



April 2020

Thinking Beyond the Left

Forum: *Planetize the Movement!*

Ashish Kothari

While in general agreement with [Valentine Moghadam](#) about the need to planetize the movement, and the need to bring together “a multitude of emerging movements,” I am puzzled by why she focuses only on the Left. There is a tendency amongst some leftists to put all progressive movements into this fold, which is neither factual nor helpful. Many indigenous peoples’ movements against extractivism and for territorial and self-determination rights, whose participants often base their struggles on their spiritual connection to the earth, challenge the dominant political and economic systems they are subjected to, but would not be particularly pleased to be called “Left.” The same holds true for struggles that have been inspired by people like Gandhi, fighting for justice through non-violence, or those emanating from a radical spiritualism that challenges the hegemonic tendencies of mainstream religions but also other forms of injustice. Even the feminist movements the author mentions cannot all be said to be part of the Left, given especially that patriarchy and masculinity predate capitalism by millennia.

If therefore we want a planetary movement, we need to think of the diversity of progressive struggles and narratives that exist across the planet. Moghadam does seem to hint at this when she talks about the “broader spectrum of working people” and the need for the Left to encompass a political economy approach that also looks at the intersections amongst class, race, and sex. One could go beyond and add struggles relating to ethnicity, age, caste, and anthropocentrism. And in this sense, there is a lot to learn from not only “socialist and communist experiments,” but from a much larger range of movements, many of whom do not necessarily agree with socialism in its conventional sense.

What would a “global political organization” look like? What is meant by its being “vertically organized”? How will it avoid the centralization that has often happened in the past with global movements (including with the WSF)? How will it respect and foster the independence of plural movements (what the author calls “horizontally based”)? These are all vital questions in need of answers.

To my mind, a global confluence of movements is predicated on a broad agreement on ethical principles and values, based on which there could be elaboration of plural visions of alternative economy, politics, and socio-cultural relations. How we view ourselves, each other, other species, and the earth/universe is so critical to all of us; it determines our behavior. But as part of attempted global movements, we don't explicitly focus on this. Injustice is often easier to define than justice, but that is a challenge any planetary movement needs to deal with.

One attempt at collective visioning of a just society, based on ethical principles, has been taking place in the Indian Vikalp Sangam (Alternatives Confluence) process. This and other processes of bringing together radical alternatives has led to the Global Tapestry of Alternatives, an attempt at horizontal weaving of movements to learn from each other and create a more global movement in the spirit of the pluriverse. This and other similar global initiatives need to talk to each other to “planetize the movement,” but with the explicit recognition that we do not all fit into one political category.

About the Author



Ashish Kothari is a founder of the Indian environmental group Kalpavriksh. He has taught at the Indian Institute of Public Administration, coordinated India's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan process, and served on Greenpeace International and Greenpeace India boards. An active participant in peoples movements, he helps coordinate the Vikalp Sangam Global Tapestry of Alternatives processes and Radical Ecological Democracy network. His books include *Churning the Earth: Making of Global India* (with Aseem Shrivastava), *Alternative Futures: India Unshackled* (co-edited with KJ Joy), and *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary* (co-edited with Ariel Salleh, Arturo Escobar, Federico Demaria, Alberto Acosta).

About the Publication

Published by the [Great Transition Initiative](#).

Under our Creative Commons BY-NC-ND copyright, you may freely republish our content, without alteration, for non-commercial purposes as long as you include an explicit attribution to the Great Transition Initiative and a link to the GTI homepage.



Cite as Ashish Kothari, "Thinking Beyond the Left," a contribution to the forum Planetize the Movement!, *Great Transition Initiative* (April 2020), <https://greattransition.org/gti-forum/planetize-movement-kothari>.

About the Great Transition Initiative

The [Great Transition Initiative](#) is an international collaboration for charting pathways to a planetary civilization rooted in solidarity, sustainability, and human well-being.

As an initiative for collectively understanding and shaping the global future, GTI welcomes diverse ideas. Thus, the opinions expressed in our publications do not necessarily reflect the views of GTI or the Tellus Institute.