

In harmony with SWARAJ:

Living in Harmony with the Spirit of Abundance

Introduction

When I first got Alok's email concerning writing about a personal journey towards Swaraj, I was already writing about "Education as teaching and learning within the perspective of abundance," for the UNESCO-Civil Society Seminar, "Alternative Discourse in Education," at the World Education Forum in January 2003 in Porto Alegre, Brazil. During my visit to India in December 2002 and the various discussions that took place there, I started seeing the relationship and convergence of my approach with Swaraj. When I look at what I have been doing since 1971, I realize how much that falls within what later I saw as working within the perspective of abundance. I realized that living and working in accordance with the spirit of abundance is in harmony with the spirit of Swaraj because the meaning I am using for the word 'abundant' is what is available, freely and easily, to most (if not to all) people in a particular place, available to them as people, community, culture or in the immediate environment. This, I believe, is basic for self-rule, self-organization, and self-learning. In this article, I will describe some of what I have done that embodied the spirit of abundance.

My point in this article is to open the imagination to possible convergences among many ways and approaches that stem from various settings and cultures, regardless of the words that people use to refer to such approaches, or even whether they have words for them or not. My point is to stress the importance of starting not with a ready idea or concept (even if that idea is as inspiring as Swaraj) but by being fully attentive to one's surroundings, by being in harmony with one's convictions, and by constantly reflecting on and trying to express one's experiences (without forgetting the extremely important fact that most of what we experience and understand cannot be expressed in words!) I mean by "fully attentive" attentive with one's mind, heart, soul, senses and body, regardless of whether what we are attentive to is visible or invisible. Starting with a concept (instead of life), no matter how inspiring that concept might be, has serious drawbacks. It

reflects an approach that lacks spirit and aliveness; it considers concepts as superior to life; it treats actions as implementations of theories and as manifestations of ready meanings and models. By starting with a concept, there is always the tendency and danger to fall into mechanical, technical, detached ways of thinking and doing. In contrast, by working in harmony with one's experiences and inner convictions and by being attentive to one's surroundings, we may be surprised – as many of us did in Udaipur –to discover that our hearts converge around certain universal principles while our minds, contexts and work diverge totally. From such divergence, beautiful and invigorating conversations and discussions emerged. In other words, life (and not concepts) forms the starting point and the reference in how we perceive and understand humanity and its relationship to the world. In my case, for example, the projects I have been involved in and which I describe in this article took place before I even heard of the terms abundance and Swaraj!

Abundance vs. Scarcity: an analogy

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 and consuming. One thing that proved to be helpful during that period (which I still practice) was to include dandelion in my daily diet. [Dandelion – for those who don't know – is a wild plant, which is abundant almost everywhere, and which is very rich in nutrients and every part of which is edible (the leaves, the flowers, and the roots).]

There were two ways in which my wife, Carmen, entered the story. As a good American, she used to dig and uproot this "most undesirable weed" that grows everywhere and ruins everything (which usually means ruining the grass in the landscape)! I had to plead with my wife in order not to dig it out. The second way in which my wife entered the story was through noticing me picking dandelion leaves and eating them directly from the ground. She said, "Don't let any of the neighbors see you. They will think you are weird." The image of seeing neighbors eating potato chips immediately jumped into my head and I said, "I see them opening shiny colorful little bags and eat something that looks weird. Who should be embarrassed: I who eat something which is natural, healthy, organic, and abundant, or they who eat something which is unnatural, unhealthy,

artificial, manufactured, and costly?" [Since then, Carmen and I have been thinking of writing a small book that revolves around that story, because it embodies two totally different ways of living and perceiving, two ways that exist in the modern world – but are world apart! We haven't done it yet but some day we will.]

This story about potato chips (PCH) and dandelions (DNL) clarifies the difference between living in a way that is governed by the perspective of scarcity and living in harmony with the spirit of abundance. When I look back at what I have done since 1971, I feel that I have been embodying the spirit of abundance in my thinking and work, although I never saw it in these terms until I read Illich (in January 2000 at the recommendation of Gustavo Esteva). Illich clarifies how modern institutions are built around the scarcity perspective; i.e., scarcity is basic in the functioning of institutions and professionals, in a world governed by the values of control, winning, profit, greed and elitism.

As I mentioned earlier, I am using the word 'abundant' to refer to what people, the community, and culture have; i.e., to what is available to people freely and easily. And I am using the word 'scarce' whenever institutions and professionals are needed to produce a commodity or execute an action (regardless of whether that commodity or action takes a material, social, cultural or intellectual form). In this sense, DNL is abundant while PCH is scarce.

All what DNL needs in order to grow is the working of nature and suitability of the environment. In contrast, PCH needs institutions, professionals and artificial ingredients for its manufacturing. In fact, when institutions and professionals are needed in the case of DNL, they are needed to kill the plant, and not to help it grow. They are needed, for example, to produce chemicals that would be effective in killing dandelions; they are needed to transport such chemicals, to advertise them, to sell them, and to get rid of the containers in which they were stored; they are needed in order to test the quality of the chemicals, give licenses etc. In addition, special institutions are needed to certify those professionals who are qualified to produce, transport, and sell. Companies would compete as to whose product is more effective and whose ways are more permanent in killing dandelions. A committee may even be created to conduct contests and give awards to those who prove to be better killers of this most wonderful plant!

Personal experiences that embodied the spirit of abundance

Education, in its present dominant form, is built around the perspective of scarcity. Institutions and professionals are needed at every step of the way. Learning and knowledge become commodities that need institutions and professionals in order to produce, control, assess, and deliver them. The claim that it is impossible to learn without them becomes, in time, a popular belief.

I have been working since 1971 with the spirit of abundance, not because I was conscious of it but because of the same reason I started to eat DNL: I could not afford manufactured commodities! I had to depend on what was available at the time and place where I happened to be. Over the years, I increasingly became aware of the tremendous amount and diversity of what is available! Institutions and professionals usually suppress or ignore or even become unaware of what is available simply because they can neither make money nor control people when they deal with what is freely available. The conditions under which I worked most of my life – living under Israeli military occupation – forced me to look for what was available in people, in the community and in culture. Building on what was available was the only way to do things; otherwise, I would not have been able to do them. Looking for and building on what is available became a habit and a principle in my life.

In this sense, being creative and innovative in working with what is naturally or culturally or humanly available is different from being creative and innovative in working with manufactured things – where creativity is mainly technical and motivated by forces from the outside, mainly institutional and market forces and values. Under the abundance perspective, creativity and innovativeness spring out of involvement in life with all one's being, and working within its real boundaries. [It is worth mentioning here that some of the most creative, insightful and inspiring writings of the 20th century were written in prisons, where what was available/ abundant to prisoners were their memories, reflections, articulations – and of course abundance of time!]

The personal experience that I would like to start with is when I was growing up in Ramallah, Palestine, in the 1950s. Kids in every neighborhood would

clear up a space and change it into a soccer field where we would play every day, anytime we pleased; no permits or monthly fees were needed. In addition, we felt free to change the rules as we pleased and as we saw fit. No child/ kid was excluded; even when there were children who were too young to play, they were allowed to play as "empty peanuts," which meant that they were not full players, but could run around in the field. That beautiful spirit (which embodied abundance) was slowly replaced by clubs, official playgrounds, and by professionals who told kids "this is wrong" and "that is right." Playing soccer started shifting into the scarcity paradigm, controlled by institutions and professionals, and requiring high fees. It became exclusive to those who could afford them. Under such conditions, a new "class structure" naturally developed. Some started feeling less than others according to some outside measure. Playfulness and joy soon gave way to control, winning and elitism.

The difference between the two ways of playing reflects the difference between living with universal rules and living with universal principles. The size of the soccer field, number of players, positions, movements etc, are part of universal rules that are arbitrary. Love to play is a universal principle that applies to all people, everywhere. Swaraj and living with the spirit of abundance embody principles; the rules change according to place and time and to people engaged in living. Wisdom is connected to principles; science and math (as conceived by people like Descartes and Bacon) are more connected to rules and laws.

Without being conscious of it, it was probably experiences such as the free flexible soccer spaces that formed the roots of what I did later, both in my teaching and my work in general. My first "experiment" in working with the spirit of abundance was in 1971, when I started the voluntary work movement in the West Bank in Palestine (the region has been under Israeli military occupation since 1967). What is available in other countries to young people (such as shopping malls and consumer commodities) was, fortunately, not available for young Palestinians living in the West Bank. Thus, the idea of the voluntary movement was attractive and meaningful. What was needed for voluntary work was available: our hands, feet, energy, time and surroundings. People would gather every Friday and Sunday and we would go and work wherever work was needed. We worked in farming, in building roads, in water projects, with children.... The idea spread in other areas, including some neighboring countries.

Another experience that embodied the spirit of abundance during that same period was related to schools. I was in charge of math instruction in the schools of the West Bank from 1973 until 1978. I looked for what I could do beyond the routine work that was assigned to me, which was visiting classes and writing reports about teachers. I looked for "elements" that were abundant. Questions are abundant, I thought, and "every person has questions that s/he is interested in pursuing" is a universal principle. I thought that if every student comes with such a question, together they could form a club. I encouraged students to start math and science clubs, building on the fact that science starts with questions that people ask. The clubs were so successful that the Israeli military officer of education in the West Bank had to issue an order banning them! That was in 1976. [One interaction with science teachers is worth mentioning here. When a teacher complained that they could not teach science without laboratories in the school and without factories in the area (the scarcity paradigm), I asked, "Aren't there flies in the classrooms and in students' homes {abundant creature}? Let your students observe flies and record as much information as possible over a period of time, and then compare their various observations with one another. They probably will learn more science than the textbooks and classes they usually go through." The teacher smiled and looked at me as if I were joking or being ridiculous.]

Another abundant idea with which I worked during that period is related to the conviction that every person is a creator or co-author of meanings. I used to visit schools and ask children about meanings of words and phrases such as "what is a point?" and "what does $1=1$ mean?" Children create meanings all the time, though they usually are not aware of it. The biggest obstacle to co-authoring meanings is institutions and professionals, since one of their main functions is to provide and control – even fabricate and monopolize – the meaning of words. [I will say more about co-authoring of meaning later.]

Another abundant idea that I worked with during the 1970s was related to logic. One of the hardest ideas I encountered with teachers was for them to accept that every child is logical. It is so engrained in our minds that there is only one logic, usually mastered by only a few through studying it with certified professionals, that it becomes very hard to imagine a pluralism of logics or to believe that every person is logical. A teacher who does not

understand or agree with a child's logic usually concludes that the child is illogical instead of following a different logic. The belief in one logic and that it has to be taught is an example of the scarcity paradigm. Believing that every person is logical, and that people develop their logic through interaction with life, is an example of the abundance perspective. The distinction between believing in one *universal logic* and believing in a *universal principle* that the world is pluralistic, with a multiplicity of logics, which does not necessarily mean that one has to agree with or understand, is a very important distinction. The danger in the scarcity paradigm, however, is not the belief in one logic as much as in its *creation of tools that are claimed to be universal and objective*. The abundance perspective, in contrast, expects every place to develop its own understanding and tools.

The *intifada*:

Many things affected my life deeply but, no doubt, the most inspiring and invigorating one that shook a lot of the dirt/ junk that I accumulated over the years was the *intifada*, which means, in Arabic, shaking off the dirt." It is most inspiring because it brought aspects out of the shade and made them visible. It brought out what is abundant in relation to beautiful and nurturing aspects in the culture and in people. It brought out the abundant spirit of taking initiative when people feel they are totally responsible for their lives. It was phenomenal; people did what they thought needed to be done. There was no authority to expect it to do things or from which to ask permission. Thus, the *Intifada*, which started in 1987 and lasted for almost six years, embodied in a striking way the spirit of abundance. [An earlier period that manifested this spirit of taking initiative was the decade of the 1970s. As a result of the defeat and expulsion of the PLO from Jordan in 1971, people in the West Bank and Gaza Strip had no choice but to depend on themselves in doing what needed to be done. Activities of all kinds flourished: voluntary work, theater, and music...]

During the period of that first *intifada*, Israel closed down all institutions, including schools and universities, and paralyzed all official systems. I don't remember any other period in my life where people took care of themselves, ran their daily affairs, and related beautifully to one another, as much as that period. It made me realize how much people, society and culture have. The society had to function with what Israel could not close down: the family, the neighborhood, churches and mosques, planting, raising animals, the upbringing of children, and traditional ways of doing things, solving

disputes, enjoying themselves, teaching, learning, etc. It made me aware of cultural and social aspects that were made invisible (or considered backward) by dominant structures and terminology. *It made me aware that most of what we need is there, and that most of what we buy and consume under "normal" conditions is not needed.* It made me aware that we may need institutions and professionals in certain specific limited aspects of life but that we need – even more – spaces where people can live, interact, learn, do, produce, and express outside the intervention of institutions and professionals. During that first *Intifada*, I realized that what kept Palestinian society viable were people who were rooted in the soil of the culture and in daily life, whether literate or not. It was the rooted traditions and social structures that kept the various communities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip functioning. In other words, the crucial factor in whether a person is “nurturing the community and nurtured by it” is not whether one is literate or not, but whether one is rooted in the cultural soil and in daily living or not. For me, the challenge facing communities everywhere, is to reclaim and revalue the diverse ways of living, learning, studying, knowing, relating, doing, and expressing. Like most people during that period, I asked myself what could I do with what was available? As someone who worked in education and with children and youth, I thought that reading, writing and expressing are things that people can do under the circumstances. Expressing oneself is an abundant idea; every person has some way of expressing herself/himself (expressions here do not refer only to forms that are recognized as such, but also to forms that reflect what people do in their daily work, such as farming, building, knitting, raising children...). I started a reading and writing campaign, since all what it needed was there: books, ability to read, papers and pencils and hands, and stories to tell. [For details, see my article “The Reading Campaign Experience within Palestinian Society: Innovative Strategies for Learning and Building Community, *Harvard Educational Review*, Feb. 1995]. In the case of those who cannot read and write, they could use other means to express themselves and tell their stories. [Those who are interested in more details about that period, please see some of what I wrote elsewhere, including *Learning to Survive* (1992), *Community Education is to Regain and Transform What has been Made Invisible* (1990), *Regaining Our Identities and Our Lives* (1991).]

The Arab Education Forum” and *Qalb el-Umour*

Since 1997, I have been involved with two projects “The Arab Education Forum” and the *Qalb el-Umour* Project, both of which embody a different

perception, conception, practice, and “myths” concerning learning and the use of language. *Qalb el-Umour*, in particular, is a good example of what we can do to unplug ourselves from the ideology of control and consumption: no editorial board, no permission, no selling or buying, no budget outside what those who produce it can afford... Both projects are examples of building on what is abundant: people’s experiences, reflections, expressions, and discussions. [For details concerning *Qalb el-Umour*, see my article in *Vimukt Shiksha* April 2001, a special issue of “Unfolding Learning Societies” by Shikshantar, Udaipur, India (see www.swaraj.org/shikshantar)]

An irony

One last remark: the irony in western thinking and style of living is that it deals with what is abundant (such as knowledge, expressions, meanings...) as scarce while it deals with what is scarce (such as land and water) as if it were abundant. Every time land and water proved to be limited, Europeans did not change their ways of living and styles of consuming but rather solved the shortage by conquering new lands and new sources of water, and as a consequence wiped out and replaced indigenous peoples and stole their waters and lands (along with other natural resources such as wood; if the New York Times continues to consume what is equivalent to 60,000 trees daily, other countries, such as Cameroon and the Amazon, have to suffer). [An example closer to home is the fact that a person from New York or Boston can go today to the West Bank or Gaza Strip and take land from its Palestinian owners and use their water at the rate of 40 times as much as a Palestinian! Part of the collapse in capitalism, and in the world today, is due to the fact that there are no more continents for capital to conquer, and no more resources to steal. Like dinosaurs, capitalism will die because there would be nothing more to eat!]

On the Way of Abundance:

Co-Authoring of Meanings

In order for us to again teach and learn within the perspective of abundance, we need to unlearn a lot of what we have learned and internalized through education and other institutions, including terms we use, the meanings that are assigned to them, and dominant standards and measures. There is a

need to challenge dominant terms, meanings, categories, measures, and basic assumptions and convictions. Healing from words that are not rooted in the soils of cultures or in the soils of daily living is crucial to our healthy growth. Carving terms that spring out of our experiences and reflections is one crucial aspect of living within a different logic. In what follows, I will give examples of words whose current dominant meanings fall under the perspective of scarcity, and suggest meanings that stem from a spirit of abundance. For me, co-authoring meanings, or independently investigating meanings, and sharing them with one another, is a most important aspect of living in harmony with the principle of abundance. It can be expressed as follows: every person, young and old, has the right and duty to investigate the meaning of words, sentences, and expressions, in light of one's experiences, readings, discussions, and inner convictions. This is the essence of what for me is one of the most inspiring ideas in human history: *al-ijtihad* in Islam. What I would like to suggest here is to extend the spirit of this wonderful idea to other aspects of life, including teaching and education. Independent investigation of meanings is a most important factor in building thought, and in rearticulating the meaning of dominant concepts in today's world, such as democracy, civil society, social transformation, cultural diversity, freedom, equality, participation, human rights etc. Examples follow:

I will start with **democracy**. I use the term to refer to the freedom of choosing one's meanings, one's teachers, and one's way of living, learning, expressing and raising one's children – and not only one's government. By putting an effort to investigate the meaning of words that we use, we would be acting freely. Freeing oneself from universal concepts, meanings, theories, measures, knowledge, and tools is crucial to regaining diversity and participation in life. Choosing one's teachers is as fundamental as choosing one's government.

Civil society. One main aspect of the dominant meaning for civil society is that it is one where NGOs are active and play a significant role in society. But, when we remember that NGOs (judging even by the term itself) cannot do anything, cannot even be formed and exist, without the constant blessing and approval of governments, we realize that it is a new cover up of control. They are effective in the conquest of both space and imagination. They are effective in keeping people away from being the main actors in running their affairs. What we experienced during the first *intifada* is very revealing about

what civil society could mean: people working with what they have as persons, as communities, and as a culture, outside the interference of institutions and professionals, whether governmental or non-governmental. My experience during the first *intifada* was that what kept the Palestinian society functioning was, as I mentioned earlier, what Israel could not close down or paralyze, and by depending on what the immediate environment produces in terms of food. These for me form the basic elements of a civil society. It is a society that lives a good part of its daily life outside the intervention of official institutions (be they governmental or nongovernmental) and of professionals (be they certified or "organic"). Civil society is one where people are responsible, first and foremost, for running their basic affairs such as the upbringing of their children and doing what needs to be done according to their judgment.

Social transformation. Part of my "healing" during the past 30 years had to do with unlearning to be arrogant, to feel – for example – that literate people have a better understanding of life than illiterates. Another aspect of arrogance is wanting to change the world, society, and others according to what we think is good for them. We can rebel against experts and call ourselves "organic intellectuals," "conscientizers," or "agents of change," but the arrogant assumption that we know what is good for others is common to all such terms. An arrogant person does not necessarily mean that the person is bad; it could spring out of goodness and of good intentions. Now, through the years, I learned that the only person I could change or transform is myself. And the way I found meaningful in this regard is reflecting and contemplating on what I do or experience, and try to express and share that with others. This obviously is in harmony with the spirit of abundance. By doing that, others may change. However, this kind of change is different from change that is designed and controlled by me. Maybe "natural growth" is a better phrase to describe change that happens naturally. Natural growth is a process that is abundant; it happens to every living human, animal, plant, society, idea, or passion. Natural growth does not need institutions or professionals in order for it to happen. In fact, just like in the case of DLN, institutions and professionals can help kill or hinder natural growth. Schools, for example, usually hinder natural learning. I would like to mention again the case of NGOs that claim social transformation as their goal. Even when an NGO is critical of a government, and stands against its abuses and pays a price for that, very rarely we hear that it is reflecting on and discussing its internal ways of governing its

people and programs. This is part of what I meant by honesty being a fundamental value. I should start by looking at my way of living and see what I do on a daily basis that is harmful to myself, or to others (in the way I treat them), or to my relationship with others, or to nature. Before we can blame governments and point to their abuses, we need to look at our own behavior and see whether we do anything of the things we criticize. Thus, social transformation, which I subscribe to, is one that starts with reflection, articulation, discussion, including reflecting on the values that I live by, and – as a result – changing my self, including my behavior, convictions and values. One very important aspect of social transformation is co-authoring the meanings of words that I use.

Cultural diversity and pluralism. A city like Boston, where groups (Blacks, Hispanics, Whites, Chinese, Porto Ricans...) each lives in its own area, where the interaction is nonexistent or only through businesses, is closer to the diversity in a zoo than to a pluralistic society. In this sense, I see that Boston embodies cultural diversity, but not pluralism. We can have cultural diversity without being pluralistic. Within a pluralistic society, interactions among various groups who hold radically different worldviews are very high and daily. What characterizes the pluralistic attitude most in my opinion is that the dialogue with other worldviews stays alive, and never breaks down. In other words, it is possible to have cultural diversity and still believe in progress along one universal path. For me, one measure of pluralism is having different ways of learning and different systems of knowledge, all of which are legitimate, and people have the choice to use the money and resources allotted to education in the upbringing of their children the way they see fit. In a pluralistic society, there are no comparisons, no universal standards, and no measurements that are determined from above and applied to all. Measuring and counting are crucial in the scarcity perspective; in fact, they help create scarcity. The worst enemy of pluralism, and thus of peoples and cultures, is not universal beliefs but rather the development of universal tools, that claim to be neutral and objective, and that can impose, gently or coercively, a certain set of universal meanings, measures, styles and beliefs. For education to play a role in humanizing globalization, it has to embody pluralism and wisdom as basic “ingredients” in its basic convictions and daily practice, which necessitates giving up “objective” measurements and assessments. It is again the difference between DLN as a global plant, and PCH as a global commodity. The two globalizations as I already said are worlds apart!

What are needed today are not ready answers and commodities to be given to people but ways of protecting people exactly from ready (mostly manufactured) answers and commodities. Using the image of DLN again, what they need is protection from institutions, their chemicals and regulations, and from the professionals that produce and manage them. They don't need help in growing, what they need is a clean, healthy and nurturing environment.

The conquest of the imagination is probably the worst form of conquest, because the defeat becomes internal and self-generating, and the constraints and limitations become internalized. At the same time, however, the imagination embodies abundance in an amazing way. Every person is born with a lively and rich imagination. The worst enemy for the imagination is ready answers and models. What limits the imagination most is a set of given options (usually meaningless or false ones) that a person has to choose from. This is why the educated textual mind/imagination has usually few alternatives, given by experts through language. In contrast, children's imaginations are open to infinite possibilities. *The incredible and unpredictable nature of children's imaginations is the real hope that humanity can never be totally controlled.*

Summary

If we let our imagination free itself from moving only along "paved roads" and allow it to wonder around, we would discover the tremendous richness, beauty, diversity, and abundance in life. We would regain our ability to make our own paths and discover the real world, the "countryside," and we will come in contact and talk more often with one another. In this kind of world, there is no official to ticket you because you moving on the wrong side or in the wrong direction. There is no meaning wrong side or wrong direction. If we free our imagination from the hegemony of universal meanings, answers and measures, we would discover the tremendous diversity and abundance that exist in the world. One abundant idea, which I stressed in this article and which I consider of utmost importance, is that every person is a source of meaning and understanding, a co-author of meaning and co-partner in constructing knowledge and building reality. Thus, a main challenge we face in today's world is protecting, creating or providing spaces where people can work, think, relate, interact, and build,

outside the intervention of institutions and professionals, including NGOs, organic intellectuals, and conscientizers.

Truth, wisdom, trust, faith and honesty are fundamental values within the spirit of abundance. Teaching and learning within the abundance perspective necessarily require a shift in our perception of us as human beings and of our place in the world, and a transformation in our relationship to one another and to the world.

Just like a seed is uniquely complete, a person – within the abundance perspective – is looked at as uniquely complete (this is a phrase which I heard from Satish and Shilpa in India). All what a seed needs is an appropriate environment (soil, nutrients, water, sun, temperature, and loving care) in order for it to grow. The internal ingredients are complete and unique in that seed. [Genetic engineering would make sense in the scarcity perspective.] Similarly, what a person needs to grow healthily is a healthy environment. Every person is uniquely complete, which means, among other things, that comparing and measuring are unnatural, even harmful to that uniqueness and completeness. Two basic ingredients of a healthy environment are beautiful relationships and living in harmony with nature.

Abundance is related to universal principles, pluralistic attitude, cyclic thinking, and hospitality. In contrast, scarcity is related to universal thinking, universal laws, one path for progress, linear thinking, and control. Universal thinking has been a major factor in destroying diversity and pluralism, forcing learning to move along narrow paths, equating understanding to acquiring information and technical skills and knowledge, and pushing wisdom aside. The logic embedded in universal thinking naturally leads to the belief that one person/ people/ nation/ country/ religion/ culture can be absolutely better than another (according to some measure that is claimed to be universal) and, thus, can impose their ideas and ways on the world at large – in the name of development, progress and saving them from “being left behind.” The belief that one’s ideas and ways are the best is not new. What is new (and exclusively characteristic of western civilization) is the successful diffusion/ dissemination – through “universal” tools – of certain beliefs and practices as universal. The most effective tool has been education as it has been conceived and practiced at least during the past 300 years – through a curriculum taught to all

students, and through standards, measures, concepts and meanings that are claimed to be universal. Mathematics and the sciences with their claims to universal truths, and technology with its magical impact on people, have been part of this triumphant march of universal thinking and the belief in a linear path for progress. Ignoring wisdom and pushing it outside people's consciousness seemed necessary for science and technology to develop at an amazing rate. However, they have been, at the same time, a main cause for the catastrophic situation and trends, which we witness today around us. A civilization (even life) cannot hold together for too long without wisdom. An important part of wisdom is living with the spirit of abundance or SWARAJ or whatever word people choose to refer to such way of living.