services, constructed on the basis of autonomy. It is insane and unjust to subordinate social resources and public services to private voracity. Bureaucratic monopolies have also proven to be ineffective, inappropriate or equally corrupt alternatives. We rather put our trust in a decentralised and autonomous administration of general goods and services, with citizen participation..

*Service and Reciprocity.* We want the strengthening and articulation of coalitions of the discontent with the dominant system. With them, we will widen our interactions, learning from one another and offering mutual solidarity, in the spirit of service and reciprocity that defines us.

*Horizon and Transcendence.* Our knowing wants to be wisdom. We are oriented towards being, rather than having. This principle inspired our conversations and is at the center of all our attitudes, behaviour and gazing. It is not a doctrinal or ideological principle. It is born from the heart, not the mind. Its name is spirituality.



## Lokvidya

‘Swadeshi means the use of local raw materials, exchange in the local market and control of the local territory as well as social community. The knowledge bases also ought to be local which means that *lokvidya* ought to have primacy over the organised universal knowledge system. Further, the technical practice and its conception belong to a world view whose inseparable other parts are the rituals, forms of worship and beliefs of the producing community and bigger world to which it belongs.’

-Sunil Sahasrabudhey



## De-textualising Knowledge

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The autonomy of our senses and experiences are critical for regenerating community media.

The biggest handicap in discussing anything is that textuality has not only created an illusionary world, but within its paradigm, has created several worlds. Without the unifying factor of senses and experiences, we live in disjointed worlds.

Your world will depend on whose books you have read. We can only engage with living from our authenticity, from the depths of our true being, free from books and theories which is nothing but to be local and rooted.

Local knowledge demonstrates a collaboration between people and their surroundings guided by nature’s need to preserve life. The biological element in human nature enables indigenous communities to create ‘life sustaining’ knowledge.

Senses play a very important role in the process of learning and are a sort of a reciprocal device that helps creation establish communion with the inner self. This is the process of knowing the world.

In the traditional societies, every situation is a

learning situation. Here to live means to learn. It was a rhythm followed from birth to death.

## Culture

Based on these evidences, a new definition of culture is called for, which must include both situations of how one gets alienated and how one becomes part of culture.

The biological instinct, as well as guidance to preserve life, and the external, local, specific natural systems, collaborate in some manner to produce a distinct, localized, apt knowledge-relationship — which is what culture is all about. This is both conscious and subconscious, as well as individual and collective.

The rural, tribal or non-literate communities seem to act holistically, endowing an aesthetic quality to their every act. What we understand as culture is a result of this collaboration. There seems to be a biological guidance, both in beauty and knowledge, which enables them to do the most appropriate act.

In the digital age, 'organisability' and 'softwareability' are becoming the criteria for what constitutes knowledge. With the change in what constitutes knowledge and how knowledge is accessed, the third cognitive shift is on the anvil. There will be a total change in the paradigm.

Many years ago, a similar shift happened, which went unnoticed. That was the shift from experiential paradigm to textual paradigm. Textualisation of knowledge altered the notion of what constitutes knowledge.

Knowledge and the process of knowing have undergone three fundamental cognitive shifts, depending

on the process of creating knowledge. The knowledge in these three paradigms — experiential, textual and digital — are very different from each other; even though for the people belonging to these respective paradigms their knowledge is very much real. And these form the three most basic worldviews.

The knowledge we create and our relation to the world are dictated by these paradigms. With each paradigm shift, there is a reorganisation as to what constitutes knowledge. Also, with each shift, we move further away from the 'life impulse' or the 'life knowledge' that helps us to sustain life, which is accessed by our whole being. Instead, we create our respective make believe world and the knowledge in this process.

Senses are our tools that connect us to nature and awaken in us this knowledge. Senses, as long as they are autonomous, are nature itself and connect us to beauty and knowledge. In experiential knowledge, not only there is authenticity, but also creativity and direct knowledge. Memory is of no consequence.

This is the awakened state of being, a total here and now situation or being always in the present.

With memory came the past. Creativity gave way to habit. Words replaced experience. A paradigm for a new world was thus created. Experience or the relatedness to the world transformed.

Textualisation removed memory from the being and became non contextual. Experience and the experiencer got fragmented. Non textualisable experience/ knowledge became redundant. New ways of relating to the world

were created. Unknown became untrustworthy and fearful. Another paradigm was created. Intuition was replaced with reason. All feelings and emotions were dropped. Boredom and alienation became the way of being.

With each paradigm shift there is a reorganisation as to what constitutes knowledge and hence, experience itself is altered. This leads to further cognitive shifts. Some experiential modes are dropped and new ones are added.

The present crisis in the West regarding feelings and emotion could be a result of textualisation of their culture. When knowledge got textualised, the feelings and emotions were dropped. The word intuition was out of use for many years, and it came back a few years ago when textual cultures started addressing their fragmentation, alienation and rootlessness. The over use of reason and logic and the neglect of intuition is due to the textualisation of knowledge and by extension, to the corresponding experiential mode it had created. The textual experience is linear and fragmented, which is the only way text can communicate.

Imagination is a word overused by textual cultures, as text demands imagination. Whereas, in experiential cultures, the reality is always present.

One can see the fragmentation in textual cultures in several cultures. The internal fragmentation has made us fragment our perception and compartmentalise and reorder the world to suit our textual notions about life.

Textual experience being personal and independent of others, separated the self from community. The individual and the ego must have began at this point.

The self was fragmented as male and female, as body and mind and as childhood, youth and old age. Spontaneous activities were broken up into planning and thus, thought and action got fragmented, and beauty and ethics were removed from action. Entertainment and boredom have become the new dichotomies. Boredom is also another of those qualities typical of modern mindset, and so is waste.

The internal fragmentation has made us fragment the outer world. Knowing which is an integrated act, got broken in to play/learn/work, etc. In the same way, beauty and knowledge, which are an integral act, were divided into art, science and language, and people into artists and scientists. Politics, ethics, religion were also separated.

Even the spiritual state of being here and now became impossible with the textual culture. A total act of being in the present encompasses both past and the future. Our relationship with the text is itself an absence of the present. Textualisation removes the present and creates only the past or the future.

Another word that got popularised is abstraction. Textual experience is an abstract experience. As far as authenticity is concerned, experience is authentic and original. It cannot become secondhand. Text, by its very nature, is secondhand.

Our relationship to the unknown which was of awe and wonder, probably changed with textualisation, as the knowledge is acquired within the comforts of the non—threatening text. The same must be the case with “controlling” nature. Even beauty, which is an exclusive domain of the senses and experience, got textualised and



became a matter for intellectual activities.

Children, because of their natural tenacity, remained outside the textual world, as did some women. The crises in modern schooling is precisely due to the conflict in these two paradigms. Textual culture is attempting to textualise children as early as possible. This can also be seen as a conflict in intuition and reason. It is no wonder that there are no true children's books today.

The whole tragedy of modernity is a direct result of textualisation of knowledge-fragmentation, alienation, boredom etc.

Even at the activity level, mechanisation brought in mechanical and repetitive act, further alienating the person from the present. Both at the level of activity and mind, being here and now became unnecessary.

With the removal of the unknown from our experience, predictability / planning and reasoning became the dominant relationship to the outside.

Many people belonging to the textual culture are realising the crisis and are also coming out with several solutions, but are unable to break free, as all these solutions are still textual. Systems thinking/holistic approach, their engagement with spirituality, etc., are attempts in overcoming these crises.

The solutions to make learning holistic consist of adding more 'sensitive' subjects like ecology, gender, study of other cultures, etc. But the whole is not a result of adding fragments. The infinite is not the addition of finites. This is the quality of the mind which is holistic, spiritual, in communion with beauty all the time.

De-textualisation is essentially recovering the autonomy of senses and experience, a reconnection to life-sustaining knowledge, accessible only to the selfless minds. It will be interesting to look at the world that belongs to the experiential paradigm, the people we claim as illiterate, poor and under-developed.

If we consider knowledge to be a biological response to sustain life, then the present level of

estrangement between man and nature is unimaginable. How could knowledge and destruction go hand in hand to the extent that the very survival of the earth now edges on the brink of cessation? Knowledge, devoid of the biological content, fostered the grounds for degradation (or depravity).

This biological response is what is inbuilt in the knowledge of experiential cultures or the 'ecosystems people'. This knowledge is the result of collaboration between people and their surroundings, guided by nature's need to preserve all life. The biological element in knowledge is what has made indigenous communities create 'life - sustaining' knowledge.

The autonomy of the senses also guides people to access life-sustaining knowledge. The so-called indigenous knowledge (a term invented by the textual world) is the knowledge of experiential paradigm.

For nearly two decades now, since 1988 to be a precise, I have been in a process of unlearning through creative engagement with rural and tribal artisan communities. The unlearning process I am involved in, is intended to scrub off the western influence that I had gathered through years of 'learning' in the alienating environs of some of the elitist institutions in the country. In 1991 or so, I decided to stop reading altogether as I was only building on the already formed framework of the western knowledge. In order to see clearly and authentically, I felt I needed to clean myself of all 'isms' that dictated my cognition.

After years of spending time with rural tribal

communities who were still free from modern schooling and were still very much part of the indigenous knowledge system, I began to see the fundamental difference between the two knowledge systems.

Once, a few years ago while I was in the process of developing exercises and activities to help children learn pottery, I was intrigued by the way the master potters arrive at a form. I wondered how the things they make could be so beautiful. I was keen to know what guides them to arrive at a particular form. Mulling over it for several days, I realised that there is a biological assistance that guides our sense of beauty. People undefiled by modern ways are far more open and receptive to this biological guidance.

This internal capacity and the external natural systems collaborate in some manner to produce a distinct aesthetic quality to their lives. The rural, tribal or non literate communities seem to act holistically, endowing an aesthetic quality to their every act. What we understand as culture is a result of this collaboration.

### Sense of Beauty

In a profound sense, it is a community's sense of beauty that delineates its culture. When a society or community loses its authentic sense of beauty or subjugates its sense of beauty to the corruption of alien influences, it loses its authentic culture.

The classical forms in human culture came about by this process. These are archetypal forms that came out as and when the need arose. The pyramids, the tombs, the ancient places of worship all over the world, the folk dances, through traditional music, traditional healing

### Workshop on Senses

Senses are our doors to the outer world and also to the inner world. They need to be addressed, and that too in a manner that would enhance the inherent, natural, biological tendency in all human beings to be in beauty and to know. Senses connect not only to knowledge but also to the beauty of living. Sensitivity, in a way, is a matter of the awakening of the senses and feelings. 'Sensing Nature, Knowing Nature' is a workshop we have been conducting from 2003 at Aruvacode, Nilambur during April and May. Each and every time, children have proven that they are born geniuses, and they need to be left alone to make sense of the world. The fundamental issues we raise through this event is the 'nature of learning, biologically embedded aesthetic sense in children, role of the 'teacher', do nothing method, etc. It looks like that we are already born with aesthetic sense. This is our connection to the world and the way we conduct our lives, provided we leave that to the nature in all of us. The workshop on sensing nature provided space to come together to listen, to see, to taste, to touch, feel, to make. There is no teaching. Development of the aesthetic sense, as the basis for all art forms, seems the most important aspect to be explored, as this would equip the student to pursue any art form at any time, depending on the individuals interest and opportunities that might pop up.

Rather than learning skills to sing, paint, draw, etc., strengthening our senses would make a qualitative and an attitudinal change.

systems all evolved by a very different process than that adopted by modernity. These must have been the intuitive leaps of humanity.

Children in natural learning cultures are like any other newborn animal. Nature has its ways to make them grow, and all the skills of an adult world are introduced in the games and toys children make. They explore the world of senses by interactions with Nature, and the world of Nature through the senses. Senses are a two-way tool, to know the outside and the inside. Text has replaced senses, and now, with information technology, text is being replaced by the computer.

The computer's criterion for dropping various elements from the textual knowledge would depend on manageability and softwareability. Like text, it would also bring new elements in the realm of what they claim as 'knowledge'.

The calamity of virtualisation of knowledge will be far more destructive and elusive. Already, the ICT shareholders are claiming many advantages over the textual knowledge.

The ultimate loss is that of human creativeness and life at large. If our experience is destroyed, our behaviour will be distorted and destructive. The natural state of being is to be creative. In the creative state one is authentic and original. To be authentic and original means to be inventing all the time, to be discovering all the time, to be new all the time. This brings in concrete and first hand experience as the basis for what is knowledge.

Senses are our tools that connect us to the concrete experience, as well as our inner nature.

This demands us to sharpen or sensitise our senses, as those are our primary tools for knowing. Beauty seems to be the spiritual way of relating to nature. A sense of beauty is experienced, when the experiencer and experienced become one, however momentarily .

This happens when all our senses are awake and we receive life in its totality.



### **Seeing nature. Hearing nature. Tasting nature. Smelling nature. Touching nature.**

The workshop begins with children sitting in silence and consciously listening to all the sounds. Then various situations are created for children to observe minutely the things that they normally do not notice.

#### **◆ Colour in Nature**

Children are asked to collect dry leaves of different shades and stick them in order. They then make the color by mixing the primary colors. This they repeat with various other colors in nature. They also do a color scale with two colours. They also bring colored leaf and reproduce the same by mixing colors. Then they make scenery with coloured leaves and dry leaves.

#### **◆ Lines and shapes in Nature**

Children collect different types of leaves and draw then in detail. Children are also given twisted leaves.

#### **◆ Touching nature**

Children make things they become aware of - the texture of objects and other qualities related to the touch sense. Children also make a scale using various objects of varying texture. Then they make surfaces of different textures using clay. They also draw this out using pencil and paper. This year we also did stitching. The act of threading demands attention and concentration and children needs to take care while stitching, which would in turn awaken the quality of 'care' in them.

#### **◆ Smelling nature**

There are few games children play for identifying smells. This they do with eyes blindfolded.

# Trying to Make Sense of Community Media

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Manish Jain tries to clarify between what is commonly referred to as 'mainstream media', 'development communication' and 'community media'.

To try to deepen our own clarity around the meaning of community media, we developed the following table. Our intention is to make certain distinctions between what is commonly referred to as 'mainstream media', 'development communication' (a field which is very popular in India) and what we mean by the term 'community media'. While these categories are by no means monolithic — there exists a healthy amount of diversity and dynamicism (even contradictions) in all these categories — we have found it useful to use them in order to highlight certain priorities of community media, and hopefully help avoid 'community media' becoming just another development jargon. Many of the descriptions under community media are drawn from our interactions with traditional popular media forms in Rajasthan such as *gavri*, *mandana* and community singing. Many such spontaneous forms still exist around South Asia and require deeper understanding and engagement, though they remain under constant threat of co-optation from State, Market and NGO institutions.

	Mainstream Media	Development Communication	Community Media
<b>Purpose</b>	Development of Global Markets (top down)	Sustainable-Participatory-Rights-based Development	Swaraj, Localization and Conviviality
<b>Producer/Funder</b>	Corporations-State for Individuals	NGOs-State-Donor Agencies <i>for/on behalf of</i> Other Communities	Community for Itself and Trans-local Connections
<b>Process</b>	Centralized One-way Transmission	Decentralized One-way Transmission/Campaign mode	Deep Dialogue and Co-learning
<b>Knowledge Base</b>	Profit-driven, Experts Institutionalized and English.	'Conscientized' Institutionalized Experts & Official State Languages	Lok Vidya, Intuitive and Local Languages
<b>Philosophical Roots</b>	Propaganda and Marketing	Social Marketing and Advocacy	Spiritual-Political, Respect for the Unknown
<b>Focus</b>	Products	Problems and Issues	Healthy Ties, Collective Intelligence & Fundamental Assumptions
<b>Perspective</b>	Deficit	Deficit	Appreciative
<b>Audience Role</b>	Consumerism	Enlightened Consumerism	Reject Consumerism in favor of Co-Creator Being

It may be worthwhile to clarify a few other things in the table. First, community media seeks to open up space to move beyond the reference points of the industrial-military-technocratic development paradigm. We use the term *swaraj* as discussed by Gandhi and Tagore to explore the deeper purpose of human beings and notions of well-being and progress.

Second, the “Process” of community media is driven by the desire to open up many more opportunities for deep dialogue and co-learning to take place. The artist in this case is more of a fellow seeker of truth, an experimenter, an honest listener, rather than an expert or teacher. S/he shares stirring, authentic questions – questions that can help in the transformation of his or her own life as well as the community’s life — rather than giving ready-made answers. We are all struggling to deepen our own understandings of real dialogue in our lives. But we believe that it is one of most critical aspects of community media.

Lastly, under the heading “Focus”, problem-based and issue-based has been placed under development communication. This does not mean that community media ignores tough community problems or issues; rather, community media seeks to focus on building healthy relationships, building our collective intelligence and questioning fundamental assumptions in order to avoid getting trapped in re-producing superficial solutions. Our experience has been that when we interrogate fundamental assumptions, new possibilities for different approaches, actors and activities open up.

This table is still evolving. We invite you to share your feedback and experiences to help us deepen our collective intelligence.

## Architects and Alchemists: Space as Community Media

Vanessa Reid  
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**Community media is also about the spaces we create for initiating continuous dialogue with the diverse members of the community.**

*Santropol Roulant is a community organization founded and run by young people in Montreal. We use food as a vehicle to break social and economic isolation between the generations and to strengthen and nourish our local community. A social service with an environmental and social change ethos, Santropol Roulant aims to bring only the most nutritious and ethically produced food to our community.*

*Since 1995, with the energy of thousands of volunteers, we have made over 400,000 meals and delivered them by bicycle, on foot and by car to seniors and people living with a loss of autonomy across Montreal.*

*“L’espoir, c’est eux.” So begins the *Le Devoir* newspaper article entitled “Cultivés et bien élevés : une popote roulante prend racine sur les toits. The title of this article is a play on words. *Cultivés* refers both to an erudite, knowledgeable person and it also means to cultivate, nurture or grow. *Bien élevés* means “well brought up” referring to manners or culture, but it also literally means nice and*

tall. And the second phrase translates as “a meals-on-wheels takes root on rooftops.”

“*Hope, it is them...*” writes the reporter and she goes on to describe the hopes, dreams, goals, and philosophies of a group of young people who have imagined and created the community in which they want to live and work. Their words and actions reveal their compassion and their commitment. They are creating new spaces in the community, green and fertile ones, to nourish us on many levels.

They are involved with Santropol Roulant, an organization imagined and run by young people in Montreal. They have created an urban garden on a rooftop that invites individuals to get their hands dirty growing food on this higher ground. Through their collective and voluntary efforts, they are growing organic produce not for themselves but to feed others who cannot, for a variety of reasons, feed themselves.

It is not just a dream. It is very much a reality, and those involved with Santropol Roulant have invited the community to do and dream together.

*“We need a collective dream to inspire our communal future. That’s why we need a new story about community and its possibilities.*

*And it has to be a positive story. The role and responsibility of leadership is to unleash in others the courage to imagine difference and (the) will to act for it. In my view, leadership is liberation – liberating others from resignation, from*

*the grips of what is to the pull of what’s possible.”<sup>1</sup>*

Every year Statistics Canada reports on the non-profit sector, and every year their findings reveal that Quebec’s rate of volunteering is lower than the rest of Canada. The conclusion is that these young people are not engaged.<sup>2</sup> Statistics only tell us one part of the story, based on the questions that are asked, and those responded to. The questions, however, might very well miss cultural or linguistic nuances in how people **name** their experiences, for example, different communities might not label helping their own community as “volunteering”, they might think of it as *karma yoga*, *being a good neighbour* or simply *good citizenship*. Santropol Roulant has a very different story to tell than do statistics about what is happening in our community, who is involved, and what it means to us.

Every week, Santropol Roulant creates the space and opportunities for hundreds of people, the majority of them between 15-35 years of age, to get involved very purposefully, in their community: making food, delivering it by bicycle and connecting with elders or people who are socially isolated, living with a loss of independence, or malnourished. They are also gardening, cooking, organizing events, gathering second-hand items to re-sell for the *Friperie*, cultivating worms for the vermi composting, taking responsibility and leadership as a way

<sup>1</sup> Eric Young, “The Story of Somewhere: A New Narrative for Community” presented at The National conference of community Leadership Organizations, Calgary Alta, Oct. 24, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations (NSNVO) is the most comprehensive profile of the sector ever undertaken in Canada. Some findings include: *The majority of orgs (57%) report difficulty recruiting the types of volunteers they need, obtaining board members, and difficulty planning for the future; 49% report difficulty in obtaining funding, and governments still provide 49% of the funds.*

of expressing, connecting, contributing, and making meaning.

It is a story of building relationships and trust, one that illustrates that people can make a difference in their own lives and the lives of others. That they can and do change themselves and the world around them. And they are doing it right now.

Santropol Roulant's story is nuanced and complex, because it is not about sharing an ideological approach or even an understanding of 'the issues' — whether it be social isolation, food insecurity, urban development, youth employment, volunteerism and community engagement, ageism, access to health care. It is about a way of *being* together, as individuals within a collective, *about making things happen that make a difference every day in the lives of people whom they would otherwise never have met.*

This narrative of people and place not only changes the way we think about community organizations and the possibilities for making change, but the way we can be and act in the world. This is extremely powerful because at its core a shared sense of possibility and hope.

The mission is only one way of articulating or presenting Santropol Roulant, and it is clear that the undercurrents of belonging, care, humanity and compassion are at the heart of that mission. What is interesting is how the organization keeps moving towards working in ways that allow a continual exploration and celebration of our essential humanity. An exploration that has tangible impacts on individuals, our community, and of course, the world.

## Conscious Cultivation

It is though the chemistry of our actions and intentions that a community consciously cultivates its present and future, and draws on the learning from - or takes steps to unlearn - the past. The spaces in which Santropol Roulant cultivates this chemistry are active and alive, they are many and varied, and they evolve with the seasons of the year and of our lives. They include

*....the doorway of someone's home during a meal delivery, the quiet time in the garden harvesting herbs for the kitchen, a lively community conversation about food security or recipes from one's homeland, the spontaneous conversation in the office, or the multi-lingual one cutting carrots in the kitchen, the intergenerational Harvesting of Histories at a local café collecting diverse recipes and perspectives on food...*

These spaces are intimate, public, personal, collective. They are in our homes, on the rooftops and streets of Montreal, over the phone. They are invited, spontaneous, intentional, surprising. These are spaces that existed already, and through our use of them, we create new meaning, new destinations, new relationships. Indeed, the Roulant is creating new spaces of inquiry, beauty, contemplation and engagement in the city by moving with the energy of the community's aspirations and hopes.

## Spaceshifters: urban evolutions and revolutions

*So what are spaces of change; do we change or does the space?*

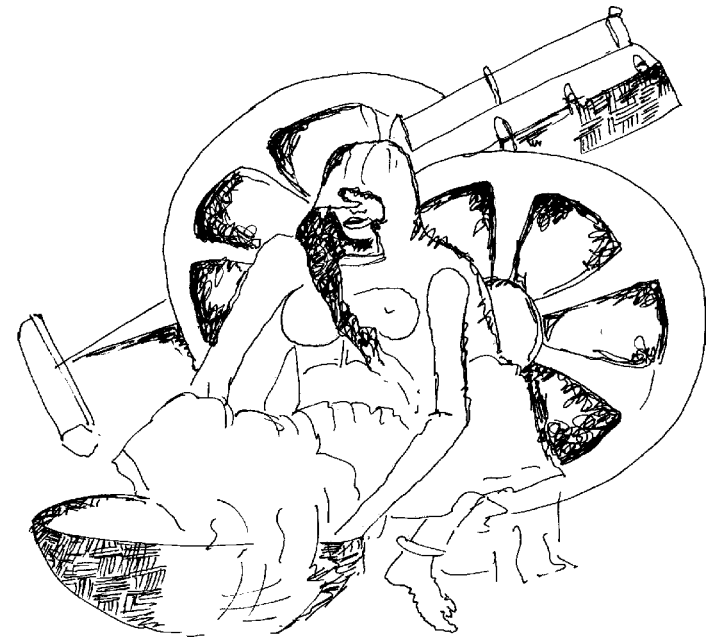
*What does it mean to consciously cultivate, individually and collectively?*

Santropol Roulant sits on the corner of Duluth and St. Urbain Street, two lifelines and thoroughfares that characterize the Plateau neighbourhood in the diverse and cosmopolitan city of Montreal. Buses, cars and cyclists zoom past the front door on St. Urbain Street every day to go downtown. Pedestrians, dog-walkers, students, urbanites, families, newcomers to Montreal or to Canada walk westward down Duluth towards the urban forest of Mount Royal, our city's namesake. And they walk east towards St. Laurent Street, a commercial and cultural hub, historically seen as the dividing line between east and west, francophone and anglophone, communities.

The buzz of energy and the scents of creativity wafting from Santropol Roulant's kitchen and office have attracted people of all ages and backgrounds to come through its doors for the last 12 years. We host them in our space and then send them out to nine different neighbourhoods across the city, each volunteer bringing hot meals and comraderie into the homes of 90 people, 5 days a week every week of the year. That's 23,400 meals — and many more conversations — a year.

Over the last 12 years, the Roulant has become a 'third space' for many — that place that is not home or work, where you can show up, offer yourself as you are, and it is more than enough. And through this emergent and iterative process, the space, culture and activities inside have shifted the external meaning of that corner of Montreal into a destination, and the opening of an exploration of self, and self in community.

In 2003, Santropol Roulant began to experiment with what we saw as a healthy urban Food Cycle. Together with Alternatives, an international development NGO, we



developed a demonstration rooftop garden to increase urban food production. The Rooftop Garden project grows food on a previously unused space, transforming a large, concrete roof into a place of urban wildlife, greenery, nourishment and collective conversation. This project has allowed Santropol Roulant to **develop and work in a fully integrated urban food system**. From growing our own food using our own vermi-compost, to engaging neighbours and citizens in urban food production, the rooftop garden is unique: an organic, urban agriculture grown on a rooftop by volunteers not for their own consumption but for a community service. It has allowed us to define anew, *Community Food Security*, in a very engaging way that also transforms the cityscape, and people's own domestic spaces — their balconies, outside staircases and rooftops — as they bring these skills home.

*Food Security as defined by the World Food Summit, 1996 means that “all people, at all times, have access to nutritious, safe, personally acceptable and culturally appropriate foods, produced in ways that are environmentally sound and socially just.”*

The Rooftop Garden has also given Santropol Roulant new grounds and experience in doing a social service (meals-on-wheels) with a vision for social change by connecting it to a larger movement for urban agriculture and greening the city. At a deeper level, ***it connects to the movement of people through a city*** — bringing people together in new ways for the collective good and exemplifying how social services are not an end in themselves, but essential to a larger vision of community evolution and systemic change.

The scope of our work is literally grounded in our own toil and soil and soars across continents to the soil and actions, aspirations and ultimately the very bodies of people in different countries. Through this long-term partnership with *Alternatives*, local partners like the City of Montreal and international exchanges with students and gardens in Morocco, Senegal and Cuba, we are feeding ourselves from the work of our own hands and we feed into a new network of social action, environmental change, and individual and community evolutions.

Santropol Roulant’s exploration of the urban food-cycle is complemented by *Going Organic*, a commitment to increase the number of local, organically grown foods we our serve in our meals-on-wheels. Our own urban agriculture efforts coupled with investing in and purchasing from local farmers builds solidarity and partnerships

between farmers, local businesses, volunteers and donors. *Going Organic* aims to serve only the best and most nutritious produce in our meals while raising awareness about buying local produce, ethical and ecological farming, nutrition, and food systems.

The food cycle is also a people cycle, a constancy towards developing the kinds of relationships we want to nourish with people and our environment — long-term, supportive, and healthy. New conversations with food at the centre led to *Harvesting Histories*, a way of collecting the stories of our lives through our memories of food. Together, while we cooked and ate and celebrated, we shared recipes and histories of immigration, of family, farming, home and collected the recipes and histories. Mrs. and Mr. C came to our kitchen to make Carribean food, and we incorporated their chicken recipe into our meals-on-wheels menu. Mr. V and Marc, our meals-on-wheels co-ordinator had an evening together over Vietnamese food, in which he shared how the recipes of his homeland are disappearing, as families disperse and immigrate.

*Harvesting Histories* strengthened relationships between people of different generations and cultures, and its richness came from the deep interest to know each other, to listen, to share and finally, to contribute our unique story to the tapestry of our collective consciousness. Food and memory become a means to witness our lives and to be witnessed by others.

### ***Circulation: lifelines and oxygen***

Just as Santropol Roulant has become a destination for connection and belonging, the Rooftop Garden has

become a new destination in this city, a place of gatherings and activity and beauty. These spaces have carved a new circulation pattern for volunteers and citizens through our neighbourhood, and through the city of Montreal, and from other continents. The exchanges with gardens in other parts of Montreal and the globe have brought a deepened awareness of our connection to and impact on other communities — our actions are intricately connected to people and environments elsewhere in the world.

**Spaces of change** shift the way people think and move and *are* in their daily lives. Creating new spaces of purpose and activity is like introducing new clean oxygen into our systems. Active and meaningful circulation in our cities is energizing. Absorbing the city landscape when cycling to a new neighbourhood with hot meals tucked in a Roulant knapsack; being invited into an elderly bachelor's home and realizing that he has not seen anyone that day nor has he left his home that week; inviting him to tell the story of his life and *harvest his history*; accompanying him so he may participate in Santropol Roulant's Annual General Meeting to vote for the board of directors, and then co-creating a balcony garden to learn how to grow tomatoes and friendship, together.

These movements through space and time are deeply felt moments of experiential learning, and the learning is absorbed into the blood flows of our systems. It is not just the sharing in activity, but the shift in perspective that allows us the view into other people's lives, their realities, gifts, struggles, and courage.

Community media in the form of harvesting our lives and stories is a powerful tool for honouring where and from whom we've come, how we are today, and what

we hope for tomorrow. The spaces that we inhabit and transform are an archive of our lives and aspirations. The unused concrete roof that becomes a garden is a material artifact that we create with our will, co-operation and the natural resources of our place. It is a living story, a map, of our collective efforts. The new circulation pattern that emerges as young people move through a city to serve meals and step into new relationships with people living with a loss of autonomy, is also a blueprint. It is a moving map of our experiences and relationships. Community media is a form of communication in which we are the authors of our story. As we transform our spaces, those spaces also tell our story.

And so a new story emerges. A story of transformation in which we are the architects and alchemists. That moment when we see for the first time what has always been there and it becomes something new. Architects and alchemists create the conditions for a natural process of transformation. Both begin with the most ordinary ingredients, materials and events — the stuff of everyday life — to reveal the golden possibility lying hidden inside. It is our responsibility to keep creating the space for the gold to be discovered and cultivated and to write, in the spaces of our lives, the new story of community and possibility.



## Endowment of Craftsmanship

'I suggest that everywhere and always the competition between a man and a machine is destructive of culture. A civilization which cannot effect between them a reasonable division of labour, does not deserve the name. The place of machinery in a true civilization should be that of a servant, and not a master. It should carry out the simplest and most mechanical processes of manufacture, it should save the craftsman from the heaviest and least interesting part of his work; but it should not rob him of that part of his labour which is his very craft. For if it does so rob him, not only is his own intelligence correspondingly destroyed, but the community has to accept an environment aesthetically and spiritually inferior, an environment that certainly does not express or produce what we understand by culture. The problem is not how to abolish machinery, but how so to regulate it that it shall serve without enslaving man; how to stop competition between machine and handwork by defining and delimiting intelligently the proper sphere of each. The community cannot afford to dispense with the intellectual and imaginative forces, the educational and ethical factors in life which go with the existence of skilled craftsmen and small workshops. These must therefore 'if we value culture' be protected in their proper sphere. The means to this end are the endowment of craftsmanship, and the transference of the control of production from the hands of those who exploit, again into the hands of those who themselves create.' - Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Art and Swadeshi*, 1910

## Rejuvenating Modes of Communication

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**Kishor Saint makes a case for participatory, liberative media, as against modern mass media.**

After the experience of several Lok Sabha elections since 1977, the intellectual community in India is prepared to entertain the possibility that the rural people of India, far from being a moronic mass, have a mind, personality and a judgment of their own, which they are capable of exercising for crucial decisions such as who shall run the affairs of the state. It is the intellectuals who do not have a mind of their own, are constantly dependent on conceptual imports and seek legitimation of their work outside their milieu. These historic events have revealed once again not only the gulf that divides the educated elite from the rural masses, but they also show how inadequate and faulty are the instruments intellectuals use for analysing, describing and explaining the Indian reality.

There are several reasons for this. The modern social sciences, modeled on the natural and physical sciences, are developed on the premise that there are universal laws which govern the character and functioning of human individuals and societies. They also assume that

there is one or other true course of social evolution, which every society is bound to follow. It is not difficult to see the imperialist underpinnings of these assumptions. The 'advanced' societies, which are further along the road of social progress, are assumed to have superior knowledge and wisdom without which the 'backward' societies cannot move forward. Always, the case of technological differentials is cited to prove the point. Yet, what holds validity in this field cannot be simplistically and mechanistically applied to the social sphere. In any case, even the fundamental technological and scientific wisdom of the advanced societies is suspect, since it has resulted in a crisis of survival of the human species and its ecological support systems.

The frameworks of knowledge and methods of study about individuals and societies have a powerful cultural bias. They are instruments not only of description and explanation of reality, but by their policy impact, they become instruments of the creation of new social reality. It is therefore, of utmost importance that these disciplines of knowledge be appropriate to the social reality they are dealing with. A great and highly evolved socio-cultural tradition like the one in India is not a mere museum for traditional anthropological studies. It is a living reality with powerful generative strengths, which have a distinctive character. The Indian ways of perception, understanding, organising and doing have an evolutionary potential not only for the Indian situation but also for mankind as a whole. There is recognition of this outside India. But within India, the academics whose task it should have been to understand the socio-cultural and psychological characteristics of the Indian reality and to identify its special generative strengths, have chosen the less arduous path of

remaining faithful cronies of their Western mentors and masters.

The closest some Indian intellectuals come to giving a 'national' interpretation to this imported knowledge is to divide their own society into 'advanced' and 'primitive'. Till they are shocked into the awareness of the knowledge of the 'primitive' through events such as the ones mentioned above, our intellectuals continue to consider our villagers ignorant.

A prerequisite of correct understanding is the designing of suitable instruments of observation, description and understanding; in other words, preparing analytical tools and a language of discourse pertinent to the particular reality. This difficult work has not been done, at least not in the academies which have continued to replicate and refine redundant and irrelevant theories and methodologies. It is my contention that describing and explaining behaviour, perceptions, thought processes and attitudes of people in India in terms of Pavlovian or Skinnerian behaviourism or Freudian or Jungian psycho-analysis or Piagetain psycho-structuralism is like describing the Hindu Pantheon of beliefs in terms of Christian or Islamic theology. No matter how logical and consistent it may be, it can only be a grossly distorted depiction of the actual phenomenon. Perhaps it is in this context that a well-known economist once remarked that 'only when the illiterate Indian peasants begin to articulate their insights born of their concrete experience and common reflection that a beginning will be made in authentic indigenous social science in India.' Until that happens, it might be worth our while to remove our academic blinkers and let the light of common sense and intelligent speculation inform our deliberations.

## Role of communication

Participation takes place *through* communication. No social existence is conceivable without a network of media forms. These play a vital role in social functioning, maintenance and change. Modes of communication and participation relate to varieties of social relations and structures. They encompass private conversation, folk media, advertising, melas, traditional gatherings, etc. They can range from informal, casual exchanges to highly complex, institutionalised and ritualised forms of conveying and receiving messages.

In highly structured Indian society, the institutionalised and ritualised forms of media are particularly important. These exist as major systems of communication, which are maintained with great regularity and permanence. Many of these coincide with the major events in the individual life cycle such as birth, marriage and death, and with seasonal and cosmic cycles. Most of these are on an intra-community basis. The traditional community maintains itself in and through these media. Socio-religious observances and celebrations like marriage and death feasts, prasadis and jati panchayat gatherings, are occasions for intra-group dialogue while the melas, haats, markets, village panchayat gatherings and great religious melas, like Kumbha, are the venues and means for inter-community exchanges.

## An illustration

To illustrate the intricate multidimensionality of traditional modes of participative media, a celebration in Udaipur, the festival of Gangoch in an Adivasi community, is described below.

Nimechkhada lies north of Udaipur. It is a small Adivasi (tribal) hamlet that nestles against the hills of Nimechmata. Its inhabitants settled there some 30 years ago when their lands were taken away to make room for progress, in the form of a Railway Training School. One of the village elders is a prominent Bhakta, a member of the reformist sect amongst the Bhils. Last year, he led a group of eleven from Nimechkhada and other Bhil hamlets around Udaipur, to make a pilgrimage to Haridwar. They went not as individuals but as representatives of several hundreds of other Adivasis and carried the remains (asthis) of their deceased elders to be immersed into the holy river.

Today, under the leadership of Bherji, the prominent Bhakta, they were celebrating the festival of Gangoch. Bherji is well-known to us, as he has been associated with some of the projects Seva Mandir had undertaken. He invited us to participate in the celebrations. We (my family and I) reached his house in the village in the afternoon. Already, there was a large gathering and people were still arriving: women dressed in gay, traditional attire and displaying all the finery they possessed, older men in clean white dhotis and a scattering of young men in bush-shirts and pants. The festivities were heading towards a climax. The last of the pitchers with coconuts were being distributed. My wife and daughter were given one each and invited to worship at the family shrine of Bherji.

In the compound, seated on a carpeted dais was an obviously important Maharaj, quite young but presiding with dignity over the proceedings. I was asked to share the dais with him. I declined the honour and busied myself with taking photographs. Soon all the pitchers had been handed out, and the procession began to form. The women held the pitchers and the coconuts on top of

their heads. Some in the lead carried special pitchers containing germinated barley. An elephant with a howdah on top had been brought. It was duly worshipped, anointed and garlanded. The 'Maharaj', the chief guest, climbed into the *howdah* and a striped flag was handed to a bearer in the *howdah*.

After this, the procession began in earnest with a band in the lead followed by the elephant. Men, women and children who had been waiting all over the village poured out in columns and joined the mainstream. Everyone walked at the elephant's pace. Women sang songs appropriate to the occasion, and quite a few began swaying as they walked and had to be supported. In high, congenial spirits, this community of several thousands made its way to Fatehsagar led by eleven men who had been to Haridwar, each carrying, as a precious treasure, a sealed metal pot containing the waters of holy Ganga. Arriving at the lake, the eleven put these Gangajalis in a circle, said ritual prayers and opened the seals. Meanwhile, the men made a chain up and down the steps to the water's edge. In quick succession, the empty pitchers carried by the women were handed down, filled with water and brought to the place where the opened Gangajalis were lying. Each filled pitcher was blessed by the Maharaj, and a drop of Ganga water added to it.

When all the pitchers had been filled and thus treated, the procession started back to the village, but a qualitative change had occurred in the atmosphere and mood. All the women carrying the filled pitchers were swaying now. They were carrying the spirit of Ganga, and it seemed that the Goddess had taken possession of their spirits. They were in communion with the primeval elements of their racial memory and heritage. Much faster than on

the outbound journey, the procession returned to the village. After some rest, *prasad* was distributed and the thousands began to depart, taking with them a part of the whole that made up their kinship and community. Those who had come from afar would stay the night, most of which would be spent in devotional singing and dancing and would leave before daybreak.

### Understanding the Gulf in Realities

This was *Gangoch*, a celebration of a lifetime, which brought together thousands of kinswomen. Through physical presence, interpersonal exchange, ritual and ceremony, song and dance and partaking of common food, the organic bonds of the community had been renewed. In the process, the stature of leadership had been demonstrated and legitimisation obtained by secular and religious means. It was a big occasion worthy of a big man, who had made himself bigger in the process.

It should be observed that although that event occurred within the municipal boundaries of Udaipur and had involved thousands of people, it received no attention from the media managers of contemporary India. No scholars and journalists were present on this occasion. As far as they were concerned, it was a non-event, for it belonged to the tribals who are considered ignorant and superstitious.

This points to the gulf that exists between the two realities in the Indian situation. The contemporary communication systems function, by and large, as a world apart from the traditional systems of communication. They comprise the various mass media: radio, films, TV, newspapers, publicity materials, advertising the systems of extension and educational services. These systems rely

heavily on imported technologies and theories of communication for their policy and functioning. A major portion of these is controlled either by the state agencies or by private business as in the case of the press and advertising. To a limited extent, through private educational institutions and voluntary adult education agencies, local community-based systems of communication have been evolved. But these are invariably overshadowed by state -controlled and industrial systems.

The audience and clientele of these systems are mainly urban, with the exception of agricultural extension service and advertising related to modern farm inputs. The rural orientation of the mass media is minimal. Yet, despite their limited coverage and cultural distance, their impact is considerable on the rural areas. Their message-dissemination is multiplied a thousand-fold through interpersonal interaction. The 'Indira wave' and the 'Janata Hawa' are phenomena of a highly communicative culture, where messages are carried by word of mouth and travel with the travelers, and are discussed, analysed, commented upon in the teashops, panshops, coffee houses, in buses and trains.

In other words, the primary means of communication in the country still remain what are called traditional. The so-called modern mass media have only modified but not replaced them. The radio and press have given larger regional and national dimensions to these inbuilt processes, but have not altered the basic character of people's reliance on the word of mouth and speakers' standing for information. The people, even though illiterate, are by no means passive recipients. They have highly developed capability for assessing validity and veracity by perceiving the tonal quality, the gestures, the

posture and the expression on the speakers' face. What is heard is further subjected to scrutiny with those who are trusted, or in groups, and is only then accepted or rejected.

This is not to say that truth always triumphs. But that begs the question: whose truth and in whose interest? Much of contemporary communication is extremely one-sided: from the center to the periphery. There are urban centers controlled by the state and the ruling elite within it. In our post-feudal system, they are at best paternalistic and at worst authoritarian. Some observers regard modern communications in even more sinister terms, as an assault on the indigenous culture and personality of the people. The non-governmental centers of communication are either tied to the promotion of particular factional interests or, if objective, they are too abstract and remote in their concern. In the latter category are the academic centers, which are usually esoteric and often trapped in conceptual schemes that have no relevance to the Indian rural situation. There is a glaring lack of media in the centers of knowledge generation which reflect people's perceptions, understandings, aspirations, and which can act as avenues for developing people's self-concept and identity in contemporary terms. Only this approach to media can help the people to liberate themselves from the weight of deadening tradition, on the one hand, and from the distortion and manipulation of elite-oriented technologies on the other.

Because of illiteracy and ignorance in modern events, the masses are subject to manipulation, control and exploitation by those interests who control the means of communication. At the same time, they enjoy a certain degree of immunity and protection from control, by virtue of their deep immersion in tradition, which has specific as

well as universal dimensions. It is in this paradoxical situation that potential has to be sought for modes of community media.

### Liberative media

What does this mean and entail? Can it be done? Who is to do it? These questions are addressed in the rest of this essay.

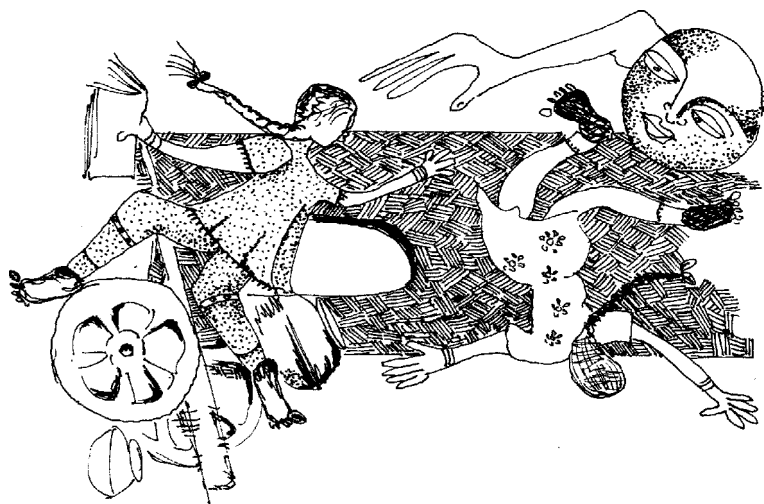
Although internationally, attention has been focused on this question by the Brazilian adult educator Paulo Freire, indigenous liberative modes of communication were very much the concern of both Gandhi and Tagore. Both of them wrote prolifically and generally in their native idiom, in one case through journalistic forms and in the other through literary and musical expressions. In both instances, they expressed the feelings and aspirations of a wide spectrum of the Indian people; what they said gave hope and courage to millions and inspired them to heroic deeds. All over the country, through the national schools, through ashrams, through the private press and through grassroot organisations, messages were shared, consultations effected, strategies developed and actions undertaken. It was a national movement, but it had very important regional and cultural regeneration aspects.

The independence movement in India was, in every sense, a multidimensional 'cultural action for freedom,' to use the more topical phrase of Paulo Freire, which evolved highly original media expressions specific to the Indian rural situation. The prayer meetings, the *padayatra*, the non-violent *satyagraha*, the fast, the spinning sessions, are peculiarly Indian forms of contemporary social and political communication and participation.

Liberative media as an expression of cultural action for freedom has several important characteristics. In the first place, it is organised on the basis of faith in the people. In fact, it is the expression of people's own desires and attempts to be articulate, to share, to participate and to become organised. The life-situation of the masses is sometimes characterised as a culture of silence. Liberative media are those, which help enable people to speak their authentic selves. They are highly region and culture specific and replete with the symbolism, imagery, motifs, common sense and idiom of the particular area.

For several years, the term 'conscientisation' has been used to signify communications with liberative intent. It means awakening to one's predicament and situation and becoming energised to deal with the problems that confront one as a member of an oppressed group. In the Indian context, the concept of *chaitanya* which implies awareness, sensibility as well as alertness towards nature, life and society, has a far richer content than 'conscientisation.' Traditionally, the development of *chaitanya* has been the spiritual prerogative of a few enlightened individuals around whom various sects have evolved, usually drawing followers from the oppressed classes. These have undertaken activities of a reformist and liberative nature in a sporadic and isolated manner. With Gandhi and Tagore, this dimension acquired secular and national significance and resulted in historic socio-political action. However, it retained its spiritual moorings with their attendant tendencies towards individualism and obscurantism.

We need to rediscover and reactivate the meaning of this powerful evolutionary impulse in the Indian character. It needs to be salvaged from the blind alleys of self-serving



esotericism and delusionary obscurantism, and channelised into fresh cultural action for freedom. The beginnings have to be with the individual selves, amongst those who have emerged from the masses and yet have not become alienated from them. These individuals have to deepen and strengthen their *chaitanya* through experience, work, study and reflection and in the process, liberate themselves from the constraints of kinship, caste and 'nowkri'. They have to relink themselves with the people, becoming re-immersed in their lives, learn from them and help to develop their awareness and sensibilities towards liberative social and cultural action. There can be no blueprints for this effort: there can only be a broad strategy and approach which must be constantly reviewed and revised. Nor can this be undertaken under patronage and sponsorship of any kind. It has to be *sui generis*.

## Songs On The Grind Mill In The Context Of Oral Tradition

Hema Rairkar  
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There's a need to show the relevance of our mothers and grandmothers' tradition of songs sung at the millstone, writes Hema Rairkar of the Centre for Cooperative Research in Social Sciences.

The age-old tradition of grind-mill songs is a strong means of self-expression and communication for peasant women in India.

In the countryside, women would squat near their mill-stones installed in the corner of the house, and grind the day's flour, well before sunrise. This practice, witnessed for 4000 years, and documented since the 6<sup>th</sup> century, was common in India till recently. It still persists, but in an increasingly sporadic manner, as the motorised grinder puts the manually-operated mill-stones to rest. With one electric stroke, it is drying up the source of songs.

It is at the mill-stone where the women would sing verses of their own compositions. These verses have a form of rhymed and rhythmic distiches (*ovi/ovya* in Marathi). When women sit on the stone mill, they talk with each other. The formula "I tell you, woman" is widely characteristic of all the traditions of grind-mill songs.



Grind-mill songs are valuable in so many different contexts. Sarubai Kadu, like so many women, can neither read nor write, but she knows thousands of songs. This knowledge gives her a distinct power in her community. Unfortunately, students in urban and rural colleges often turn their back to their mothers' experiences. I feel grind-mill songs can build a bridge across so many rifts in our society. Through them, the next generations can draw upon the heritage of their ancestors. Another example: Recently, veterinary

doctors were collecting information about traditional medicines and common practices of caring for animals. When asking women about how they shared their knowledge and experiences with the younger generations, it turns out that grind-mill songs were the medium used.

When persons are creators and carriers of their own heritage, and when they can communicate this with each other, only then will they be able to challenge the modern mass media. I close below with a grind-mill song:

### Bonds of Love

A boy is welcome to look after the estate and manage the household as the owner; but it is a relation of love that binds mother and daughter. A son is expected out of social constraint, but in her heart, a mother loves her daughter.

*"The hope was of a boy, but  
why is a girl discredited?  
Oh no! My woman! You are  
my heart's diamond."*



## Empowering Communities to Voice

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kavita@videovolunteers.org

Kavita Das Gupta outlines the work  
done by Video Volunteer/ Drishti in the  
last one year.

“Chalo re Chalo, Filum Dekhne

Mera Filum, Aapka Filum

Chotte ka Filum, Bade ka Filum

Chacha ka Filum, Chachi ka Filum

Mausa ka Filum, Mausai ka Filum

Eid ka Filum, Diwali ka Filum

Gurjarpura main thik saat baje,

Arre chhoot na jaye kahin

Jaroor ana Filum Dekhne

Chalo re Chalo, Filum Dekhne .”

Razak and Zakir, two young filmmakers from Suleimani Roza ki Chali in Saraspur, roam the lanes singing this song. Wherever they go, a throng of children singing along follows them. By now, everyone knows them, and they are warmly welcomed. These young men come once every month to show them a film.

It is 7 pm, the screen at Gurjar Nagar is up and a song is playing on the amplifiers. People throng rush to see the latest film. The venue is a dirty field between Doshi Mian ki Chali basti and Nirmal Pura. But it is important to do a screening here, as then both Hindus and Muslims come to watch, though the audiences maintain a strict separation. The screen is their boundary. On one side, the Hindus settle down, while on the other the Muslims. The film begins with people wishing each other for Eid and Diwali. As the film proceeds, Hindus talk about their favourite Muslim festival, and the Muslims describe their favourite Hindu festival. There is an environment of celebration amongst the audience, as they identify people from their basti in the film. Women giggle, children laugh out loud, and whistles pierce the night.

We see the beautiful dargah at Pirana, which is cared for by the Hindus and visited by people of all religions. The film slowly becomes serious, as it touches on issues of communal violence. It tries to question why people fight and kill, when there is so much love and brotherhood. The audience nods heads in agreement. They whisper to each other. Indeed... who makes us fight!? The film draws to an end as the filmmakers, who are from their own bastis, pledge that they will together celebrate their festivals, just as they did in the past.

Razak and Zakir take up the microphone, urging people to speak out. They ask people for their views, their stories. A young Hindu boy gets up and says that this was a wonderful experience for him, an eye opener. He had forgotten that the Muslims who stayed just across the road did not wish them ill. A Muslim man gets up and describes how he and his friends would celebrate Diwali before the riots of 2002. People start wishing each other for Eid and Diwali on the microphone. As more and more people come towards Zakir and Razak, the neat boundaries merge. The screen has been brought down. The film is over, but a group of young boys and girls stand together as they pledge to celebrate their festivals together again. This is a very brief description of the screenings of one of our video magazines made by the Community Video Unit in Ahmedabad.

In 1999, the World Bank asked 60,000 people living on less than a dollar a day to identify the biggest hurdle to their advancement. It wasn't food, shelter or health care. It was access to a voice. By empowering people to tell their stories, video gives a voice to the voiceless, and to the people who fight for them.

Video Volunteers (VV) believes that media can provide marginalised people with a platform for voice and accelerate social change. In collaboration with Drishti Media Collective in Ahmedabad, VV is working to create a global network of hundreds of rural or peri-urban Video Producers who produce and share media across the barriers of illiteracy, poverty and media neglect.

In July 2006, VV and Drishti, along with a group of leading NGOs, launched seven Community Video Units

in three states of India. VV and Drishti have developed a unique approach to applying communications media to the problems in the developing world: the "Community Video Unit" (CVU). The CVU model involves our forging a partnership with a leading local NGO, which selects five to 10 community members like Razak and Zakir from the narrative above. These members become full-time salaried Community Video Producers. We hire and train a Video Trainer, who is placed in each CVU for one year to train the Community Producers in all aspects of video production. We create a local Editorial Board made up largely of community members who decide on a different issue for a monthly Video News Magazine.

Local distribution is critical to our model, and we set a target of 10,000 people reached every month per CVU, so that the cost of reaching an individual person is reduced to little more than a cup of chai. Each month, one or two members of the CVU are selected to manage local distribution screenings. The video is taken to 25 villages or slum areas through the month, for nightly screenings on wide-screen projectors in a central, outdoor community area. The Video News Magazines end with a 'call to action', which is easily executable by community members. The Community Producer (supported by the local NGO) leads a discussion about the actions people can take to participate more fully in their development. One of the unique aspects is that unlike one-off screenings of educational documentaries, we return to the same audiences each month so that communities not only create this media, but also participate in it and eventually own it.

Our NGO partners are witnessing success: there is tremendous leadership development in the Community

Producer. Community members are eager to 'voice' and tell their stories on camera; there are high levels of turnout for screenings, tremendous viewer identification with the stories onscreen, and participation in post-screening debates. There are even prosecutable cases uncovered during the screening debates that the NGOs are now engaged in on behalf of their community.

I would like to leave you with one last image of empowerment from one of our Community Video Producers, Tarun, who works from our CVU in the slums of Ahmedabad. "Today people in our community know us and our CVU. They know that the CVU makes films about our stories. In the future, our community should have our own TV channel where we can produce and see what we want!"



## FILM REVIEW

### The Power of Community: How Cuba Survived Peak Oil

"The Power of Community" is creating excitement in localization groups, and with good reason. In this film, individual Cubans tell us how they responded to an artificially imposed "Peak Oil" in the 1990s, when the fall of the Soviet Union caused the loss of most food and oil imports. Their stories serve as a valuable model for a world facing Peak Oil on a global scale. Cuba's transition to a low energy society is hopeful and instructive.

Interweaving a cogent overview of global Peak Oil with the story of Cuba's experience, director Faith Morgan outlines the dire consequences of Cuba's energy crisis. Transportation halted. Electricity was available sporadically. Lacking substitutes for fossil fuel-based farming, food production was devastated. The average Cuban lost 20 pounds.

Morgan shows us the innovative responses of the Cuban people. We see city-dwellers planting urban gardens on every available plot, using permaculture and organic farming to reclaim soils destroyed by chemical fertilizers and pesticides. These local farmers reconnect with their neighbors and willingly supply free food to elders, schools, workers and pregnant women.

We also see how Cuba coped with a sudden lack of energy for modern infrastructure. Without fuel for cars,

Cubans walked, carpooled, and rode buses. They even massively adopted the bicycle, despite the prior absence of a cycling culture. We also see Cubans creatively reducing energy consumption in their homes and workplaces and implementing small-scale renewable energy projects.

Cuba adapted, survived, and thrived because they mobilized their entire culture. They made changes requiring cooperation, adaptability, and openness to alternatives. As one Cuban in the film remarks, "When told we needed to reduce energy use, everybody did it." (The Power of Community: How Cuba Survived Peak Oil , 2006, by Faith Morgan, 53 minutes)

## Taking The Class Out Of The Classroom

Shammi Nanda  
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**Informal learning spaces are spontaneous and flowing. People are always willing to share what they know, and since they are doers, their insights about various issues are much deeper, says Shammi Nanda.**

I had been to Brazil some years ago, and I made friends with people who make and sell jewelry on the street there.

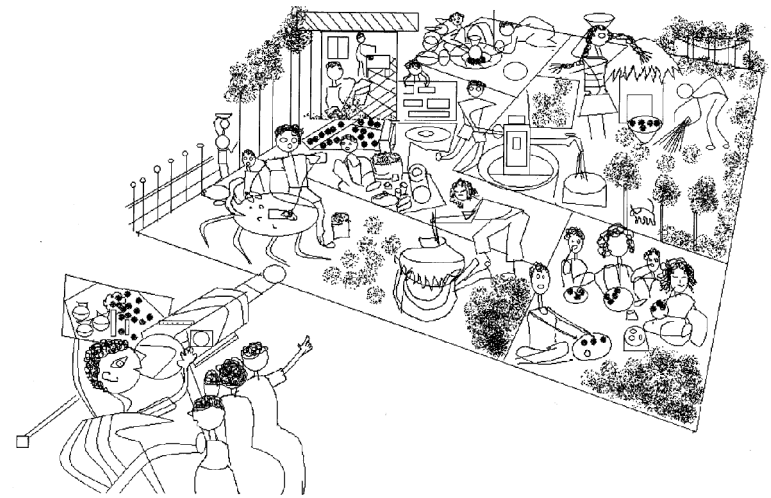
I once went with one of my friends Augusto to sell jewelry in one of the colleges in Rio. The life of the students there was so detached and different from that of people like Augusto. I was associating myself with Augusto and seeing the students from his perspective.

I remembered my college days and wondered how all those boys who worked in the *dhabas* and *chai* shops near the college viewed us. They must have wondered about these people who came every day to college, chatted, sat in classrooms, went to the library, the mess or canteen and ate, had elections gave speeches and even spoke of changing the world. Who are these people who don't seem to be doing anything with their hands and body and just talk and listen? they must have wondered. Who are these people who might not know how to cook,

or farm, or repair a puncture in a cycle, but seem to be moving around as if they know everything. I had realised then how fake college life is. We didn't even realise that it was just a stage, a set, a theater, a simulation, that we were a part of, and which we even believed to be a learning space.

I was living in Mumbai around four years ago. Some friends and their families decided to meet on Sundays to do interesting things together. We began calling it the 'Sunday Club', where we would be cooking, doing pottery, making music, dyeing clothes, making films and rakhis, all of it in a spontaneous way. We often had interesting conversations and, at times, talked with a sense of nostalgia about the sense of community we had when we were kids. I too remember how as a child I used to see the women of the neighbourhood collecting under the winter sun outside someone's house and knitting sweaters. They used to keep moving the *charpoys* with the movement of the sun till almost sunset. Also, how we used to get together during the mango season and make pickles, or how the uncles would get together to go and buy grain from the wholesale market on Sundays, or how people would offer to send meals when someone was in the hospital, or how people shared houses when there was a wedding in someone's house. The 'Sunday Club' had made me see the role that the household can play in reclaiming the powers in our lives that are getting lost to institutions and also to help us connect with ourselves and our communities.

My experiences with the 'Sunday Club' and during the Brazil trip, where I learnt to do things with my hands while hanging out with people who work on the street, made me lose my interest in formal institutions, and more



so, with those which claim to be there for the purpose of learning. While being on the street, I figured that informal learning spaces are energetic. People are always willing to share what they know and since they are doers, their insights about various issues are much deeper. So when a friend of mine, Anita, who is a lecturer and knows me as a filmmaker, asked me to help in organising a filmmaking workshop in a Goa college, I had my reservations. Not just because it would be in a college, but also because I get nervous where there is bell ringing after every hour, or where some people like principals and teachers are considered more important than others, and people move aside in the corridors to make way for them.

I told Anita I would do the workshop on the condition that we spend as little time as possible in the college and be at people's houses, for which some students would have to be ready to open their homes.

The students agreed to hold the workshop. After some informal introductions, we decided to go to Ganesh's place in Mandrem, a coastal village. We didn't know what the place would be like and what we would do there. I suggested that we do not take out the camera for two to three hours and see what we could do in that space, how we could engage ourselves, and then shoot the place and the people, along with ourselves.

In film school, I had realised that the best films are made in our first year, where each student, from different parts of the country and with diverse backgrounds, makes films about their own lives, their childhood, their family. Since the characters and experiences are drawn from their own lives, we get to see such many different films every year. Those films are technically not very good, but they are touching and are kind of real. As we move to the third year, the films become technically more superior and are good for film festivals. But most of them are distant from our lives. Also, during filmmaking workshops, there is a tendency among participants to go around asking questions to people about their lives, but there is hardly any willingness to share their own lives. Of late, I have learnt the importance of our own stories, since we can know about ourselves better than we know about others. I am not saying that we should not make films on others, but we should be able and willing to explore and share our lives with others too. Or for that matter, while I am interviewing someone, I should be willing to answer the questions that I am asking that person.

The idea of doing the filmmaking in homes was also a way to connect to our selves, our family, our neighbourhood. All that is something that I myself have

become distant to, by going to school and colleges. We have stopped seeing our home and neighbourhood as learning spaces. We have begun to equate 'education' with some institutional building. We have more faith in these simulated spaces for learning, where we have no real control in deciding what, how and why we are going to learn.

Ganesh's house was a beautiful surprise for us. His father is a carpenter, and his brother helps him in the house, which doubles as a workshop. We had also decided that we would cook the food ourselves. So, some of us got into cooking, some got into pairs to make a stool, Alfred and I got into wood carving, some went to fetch the water, while Sylvia grated many coconuts, and Anita started making dal. It was so good to see everyone working with tools and when I suggested that someone start the shooting, no one came forward as they were engrossed in their work. Ganesh's cousin who also does carpentry, seemed to be interested in filming, so he started with the camera. The camera slowly moved from one person to another, as everybody took turns shooting while the other jobs went on. We had a sumptuous Konkani lunch and chatted with the family. We had also decided that we would ask the family members to eat first, and we would serve. Ganesh's mother was a bit reluctant initially, but she agreed to sit after some persuasion. By the time we left, the stool was complete with three legs, Amay's name plate was complete except for a few letters and the face I was carving was done without the lips.

After lunch, we went to the beach for a swim and chatted for some time and shared our experiences. Someone was excited that he touched carpentry tools for

the first time; some were impressed by the fact that we could learn filmmaking in a house; someone was happy to be in the kitchen; someone enjoyed the swim. Ganesh shared that it was the first time his mother ever ate with them in the first round; normally she always eats after feeding everyone.

We then edited the film about our visit, and in the process, also learnt editing. So for me, learning is done best by doing it. Filmmaking is also like a language and can be learnt like one. You don't have to first learn the grammar, but instead start with just speaking it. We didn't have any theory lectures, but people were just given the cameras. They began shooting, then assembling and later editing the shots.

The workshop moved to two other houses, Richa's and Macbert's. We used to take the editing computer to the houses. While some people shot the films; others took turns with the editing. Before we went to Richa's house, she had told us that her mother would prefer to cook, and it would be better if we didn't intervene. When we met her mother and suggested some dishes, she wanted us to make them, which got us an easy entry into her kitchen. Richa's father was impressed with the workshop, as he noticed that ever since the workshop began, she started helping in the kitchen.

At Macbert's house, we worked on a fiction film. Some people chatted with his grandmother, and his aunt and nephew also did small roles in the film. Macbert was acting in the film and doing a peppy role. His aunt said that she always thought that Macbert was a shy guy, but she was impressed to see him interact so much with his

friends. We also had learning exchanges, where everyone would bring anything that they knew and would like to share with others. Sania got her glass painting kit; I had my jewelry-making tools; a friend Luisa who was also visiting us, shared clowning exercises which later helped us in designing the fiction film.

Another time in Delhi, a friend Deepti, who teaches in a school, asked me to do a workshop with her students in the school. My answer was the same, and she agreed. To make things simple, she suggested that we do the workshop after school hours and not involve the school in it. All her students agreed, and we also invited some kids from 'Manzil', which is a family's house opened to the neighbourhood kids. They come and do crafts, music, maths, English and computers.

At Mehak's place, it turned out that her mother runs a boutique in one part of the house. We had our own learning exchanges, but her grandmother also came and shared how to cut a piece of cloth to make a kurta. All these spaces become interesting for me, as I got out of the role of a facilitator and learned of too. The people we met in the houses also add their energies to the workshops.

One day, we went to Anjali's house. We had decided to make mango 'panna' in her house. Anjali was proud to introduce her dad, who is a driver by profession and also takes up cooking for parties and big gatherings. I still remember the expression on her face as she said, "Bhaia, yeh mera papa hain, yeh bahut accha khana banate hain". As we got about making mango 'panna', her dad joined us in lighting the firewood. He gave his own ideas for making it delicious. I shared my interest in

cooking and inclination to join him as an apprentice when he gets his next big cooking contract. He agreed to take me along. It has not happened yet, as I didn't stay in Delhi that time, but it's still on my mind and hopefully, I will go there one day and try to make *naans* and *rumaali rotis*.

The TV was on when we entered their house, but then, as we began chatting and singing songs, it was pushed in the background and finally switched off. It reminded me of the days when we used to sing songs during my cousins' weddings and also do some skits with my cousins. We were appreciated for doing all this. I used to do theater in school too, but somehow I had stopped doing all that. I don't even know why it stopped, and why I later developed stage fright. Singing with Anjali's family reminded me of that and also made me realise the reason. It was simple: the singing and acting in all our family gatherings was non-competitive, and there was no pressure of winning or humiliation of losing. But then I realised that in these workshops, it is equal fun and exploration for me, as much as it was for others. While we do all this, the filmmaking also goes on. The whole idea is that we do some interesting things and engage meaningfully, and then shoot those things.

Our next destination was Lodhi Gardens, where we decided on doing some simple fiction stories. We decided that we would all sit silently and think about our own story ideas and then get back in groups. I suggested that we switch off the cell phones. Two of the girls said that they couldn't do that, as their mothers would get worried. So they had to call up their mothers and tell them that they were switching off the phones. I never knew we have become

so dependent on phones. Similarly, we have so many public spaces where we can do so much, so I don't understand why we are holed up in buildings for 'learning', day in and day out for years! For me, the difference between a typical school and an 'alternative' school is that one is a Zoo, and the other is a Sanctuary. We don't have to create more sanctuaries, when there are so many forests inviting us with open arms. Maybe we have lived too much in zoos and sanctuaries that we are too scared of forests. It's like the pets raised in captivity, who may not be able to survive in the forest for long.

Everyone had a good time at the workshop. The kids went home happy. The news somehow reached the principal through a parent, and the principal called Deepti to inquire about the workshop. Deepti said that it was not a part of the school. It was done after the school hours and was optional. The principal however said that there could be nothing personal between teachers and students and no interaction out of school. Not even phone calls from them should be entertained. Deepti refused to agree to this and left her job.

Another workshop I have been a part of was done in Nashik. Sakhi, my friend, had written a beautiful book review of *The Teenage Liberation Handbook*, which inspired me to read it. After that, I have been trying to get back some of my liberated teenage years and trying to explore things which I am really passionate about, be it cooking, organic farming, making things with waste, self healing, making soaps, doing tie and dye with vegetable dyes... It's good to be free from classroom!



## BOOKS : Learn More ! Be inspired !

**Grub: Ideas for an Urban Organic Kitchen**, by Anna Lappe and Bryant Terry, is more than just a great collection of recipes. It stresses the importance of the organic lifestyle, not only as a path to personal health, but also to environmental and societal justice. Tarcher, 2006.

**Capitalism 3.0**, by Peter Barnes, urges readers to 'upgrade' capitalism and preserve humanity's shared heritage by reclaiming the Commons: nature, community, and culture. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2006.

**The Small-Mart Revolution**, by Michael Shuman, offers a detailed and informed look at how small businesses are triumphing over multinational chains. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2006.

**Short Circuit: Strengthening Local Economies for Security in an Unstable World**, by Richard Douthwaite, proposes that communities should build independent local economies to avoid mainstream economic collapse, and also supplies ideas for action. The Lilliput Press Ltd, 1996.

**Bringing the Food Economy Home**, by Helena Norberg-Hodge, et al, argues that localizing our food economies is a 'solution-multiplier' that will reduce the negative impacts of globalization. Zed Books, 2002.

**In Praise of Slowness** by Carl Honore shares how people around the world are challenging the cult of speed. It encourages us to rethink our relationship with time and efficiency. HarperCollins, 2004.

**Deep Economy** by Bill McKibben argues that we need to move beyond 'growth' as the paramount economic ideal and pursue prosperity in a more local direction. The book puts forward a new way to think about the things we buy, the food we eat, the energy we use, and the money that pays for it all. Times Books, 2007.

**The Spirit of Regeneration** edited by Frederique Apffel-Marglin discusses how members of the group PRATEC are seeking to redefine development based on the indigenous cosmologies and practices of peasant communities in Peru. The book inspires us to engage with the local on its own terms. Zed Books, 1998.

## RESOURCE GUIDE

### Declare Independence! Localize Your Life

**Cyberspace Goes Local** - The internet needn't be just a tool of the global economy. These tools can help build community and your local economy.

**100-Mile Diet**, the official home page of Canadian 'locavores' Alisa Smith and James MacKinnon, identifies your 100-mile eating radius and publishes success stories from all over the nation. <[www.100milediet.org](http://www.100milediet.org)>

**Local Legacies** is a compilation of local festivals and community events that celebrate the unique heritage of each U.S. state. Includes links to each annual event's. Website. <[www.loc.gov/folk/lifelroots/](http://www.loc.gov/folk/lifelroots/)>

**The Relocalization Network**, an initiative of the Post Carbon Institute, supports 125 existing groups worldwide that are dedicated to localizing their food and energy economies. It also helps create new groups. <[www.relocalfze.net](http://www.relocalfze.net)>

**Community-Wealth.org** provides information about community-based wealth strategies, policies, models, and innovations. The organization connects community corporations, co-ops and nonprofits to create a network of support and participation. <[www.Community-Wealth.org](http://www.Community-Wealth.org)>

**The Big Box Tool Kit** : Works to counter mega-retailers and rebuild local business by supplying information about big box stores, how to stop them, and how to get the neighbors involved, too. <[www.bigboxtoolkit.com](http://www.bigboxtoolkit.com)>

**Freecycle**: Connects you with people who might want whatever it is you want to recycle or who might be off loading the item you've been looking for. Everything, including membership, is free. Located in more than 3,000 cities, there's likely one in your community.  
<[www.freecycle.org](http://www.freecycle.org)>

**Local Harvest** : Lists by zip code CSAs, farmers markets, food co-ops, and restaurants featuring local foods. A great way to connect with local farmers and find local produce.  
< [www.localharvest.org](http://www.localharvest.org) >

**BALLE Network**: Marketplace connect local economies. If you can't get something locally, get it from another local economy by searching BALLE'S online Marketplace  
<[www.livingeconomies/org/](http://www.livingeconomies/org/)>

**Farm to School** helps establish local food programs in school cafeterias, and educates students about the benefits of eating local food. Includes a map of current programs in the U.S.  
<[www.fai-ntoschool.org](http://www.fai-ntoschool.org)>

**Slow Food** is an international organization devoted to protecting regional foods from homogenization.  
<[www.slowfood.com](http://www.slowfood.com)>



## Get Out of the Global Cage: Go Local for a Real Life

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Shilpa Jain recounts her experience of a week long cycle journey through Mewar, to build relationships, share skills and gather some learnings en route.

*"Bin Paise Cycle Yatra – Chale Chalo! Chale Chalo!"* (Bicycle journey without money – C'mon, let's go! Let's go!) We shouted euphorically to all the other road-dwellers: pedestrians, auto-rickshaw drivers, truck drivers, motorcyclists, cows, dogs, and of course, our beloved fellow bicyclists. In response, we were greeted with smiles, waves and expressions of puzzled surprise.

Thirteen friends and I had embarked on a week-long journey in Mewar, a southern region of Rajasthan, India. We carried neither food nor money with us nor medicines nor mobile phones. Our intention was to build relationships, physically work, share our skills and abilities, and (hopefully) receive food and shelter in return.

We came from the globalised world. What we wear, what we eat, what we do, what our entertainment is, how we transport ourselves – everything comes through money and from sources outside of ourselves (often, from very far outside). As predominantly urban people, we all understood how disconnected we had become from nature and the REAL world. Taking time to live close to our bodies,

to offer our labour for what we were consuming (though it could never be an equal exchange), to form relationships with people who still had the wisdom of simple and balanced living ... we felt it was not just timely learning, but necessary.

For me, the journey was incredible. We moved from place to place, dependent entirely on our body fuel (and with the help of an air pump and bicycle puncture-fixing kit). We worked in fields, helping to cut grass for animal fodder, to bring in the corn harvest, to prepare the land for wheat plantation, to collect tomatoes and peppers... We worked in homes, washing dishes, sweeping floors, cleaning up the animal shed, whitewashing walls... We gave openly of ourselves, sharing our energy and stories, thoughts and questions. And we learned to receive food and drink, shelter and care, all with humility and gratitude. Mother Nature not only challenged us with difficult uphill and terrifying downhill; She also bestowed gifts of water — streams, small lakes, large catchments — where we swam, rested and took in Her beauty and grace. She reset our clocks with her sunrise and sunset, and showed us the infinite diversity of open land. I felt replenished and deeply blessed by all this generosity.

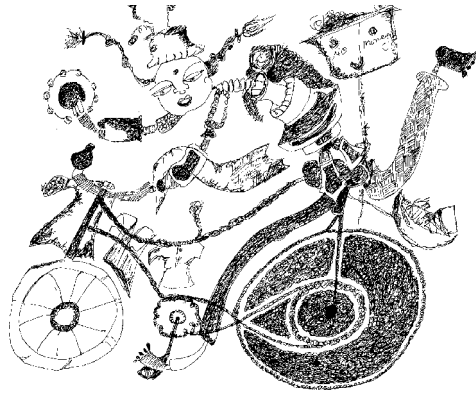
When I think of localisation, and what it means for our days and times, I remember this journey. It emerged from the efforts of countless people and creatures, all located in a specific area, who felt the urge to connect and share together. Through the cycle yatra, the 14 of us confronted our own dependency on the market and State and tried to shift power over our lives back to ourselves and to those immediately around us. We invited those we met along the way to join us in this process. Most significantly, each of us was intimately part of the

experience; that is, it had self-defined meaning and purpose, as well as a personal impact.

Re-valuing our own personal power, as well as the power of our immediate people and places, is a vital part of localisation. I feel this contrasts greatly with 'empowerment' — which entirely locates power in State and Market bodies (and legitimises them). As my friend Bhuwan Pathak says, the great irony in 'empowerment' is that the people with the least amount of power [i.e., those completely entangled in the globalised world] are trying to empower those with the most amount of power [i.e., those who live close to nature, dependent on their own bodies, minds and spirits]. Unlike 'empowerment', localisation roots power in the right place. Recognising that we can shift the course of our own lives, and the course of our communities, by changing our actions, perspectives and relationships — well, these are tremendously powerful actions that do not rely at all on institutional sanctioning.

There's another level to this, I feel. When we begin to trust in our locality, its tremendous power, beauty and potential become fully visible to us. It's a variation on the old saying, 'seeing is believing'. In localisation, believing is seeing! When we orient ourselves towards the local, we find whole new worlds of possibilities available to us. Hope then becomes more than a wish for the future; it is living, breathing, in our midst...

Hope is what the cycle yatra — a community media, in the true sense of the word — re-invoked in me. One evening, we landed up in Dadia village. The Bhil families who lived there took us in as their own family, feeding us in their exquisite mud homes, singing and



dancing with us late into the night, letting us work on their land with them in the morning. They had been living there for at least ten generations — and a lively, nearly self-reliant community was flourishing.

They, more or less, lived off the government and market map, rarely interacting with them, and if then, only on their own terms. It was inspiring for me to know that less than 60 km from my globalised reality, true power was alive and kicking.

How different is this from the demand for rights that is sweeping the NGO sector in India. Right to Education, Right to Work, Right to Food, Right to a Home — what is next? The Right to Breathe? To Sleep? To Love? I feel the rights-based approach is dangerous and needs to be named as such. Like ‘empowerment’, it undermines not just the local, but human dignity. In asking for rights, power is stripped from local people and the local context and is given to the government (and therefore, to the market). Government officials and corporate executives decide the policies which, in turn, determine how people will live. Then institutions — not people, not nature — become the sources of hope, promise and fulfillment.

Another irony: People are being sold to forces far beyond their control, and on top of it, being told that this makes them members in a healthy democracy! In the

rights discourse, all that is hoped for is that each person gets their piece of the pie. But no one is questioning the contents of that pie itself, how it came into being, how that pie sustains itself, what that pie destroys in order to exist.

In my view, instead of demanding rights, we can put our time, passion, energy and other resources towards nurturing real relationships — with each other across tough, human-made boundaries, and with the natural world. I feel there is hope in relationships, which can give us the energy we need to meet the challenges before us. Can we lift our hands and spirits towards that prayer of connecting and self-organising (and not divide and rule)? Not just as an aspect of localisation, but as a means to recover and rediscover our own humanity.

I believe there are infinite forms of community media we can utilise in this process, both the usual suspects (theatre, visual arts, puppets, music, dance, etc.) and the unusual suspects (natural farming, weaving, festivals, cycle yatras, etc.). A definition for me: anything which brings people together to share their experiences and perspectives, and to engage in self-defined meaningful dialogue, and can enable friendships to emerge, is community media. Or, to be quite literal, the ways (media) any size/ composition group (community) can share and connect.

For example, for the last few years, in Udaipur, we have been exploring the concept and practice of Zero Waste. Through various processes, we have been encouraging our families, our organisations, our neighbourhoods and our whole city to notice our waste and move towards taking care of it in healthy, ecologically-balanced and creative ways. Youth have helped to co-host workshops in their neighbourhoods on making

puppets, musical instruments, jewelry, handbags, cups, baskets, diaries, and more, all out of waste. This kind of *kabaad se jugaad* (upcycling) has become a regular feature of Shikshantar and gets to the heart of localisation: believing that nothing is waste, that each of us is a creative artist, and that we have tremendous power in our own hands.

We wanted to take things to another level and try to get to one of the roots of waste. In other words, to take actions to stop the *kabaad* (garbage) from being created in the first place. So one month, last September, in our local *subzi mandi* (vegetable market), we tried to invite people to stop using plastic carry bags and instead bring their own cloth bag (or take a cloth or paper bag from us for the short-term). Naively, we thought if we just opened our hearts (and our mouths) and asked people to change, they would. After all, everyone could see the damage plastic was doing: blocking drains, destroying the city's beauty, poisoning cows, poisoning the land, and poisoning the air when burned.

What happened surprised and disturbed us. About 50 per cent of the people we talked with were agreeable; they started bringing their own bags to the market. Another 35 per cent were apathetic. If we asked them, they would relinquish their plastic bag and take paper or cloth. If we didn't ask them, they would continue with their plastic. The remaining 15 per cent were angry and aggressive. They did not want to look at their own actions; instead, they told us, "Get the Government to ban plastic! Tell the *subziwallahs* (vegetable vendors) to stop using plastic! Go shut down the plastic factories! Who are you to ask me to change? I will do what I want!" Typically, it was a school-educated, car-driving employee of some kind who would give these responses.

What we learned was that we couldn't continue to do the same actions — of putting up posters and asking people to give up their bags — and expect that it would touch everyone. Worse, it wasn't leading to any deeper dialogue. We decided to try other things: a street play on "Polythenia"; making paper bags, coconut cups and rubber tire bags in the vegetable market; putting up stalls of herbal medicines, organic food, waste products; creating a giant cow made of plastic and waste in the middle of the market. Each of these efforts was a kind of media and enabled us to dialogue with different customers and vendors in the market on another level. I can't say we were successful with getting to the root of plastic bag use; but we did experience how varied and engaging community media could be, when it came out of our own questions, experiences and interests.

I feel that here I need to mention the Cult of the Comics. Years ago, Tagore wrote an essay asking Gandhi to think about the Cult of the Charkha. Tagore feared that people would become mechanical in their thinking and action. They would stop innovating and not examine the unique and creative role each of them could play in the Freedom Struggle. Worst of all, they would reduce the Freedom Struggle to just spinning the charkha, not recognising the deeper needs for questioning themselves (their lifestyles, habits, consumption, addictions, etc.) and for bringing their whole lives in greater alignment towards Swaraj.

Nowadays, many cults like these are occurring in the NGO sector, where people are told to (or tell themselves to) copy, replicate, scale-up and generally try to mass produce. One example of this are comics. As a so-called community media, comics are being

standardised to a form, in order to sell a message — usually about AIDS, domestic violence, or schooling. I have seen so many comics which look almost exactly the same, though they were created by different children. Somehow, the Cult (i.e., the NGO project) fails to recognise not just each person’s uniqueness, but also the special nature of each place. How can the media we create reflect that? This is not to say that issues aren’t important. But who is to say that female infanticide outweighs bird deaths (from cell phone towers), technical waste (from the digital revolution), toxic chemical industries (from Development), the war in Iraq (for fueling our Progress)? Who decides what issues matter to us and which don’t?

I am not saying to disregard issues if they are real, but the role of community media is different. Maybe its role is to get us to recognise our culpability in all the injustices and wrongs we see. Do we see our lives are tied up in one another’s? Does the medium invite us to change ourselves? Does it assist us to share our stories with others and give them open invitations to do the same? Does it strengthen our senses, sensitivity and sensibility? Even as I write this text, I feel that literacy and institutional forms are extremely limited in offering these openings to us.

That is yet another power of the local. We are face-to-face in it, while making media, while sharing it, while dialoguing through it. There is tremendous potential for understanding and friendship in those moments. And perhaps this is at the heart of what we hope to see in the world. Together, let’s find and create diverse media to bolster the local, build interdependent relationships among us and uncover paths out of the crises before us. *Chale chalo!*



## Life in Balance

Adam Smith might not like it, but an economy that worked for Pacific Islanders for thousands of years may have something to teach us about how to live today. Regina Gregory, an eco/ political economist illustrates the difference through an imaginary conversation between Adam Smith and “Bula Vinaka” a typical islander.

**Smith** : For several years I studied the economics of decolonization in the Pacific Islands. I came to the conclusion that what is really needed is the decolonization of economics itself. Pacific Islands culture (and indeed most indigenous cultures) is based on values that simply do not fit the neo-classical model of ‘economic rationality,’ based on materialism and individualistic self-interest as the main motivating forces. This culture — in particular its communal land tenure and lack of individualistic go-getting spirit — is often referred to as an impediment to economic ‘development’. The thinking seems to be that since the realities of Pacific societies do not fit the development model, the societies should be changed. But of course the reverse is true: the model must be changed to suit the society.

**Vinaka** : I call the more appropriate model ‘Pononomics,’ from the Hawaiian word *pono*, meaning goodness, righteousness, and balance. Apart from being more culturally appropriate, it is more ecologically sustainable as well.

**Smith** : The magic of the marketplace is this: Each person, acting in his own self-interest, maximize total welfare. The butcher provides you with a pork chop, not because he likes you, but because he wants your money. And you give him money because you want the pork chop. Both of you are better off, otherwise you would not have made the trade. This is replicated throughout the economy, and everyone is better off.

**Vinaka** : Each person acting in his own self-interest is stingy behavior. In our culture, when somebody has extra, they give it away. We even give away whole pigs, not just pork chops. The way to maximize welfare is to redistribute things, so that goods and money flow like water to where they are most needed.

**Smith** : Another magic of the marketplace is that supply and demand are always perfectly balanced. If there is shortage, the price will go up. Higher prices encourage producers to produce more, and so the shortage is alleviated. For instance, when the price of coconuts goes up, you produce more, right?

**Vinaka** : No, when the price of coconuts goes up, I produce less. Last year I had to cut 70 coconuts to pay my children's school fees. Now the price of coconuts has gone up, and I only have to cut 50! Somebody else can cut the others, and pay for their children's school, too.

**Smith** : But the magic of the market allows you to accumulate great wealth. It converts land and natural resources which are in themselves worthless into valuable goods.

**Vinaka** : Land is not worthless. It's priceless. It's where the spirits of our ancestors live. It's what we pass on to our children. We don't own it, we care for it. The 'owners' of land are the spiritual rights vested in people, not the people themselves. When we say venue, which is a piece of land, it means the land and people together.

**Smith** : But our system is so much more efficient. One man working all day can make, say, 14 pins. Now, by working together, each man doing a separate task (one man cutting wire, one man putting pinheads on), 14,000 pins could be produced each day.

**Vinaka** : Who needs 14,000 pins? For me, division of labor goes like this: alone, it takes all day to make 14 pins. Working together, we can make 14 pins in about 20 minutes. Then we can all go home and relax! Or go catch some fish for dinner. When you have mass production, you take too much, you eat up the earth and make the species extinct, like the sandalwood and the whales. You fill up our lagoons with trash from McDonald's.

**Smith** : But cleaning up that trash makes jobs, so everyone is wealthier. Every single transaction contributes to the gross national product, or wealth, and creates jobs. Aren't you worried about unemployment?

**Vinaka** : We are not particular eager to work hard all day every day. We are content to earn what is needed for basic necessities. You need a concept of enoughness. You need to value freedom and leisure. People don't want jobs; they want food and a roof. And if you can grow your own food and build your own roof, you don't need a job. It's pity that your 'education' has educated our children away from knowing how to live. It is unfortunate that your economics defines our happy life which has survived thousands of years, as a state of unemployment. As the rest of the worlds begin confronting the hazards of over — development, you may find that the Pacific Islanders know something about how to live.

(For details - [www.ecotippingpoints.org](http://www.ecotippingpoints.org))

## Towards Prosperous Local Economies

Wendell Berry

**If governments fail to protect their citizens, then those citizens must protect themselves by developing local economies, says Wendell Berry.**

Aware of industrialism's potential for destruction, as well as the considerable political danger of great concentrations of wealth and power in industrial corporations, American leaders developed, and for a while used, the means of limiting and restraining such concentrations, and of somewhat equitably distributing wealth and property. The means were: laws against trusts and monopolies, the principle of collective bargaining, the concept of one-hundred per cent parity between the land-using and the manufacturing economies, and the progressive income tax. And to protect domestic producers and production capacities, it is possible for governments to impose tariffs on cheap imported goods. These means are justified by the government's obligation to protect the lives, livelihoods and freedoms of its citizens. There is, then, no necessity or inevitability requiring our government to sacrifice the livelihoods of our small farmers, small business people, and workers, along with our domestic economic independence to the global free market. But now all of these means are either weakened or in disuse.

The global economy is intended as a means of subverting them.

In default of government protections against the total economy of the supranational corporations, people are where they have been many times before: in danger of losing their economic security and their freedom, both at once. But at the same time, the means of defending themselves belongs to them in the form of a venerable principle: powers not exercised by government return to the people. If the government does not propose to protect the lives, livelihoods and freedoms of its people, then the people must think about protecting themselves. How are they to protect themselves? There seems, really, to be only one way, and that is to develop and put into practice the idea of a local economy — something that growing numbers of people are now doing. For several good reasons, they are beginning with the idea of a local food economy. People are trying to find ways to shorten the distance between producers and consumers, to make the connections between the two more direct, and to make this local economic activity a benefit to the local community.

They are trying to learn to use the consumer economies of local towns and cities to preserve the livelihoods of local farm families and farm communities. They want to use the local economy to give consumers an influence over the kind and quality of their food, and to preserve and enhance the local landscapes. They want to give everybody in the local community a direct, long-term interest in the prosperity, health and beauty of their homeland. This is the only way presently available to make the total economy less total. It was once, I believe, the only way to make a national or a colonial economy less

total. But now the necessity is greater.

I am assuming that there is a valid line of thought leading from the idea of the total economy to the



idea of a local economy. I assume that the first thought may be a recognition of one's ignorance and vulnerability as a consumer in the total economy. As such a consumer, one does not know the history of the products that one uses. Where, exactly, did they come from? Who produced them? What toxins were used in their production? What were the human and ecological costs of producing them and then of disposing of them? One sees that such questions cannot be answered easily, and perhaps not at all. Though one is shopping amid an astonishing variety of products, one is denied certain significant choices. In such a state of economic ignorance, it is not possible to choose products that were produced locally or with reasonable kindness toward people and toward nature. Nor is it possible for such consumers to influence production for the better.

Consumers who feel a prompting toward land stewardship find that in this economy they can have no stewardly practice. To be a consumer in the total economy, one must agree to be totally ignorant, totally passive, and totally dependent on distant supplies and self-interested suppliers. And then, perhaps, one begins to see from a local point of view. One begins to ask: What is here, what

## Politics of Global Economy

Unsurprisingly, among people who wish to preserve things other than money — for instance, every region's native capacity to produce essential goods — there is a growing perception that the global free market economy is inherently an enemy to the natural world, to human health and freedom, to industrial workers, and to farmers and others in the land-use economies; and furthermore, that it is inherently an enemy to good work and good economic practice.

I believe that this perception is correct and that it can be shown to be correct merely by listing the assumptions implicit in the idea that corporations should be 'free' to buy low and sell high in the world at large. These assumptions, so far as I can make them out, are as follows:

- ◆ That stable and preserving relationships among people, places and things do not matter and are of no worth. That cultures and religions have no legitimate practical or economic concerns. That there is no conflict between the free market and political freedom, and no connection between political democracy and economic democracy.
- ◆ That there can be no conflict between economic advantage and economic justice. That there is no conflict between greed and ecological or bodily health.

- ◆ That there is no conflict between self-interest and public service. That the loss or destruction of the capacity anywhere to produce necessary goods does not matter and involves no cost.
- ◆ That it is all right for a nation's or a region's subsistence to be foreign-based, dependent on long-distance transport, and entirely controlled by corporations.
- ◆ That, therefore, wars over commodities — our recent Gulf War, for example — are legitimate and permanent economic functions.
- ◆ That this sort of sanctioned violence is justified also by the predominance of centralized systems of production supply, communications and transportation which are extremely vulnerable not only to acts of war between nations, but also to sabotage and terrorism.
- ◆ That it is all right for poor people in poor countries to work at poor wages to produce goods for export to affluent people in rich countries. That there is no danger and no cost in the proliferation of exotic pests, weeds and diseases that accompany international trade and that increase with the volume of trade.

- Wendell Berry

is in me, that can lead to something better? From a local point of view, one can see that a global free market economy is possible, only if nations and localities accept or ignore the inherent instability of a production economy based on exports and a consumer economy based on imports. An export economy is beyond local influence, and so too is an import economy. And cheap long-distance transport is possible only if granted cheap fuel, international peace, control of terrorism, prevention of sabotage, and the solvency of the international economy. Perhaps also one begins to see the difference between a small local business that must share the fate of the local community, and a large absentee corporation that is set up to escape the fate of the local community by ruining the local community.

So far as I can see, the idea of a local economy rests upon only two principles: *neighbourhood* and *subsistence*. In a viable neighbourhood, neighbours ask themselves what they can do or provide for one another, and they find answers that they and their place can afford. This, and nothing else, is the practice of neighbourhood. This practice must be in part charitable, but it must also be economic, and the economic part must be equitable; there is a significant charity in just prices. Of course, everything needed locally cannot be produced locally. But a viable neighbourhood is a community; and a viable community is made up of neighbours who cherish and protect what they have in common.

This is the principle of subsistence. A viable community, like a viable farm, protects its own production capacities. It does not import products that it can produce for itself. And it does not export local products until local

needs have been met. The economic products of a viable community are understood either as belonging to the community's subsistence or as surplus, and only the surplus is considered to be marketable abroad. A community, if it is to be viable, cannot think of producing solely for export, and it cannot permit importers to use cheaper labour and goods from other places to destroy the local capacity to produce goods that are needed locally. In charity, moreover, it must refuse to import goods that are produced at the cost of human or ecological degradation elsewhere. This principle applies not just to localities, but to regions and nations as well.

The principles of neighbourhood and subsistence will be disparaged by the globalists as 'protectionism' — and that is exactly what it is. It is a protectionism that is just and sound, because it protects local producers and is the best assurance of adequate supplies to local consumers. And the idea that local needs should be met first and only surpluses exported does not imply any prejudice against charity toward people in other places or trade with them. The principle of neighbourhood at home always implies the principle of charity abroad. And the principle of subsistence is in fact the best guarantee of giveable or marketable surpluses.

This kind of protection is not 'isolationism'. Albert Schweitzer, who knew well the economic situation in the colonies of Africa, wrote nearly sixty years ago: "Whenever the timber trade is good, permanent famine reigns in the Ogowe region because the villagers abandon their farms to fell as many trees as possible." We should notice especially that the goal of production was "as many ... as possible." And Schweitzer makes my point exactly: "These

people could achieve true wealth if they could develop their agriculture and trade to meet their own needs." Instead they produced timber for export to the world economy, which made them dependent upon imported goods that they bought with money earned from their exports. They gave up their local means of subsistence, and imposed the false standard of a foreign demand ("as many trees as possible") upon their forests. They thus became helplessly dependent on an economy over which they had no control.

Such was the fate of the native people under the African colonialism of Schweitzer's time. Such is, and can only be, the fate of everybody under the global colonialism of our time. Schweitzer's description of the colonial economy of the Ogowe region is in principle not different from the rural economy now in Kentucky or Iowa or Wyoming. A total economy for all practical purposes is a total government. The free trade, which from the standpoint of the corporate economy brings unprecedented economic growth, from the standpoint of the land and its local populations, and ultimately from the standpoint of the cities, is destruction and slavery. Without prosperous local economies, the people have no power and the land no voice.

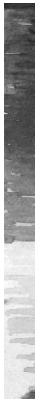
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## A Different Perspective

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**The ability to regenerate without the help of institutions and professionals is, in truth, localisation, writes Munir Fasheh.**



What characterises children most is their immense attentiveness to their surroundings, their ability to draw aliveness from that relationship, and an ability to use energy to engage in self-defined actions (mainly play) driven by personal inner force (mainly joy and pleasure).

This is true of almost all children — until, of course, we flood them with distractions, mainly created and disseminated by institutions and professionals, such as manufactured toys, educational curricula, video games, TV programmes, and commercial books and magazines. These distractions gradually rob children of their abilities and tear apart the 'social spiritual fabric' they have woven with their surroundings (people, communities, culture, and nature).

Are these characteristics 'local' or 'global'? These words themselves are a creation of the mind, of modern institutions and professionals; children don't use them. These words themselves are distractions and distortions of the

integrity of life. When two children from different cultures meet, it takes just a few minutes for them to weld their cultures in the common place and time that both share. The child-stranger is not someone to avoid, but a source of excitement, wonder, and joy that appeal to children's inquisitiveness.

Children never see life dissected between local and global, or between 'us' and 'them'. Such words (that usually come in the form of adjectives and categories) do not make any sense to them. They are shallow at best, and have no connection to the reality as children experience and live it.

Robbing people and communities of their 'natural' abilities (including the ability to regenerate) is a sign of modern times and is, mainly, the work of institutions. People need pills in order to sleep; modern farmers need to buy new seeds every year; people need an entertainment industry to flood them constantly with ready and pre-packaged expressions; officials and professionals provide meanings, knowledge, and worth; and modern people need institutions in order to learn, heal, raise children, and care for one another. The real distinction, then, is between the ability to re-generate aspects in self-defined, self-ruled ways (which has been the case for thousands of years) and needing institutions and professionals to take care of such aspects. I would like to suggest that we take this distinction – rather than global vs. local – as our language and reference in referring to anything.

I would like to tell a story that happened to me ten years ago as an illustration of this distinction. During the academic year 1997-98, I was a visiting scholar at the

Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University. I did not have an income and my wife's salary was not enough for us to live on. In order to survive, we had to change certain aspects in our ways of living. One thing that proved to be helpful during that period (which I still practice) was to include dandelion (which was naturally available in the garden most of the year) in my daily diet. It was a new discovery for me! Dandelion — for those who don't know — is a wild plant, abundant around the world, very rich in nutrients, and every part (the leaves, the flowers, and the roots) is edible.

In short, it is nutritious, abundant and free. The question of whether dandelion is global or local is meaningless — one can argue it is global because it is everywhere and is nutritious to all, and one can also argue it is local because it grows locally and is nutritious to people in local communities.

The story had another twist to it related to the distinction between the ability to regenerate and needing institutions. One day, my wife, Carmen, saw me pick dandelion leaves and eat them directly from the ground. She said, "Don't let neighbours see you; they will think you are weird." The image of seeing neighbours eating potato chips immediately jumped into my mind and I said, "I see them opening shiny little bags and eating something that looks weird. Who should be embarrassed? I who eat something which is natural, healthy, organic; abundant and free, or they who eat something which is unnatural, unhealthy, artificial, manufactured and costly?"

The story points to two worlds that embody totally different ways of living, perceiving and relating to one's



surroundings — two worlds that coexist in the world today, yet are worlds apart: one world represented by dandelions, the other by potato chips. The main difference is that the world of potato chips needs institutions and professionals to be produced, while the world of dandelions is a natural part of the miracle of Creation. What characterises the world of dandelions is the ability of self-generation. A million bags of potato chips cannot produce one extra bag, while the seeds of one dandelion can produce a million plants!

What dandelion needs in order to grow and flourish is the working of nature and protection of the environment — mainly from our onslaught. In contrast, potato chips need institutions, professionals, and artificial ingredients for its manufacturing. If institutions and professionals are needed in relation to dandelions, that need is always related to killing the plant! They are needed, for example, to produce chemicals effective in killing the roots. They are needed to transport such chemicals, advertise them, sell them, and get rid of the poisonous containers in which they were stored. They are needed to test the effectiveness of the chemicals, to give licenses, certify people, and decide who is qualified to produce, transport, and sell. They are also needed to conduct contests and give awards to those who prove their products are better killers of this most wonderful plant! What makes things worse is that potato chips make us blind to the abundant existence of dandelions — most people don't even see them, recognise them, or eat them.

Over the years, I have become increasingly cautious of words that distract us from what is real and fundamental. 'Local/national' universities help bring 'global diseases' into local communities; 'local/national' banks help suck out money from local communities and deposit them in global multinational banks; and 'local/national' cola is still harmful. The adjective "Palestinian" used today to describe education, curriculum, police, and TV in Palestine, is used to cover up and make us blind to what is going on in reality. The famous quote of Gandhi — concerning his worry that the British would leave but their institutions stay — is relevant here: changing the adjective does not change the nature of the beast. We are fooled by connotations of such adjectives and forget what they make invisible. Phrases

like 'national bank' or 'Palestinian education' give the illusion of being local but, in reality, they cover up what they rob people of. The first robs people of their money, and the second robs people of their abilities.

In short, the question we should ask is not whether something is local or not, but whether it is self-defined, self-controlled, re-generative, and naturally available to all in the community, and whether people control all its aspects. It is possible in today's world, for the farmer to be local, for the soil to be local, for the produce to be sold and bought in local markets, but if the seeds are genetically modified and, thus, not self-generating and not controlled by people but, rather, by institutions that control their production, distribution, availability, and prices, then all other things being local mean nothing.

Using seeds that have been self-generating for thousands of years; raising chicken that can survive without special feed and special conditions; sharing stories about what is happening in the community; story-telling by grandmothers; playing with elements of nature; singing, dancing, walking, conversing, learning, mutual caring; and vernacular languages and subsistence living are all examples of regeneration and self-defined actions.

A trend, currently fashionable throughout the world, is to encourage people to express experiences and tell personal stories. I have been part of this thrust since 1971. Over the years, however, I realised that such a call could be naïve because it could easily be co-opted. By expressing personal experiences and stories using dominant words, meanings, and measures, we would be carrying and spreading the virus of rootless words without realising it

and, thus, deepening the defeat within. That slowly led me to the following conviction in relation to the source and reference of the words, meanings, perceptions, and worth of people. I realised that there is a difference between expressing personal experiences and stories using dominant words and meanings, and expressing them using words and meanings that stem from contemplating on what one is experiencing in light of the place, community, context, and culture that one lives in and interacts with. In other words, how we tell a story or express an experience is determined, to a large extent, by one's reference — the source of words, meanings, perceptions, and values one uses. Thus, we need to question not only master narratives, but also our personal narratives when we tell them using dominant words and meanings. The way I express this conviction is by stressing the importance of co-authoring meanings and measures, and encouraging people to avoid — as much as possible — using words for which they have no personal meanings.

Recently, a Palestinian approached me to see how we can cooperate on a project he is working on: "one laptop per child". I said that I am an advocate of "one *tablah* (drum) per child". The *tablah* is made of local materials and can be available in one form or another to every child (children even use kitchen pots and pans as *tablaks*). They learn from people who embody the *tablah* in their lifestyles. Compared to *tablaks*, learning how to use computers is easy and mainly mechanical; it is the work of programmed minds that use tools and services but have no control over their manufacturing or use.

If pressed to use the word 'local' I would always link it to feeling a sense of community, which usually

embodies a connection to a place/ land. The place I feel part of most is the Jerusalem-Ramallah-Jericho area in Palestine, where — since I was a child, until I was 56 years old — I walked through the valleys, the hills, the fields, and drank from its springs and swam in its streams, with family, friends, and classmates. When I was in elementary school, the principal Khalil Abu Rayya used to take the whole school (staff, teachers and students) once a week walking around Ramallah and Jerusalem. That kind of connection to a place, to people, to smells, to nature and to one another is totally different from current lifeless, rootless, and meaningless words such as identity.

Development and consumption patterns of living contributed to cutting one's connections with the surroundings. It is worth mentioning here that, since 1971, I have been engaged in actions/ activities that are self-generating, available to all, and controlled by people and the community. In particular, that spirit characterised the decade of the seventies and the first Palestinian *intifada*, and was manifested by the vitality and revitalisation of people and communities. I tried to embody that spirit in my work within the Arab Education Forum.

Just as the soil of the earth does not make things local, if the seeds are genetically modified and controlled from outside, the soil of culture would not be local, if it is contaminated with rootless words, meanings, perceptions, and expressions. The concept of 'change', which is popular today, is an example of this connection to the 'soil of culture'. The Zapatistas' motto "changing traditions in traditional ways" is very inspiring in reflecting this rootedness.

One aspect of 'local' that I have been personally involved in is related to generating meaning, understanding, and worth. Meanings, understandings, and the worth of people have to stem from the soil of the community, the soil of culture, and from harmony within the person and with one's experiences and surroundings. Without them, 'local' can easily be used as a connotation, but with no denotation or reference to anything that is self-generating, self-defined, and available to all. I usually encourage people not to use a word that has no personal meaning to them (i.e. if they have not co-authored its meaning), if they have no experience or story that provides a basis for that meaning. The same is true in relation to one's worth.

A central aspect in every person's life is the source of one's worth. If it comes from an official committee or institution or from professionals, then no matter how 'local' the people who decide the worth of the person are, the worth of the person is not rooted locally. The principle that I try to live by was articulated 1400 years ago by Imam Ali. It is embedded in his statement: *qeematu kullimri'en ma yuhsenoh* (the worth of a person is what s/he *yuhsen*). *Yuhsen* in Arabic has at least five meanings: the first meaning refers to how well the person does what s/he does (the knowledge and skills dimension) the second refers to how beautiful and how pleasing what s/he is to the senses (the aesthetic dimension) the third meaning refers to how good s/he is to the community (the ethical dimension) the fourth refers to how much one gives of self (the emotional/giving dimension, as opposed to only taking or, what is worse, consuming; and the fifth meaning refers to how respectful of people and ideas the person is in discussions – the social spiritual fabric dimension.)



Now, is this principle local or universal? It is not a relevant question but if pressed to use the terms, I would say that it is universal in its inspiration, and local in its meaning (in the place and time where people are guided by it to feel the worth of a person).

I would never advocate localism in a way that would deprive the person from seeing the diversity of the worlds that exist in this world. One's relationship to the surroundings in today's world can be nurtured tremendously through inspirations one gets from others around the globe. Since January 2001 (i.e. since my first trip to a place outside the Arab world, Europe, and North America), I have been immensely enriched by people and their ways, perceptions, and actions in places like India, Mexico, Iran, Pakistan, Mali, Malaysia, Zimbabwe...

My approach is not to combat universalism as much as to be attentive and alive, and to bring out the diversity, richness, beauty, and inspiration that still exist in multitudes of communities around the world. My reference is the wisdom that is embedded in these communities. Much of what we refer to as local (such as knowledges) is invisible and cannot be taught through our methods. When we use dominant languages and concepts to describe them, we usually end up killing their spirit, essence and vitality. People whom we refer to as 'local' are the carriers of wisdom, and they are the ones that are sustaining the world. Hope and sustainability dwell in them because their ways and patterns of living are much more in harmony with nature and creation.

One area of the modern way of living, where wisdom is totally absent, is related to the pattern and level of consumption. The world today (mostly rich nations and those who have adopted their ways of living — those referred to as 'global' people) is consuming almost 30 per cent more ecological resources than the Earth produces. Just imagine if those labeled 'underdeveloped' consume at the level of those labeled 'developed'! We would have run out of resources, and life would have vanished, a long time ago.

In line with the above, I would like to suggest that we use verbs and stories (including stories about how we live and exchange happenings) rather than adjectives (such as 'local media') to describe what we are doing.



## Connecting to Communities

‘In Separational Philosophy, the individual is encouraged to take, take, take and this ceaseless taking leads to nothing but anxiety. We live in anxious times: fear, insecurity and mistrust rule our lives. This is because we have lost the way of deep relationship with the Other, and our sense of belonging to a place and a community. The struggle for power and wealth has been with us since we left the Garden of Eden. This is not a new phenomenon. But in earlier times, the value of tribes, communities, families and religions enabled and supported an ethos of reciprocity and mutuality rather than the tendencies to control and dominate. But now, in the age of modernity and materialism, the values of relational thinking have been swept away, and aggressive attitudes are respected. To remedy the situation we need to return to ‘only connect’. All existence is a participatory process. To see the relationships which are the basis of life is to see the whole picture. Nothing can be understood without its context and its relatedness to other things.’

- Satish Kumar, *You Are Therefore I Am*, 2002

## Radio - Tapping the Airwaves

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Preeti Soni and Stalin K talk about the community radio initiative in the district of Kutch, Gujarat.

Kutch, the largest district of Gujarat, has distinct geographical features. The drought prone land, ravaged further by the government’s well-intentioned but incongruous efforts, has suffered many ecological problems. This has had serious effects on people and their livelihoods. Destruction of grazing land has had a direct impact on livelihood sources like dry farming and cattle breeding. That, and the 2001 earthquake, have forced people to migrate or look for alternative occupations.

While men folk had to migrate, women were forced into taking on income-generating activities. The women are mostly ill-literate; many face restrictions on mobility, and so many took up home-based occupations. The traditional skills of embroidery and crafts became the main source of livelihood. The transition to a crafts-based economy meant a change in the socio-economic and family decision-making structures. By virtue of their skill in handicrafts, women became the principal earners in the family. Economic exploitation at the hands of middlemen

continued, however. Women realise that they now have to contend with increasing social insecurity, stemming from complex economic-ecological problems. This is compounded by constant alienation from access to all kinds of resources and information. Lack of adequate nutrition, early and frequent child bearing, the double burden of household responsibility and wage labour, and domestic violence further threaten them. Severe patriarchal norms and behavior are taking perverse forms in the face of greater economic pressures on men, and due to greater resistance from women.

### **Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan**

The Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS) was set up in 1989 to act as an independent organisation of rural women. It decided to work towards developing women's capabilities and harnessing their collective strength. Women have now become more able to access and define their own and communities' needs. With a network of women's leadership groups at the village level (*sangathans*), women are articulating the need to equip themselves with more information and skills in order to intervene successfully in the larger social and political process. KMVS has concentrated primarily in remote and less accessible villages. The idea of 'Ujjas Mahiti Kendra' (Ujjas Information Center) took shape. The Mundra Mahila Vikas Sangathan established Ujjas Mahiti Kendra and started publishing a newsletter named 'Ujjas'. Its principal objective was to document and disseminate different types of information among village people, particularly women.

### **Towards Radio**

But Ujjas had to face a big hurdle; the literacy level in Kutch is very low. And since Kutch spans a vast

area, the distance between villages make reading/writing activities difficult. Enter radio. This appeared to be an appropriate medium for nomads whose main occupation is animal breeding and herding.

After the government made a provision for 33% reservation for women in Panchayat bodies in 1995, *mahila sarpanchs* (women leaders) began to demand training and proper guidance, to make the environment more conducive. Hence, a radio program 'Kujal Paanje Kutchji' (Sarus Cranes of our Kutch) started its broadcast from All-India Radio, Bhuj station, in December 1999. The focus of the serial was the participation of women in political processes, specifically panchayats at the village level. By exploring the entry of women from the private to the public domain, we were able to generate a debate on gender issues on the one hand, and on democratic governance on the other. Some of the gender-related issues raised in the serial, so far, have been women's leadership and governance, female foeticide, harassment of brides for dowry, unnatural deaths and suicides of women at their in-laws, pressure on women to produce boys, maternal mortality and disregard for natural environment, cyclical drought and lack of water resources.

Another program, Kutch Kuchhato Kutch Kuchhto, was a documentary module that featured interviews, a committed space to the voices of people from Kutch. This section also helped in disseminating critical information. Interviews, whether in the field or in the studio, used to be recorded by a team of nine village-based reporters. This program was produced by KMVS, directed by Drishti Media Collective, a media NGO based in Ahmedabad and written by Paresh Naik, an Ahmedabad-based writer and

filmmaker. The Center for Alternatives in Education, Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (IIM-A) provided support in conducting village-based surveys to assess the impact of the radio program on the ground.

### **Underscoring Kutchiyat: Language and Culture**

The regional identity of Kutch is distinct and well-defined and is an emotional identification point for most Kutchis. Hence, this program was planned as a vehicle for public articulation and expression of Kutchi identity. The Kutchi dialect has no written form. The spaces for cultural expression in Kutchi language are few and shrinking further. A preliminary village-based survey conducted by KMVS to assess the media habits of rural Kutchis revealed that there was a great demand amongst audiences for listening to Kutchi programme. Hence, our choice of language was Kutchi.

The choice of making the serial in the Kutchi language was amply vindicated by 1,560 postcards that the program received from the audience, mostly women. The Center for Alternatives in Education, IIM-A was involved in researching and designing the listenership and feedback surveys for this programme. Listenership amongst radio-owners in Kutch went up to 80 per cent.

Then, KMVS, with the support of Drishti Media Collective, started a bi-weekly broadcast of a new radio program called 'Tu Jiyaro Ai' [To be alive!] in March 2001 in the aftermath of the earthquake. The program was in a magazine format and featured a range of interviews. Songs and profiles were created to capture and grapple with the enormous complexity and range of issues. The earthquake affected were invited to air and share their concerns about rehabilitation.

Community radio can report, highlight and reflect highly localised issues, news and cultures, nurture intimate audience communities and reinforce local identities. It can contribute to a public discourse and encourage debate and introspection by society about itself: its social mores, attitudes and problems.

It was within this philosophical frame that the Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan and Drishti Media Collective took up its community radio initiative in 1999. Kutch Lokji Vaani was the third program produced for broadcast in All-India Radio's sponsored program category in July 2002. It was to present a mirror to society, remind people of their uplifting past, provide a platform to question government's malfunctioning policies, and address the community in the aftermath of the earthquake and rehabilitation efforts. To address these requirements, three separate capsules were designed for Kutch Lokji Vaani:

- Pardafash [Expose] was planned to unearth socio-political scams, irregularities and corruption in rehabilitation work;
- Musafari [Travelogue] was the drama section of this magazine;
- Lokvani [People's Voice] segment was incorporated to encourage greater participation in village development and social change.

For the Musafari module, many places were visited, in order to extract locals' views of a particular legend or folktale. Many elders and poet-historians of people were consulted. The songs, proverbs and anecdotes were identified for each episode and suitable music was recorded. For music documentation, music trips were carried out recording songs sung among different communities on different legends and historical figures.

For the Pardafash segment, written documentation was necessary to support statements made. Details and figures regarding the damage and the reconstruction activities after the earthquake were collected and frequently referred to. We relied on many sources to identify issues, e.g. our reporters, the sangathan members, SETU workers, newspaper, letters and phone calls.

For the Lokvani segment, first-hand information by reporters mattered. Most issues came up during their routine village visits. The reporters usually played the role of recorder, and the participants' views got preference. One of the objectives of this radio initiative was to highlight issues that are important and serious, but people are reluctant to talk about that in the open.

The Musafari segment was designed as a travelogue. The team of the reporters was on a tour of Kutch, visiting its historical, religious and cultural spots. They were guided by imaginary figures — Vayro (the wind), Dharti (the land) and the Kala Dungar — to various places, transcending time and space to witness important historical events. The selected legends and folktales were classic examples of leadership, communal harmony, argument between tradition and modernity, and firm decision-making. All stories were analysed from the gender viewpoint and given present-day meaningful context. For example, the legend of Kanthadnath of Kanthkot is relevant for his advice not to make multi-stored building, since now Kutch has been identified as seismically-active zone.

The program also highlighted the Sufi traditions prevailing in Kutch, which are responsible for creating and sustaining the congenial condition for communal harmony



and strong bond of fraternity among Kutchis. Moreover, it has helped in retaining the liberal and receptive culture. Kutch has many love stories, traditionally sung in different traditions, with Sufi connotations. Sasai-Punu's is the most famous of all. Based in the backdrop of Sind and Kutch, it is a tale of star-crossed lovers. It also symbolizes the relation between a soul and the Almighty.

The other aspect was the gender conscious view of the program. Different examples projected women as good leaders and firm decision makers. The story of Jethiba shows a woman's struggle to stick to her decision not to marry. The lady belonged to the Darbar community, in which women could not even think to depart from the traditions. It was after this incident that the government was compelled to change its policy regarding women's rights. The story of Rugariba from Bhadrashwar justifies her decision to leave her husband, once he doubts her.

When the Pardafash capsule was conceived, its primary objectives were to unearth the scams occurred in the rehabilitation process after the earthquake. It sought to provide a platform for the suppressed and the poor to express their concerns. People were not satisfied with the government's number or with its degree of surveillance. So another survey, popularly known as 'Resurvey', was conducted.

As the program progressed further, other issues started finding their place in Pardafash. Panchayat was one of them, especially the control of male members on the governing procedures, even where there are women sarpanchs: how women are made to be rubber stamps, and how little space they have for self-expression and development. The cases of villages like Punadi, Nana Layja, Deshalpar Gunthli, Mindiyana, were discussed, taking different angles, exploring the politics of pressure building, caste structure, family restrictions, distancing from information and vested interested of *sarpanch patis* (those women's husbands) who promote them to this post in order to govern the Panchayat.

The Lokvani module was designed to increase the participation of the audience. It happened through interviews, debates, opinion polls, discussions... Stories covering about seventy-five villages were broadcast. This segment also contained a brief profile of a village, "Gothji Gaal". Villagers' efforts for reconstruction in the aftermath of earthquake were appreciated. People in Chhotapar helped in building a water tank; Kankhoi villagers managed to repair the damaged dam by themselves.

### Overall Impact

In KMVS' radio program, audience participation and its scope have increased as time passes. The reporters have a nice rapport in the villages. This direct relationship with the audience not only provides us with an authentic feedback system, but also helps us in knowing the needs and likings of the people of Kutch. The demand of these programmes is so high that the audience assures to pay for its airtime. They put forth the idea of forming groups in villages ("listener clubs") to be in direct contact with the reporters and with the studio.

During these four years of radio programming and communicating with people of Kutch, we have learnt many things. We realised radio's affinity with oral, non-literate cultures; it can easily reflect and generate debate on local concerns, needs, priorities and issues. This highly localised programming brings pluralism into our broadcast culture; a radio program in a local language affirms local cultural identities.

## Break Free of the Corporate Economy

Has the cash economy swallowed up your life? Here are some ways to extract some of your time and “life energy” from the cash economy.

**1) Reduce debt** : If you can't pay cash, don't buy it. Practice being mindful about what you buy and why.

**2) Do it yourself** : Grow food, pick berries, can and preserve food, make wine, bake bread. Make or repair clothes, furniture, and gifts. Create your own entertainment. Walk, bike, run, or play basketball instead of joining a fitness club.

**3) Share & exchange** : Take care of neighbor kids and elders. Play music, sing, act in local theatre, write poems, hold art shows. Exchange haircuts for applesauce, bike repair for massage, language tutoring for babysitting.

**4) Reduce waste & pollution**: Weatherize your home or apartment. Reduce your car usage, or get rid of a car.

**5) Buy local** : Run buy-local campaigns, print stickers, publish or post a directory of local businesses. Acknowledge business owners who foster the well-being of the environment, employees, and the whole community. Convert public funds from luring outside corporations to supporting local businesses.

**6) Start a new local business** : Start a food market, credit union, wifi network, or even an electricity co-op. Explore ownership options like cooperatives, nonprofits, for-profits, or single proprietorships.

