

# Living Utopias

Facilitated by : Pallavi Varma Patil and  
Sujit Sinha, Faculty, Azim Premji  
University, Bangalore

This six day short course, is about understanding:

- a) the urgency in combating the crisis of **Industrialism** in the world today and;
- b) the various anti Industrialism alternatives existing today in different spheres of civilisation— economy / ecology / technology / politics/ socio-cultural / education .



The course through well outlined examples and case studies showcases new and emerging efforts in India and the world which are futuristic and exciting and do-able. By doing so, the course aims to provide a sense of hope and encouragement towards building another world based on the premise of a **GOOD SOCIETY where we all not only survive but flourish!**

## Introduction and context of the course:

The word “Development” is associated with the spread of “Industrialism” --- an ideology of ever increasing material wealth and consumption (growth) through faster and faster exploitation of Nature , using the wonders of large scale Science and Technology, guided by powerful Nation States and Corporations, rising world scale trade , and individualism. Last 30 years of information technology has made almost everyone aspire to climb this endless consumption ladder. This has brought the world to the brink of ecological collapse, depths of socio-economic inequalities and despair, increasingly dysfunctional political institutions, and hugely stressed socio-cultural systems.

In the last few decades, efforts to bring justice, equity, sustainability in the idea of development can be classified in two broad ways --- One : changes *within the existing Industrialism paradigm* such as global efforts to measure development more comprehensively and define new Goals like the Human Development Index (HDI) , Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Green Growth, the Triple Bottom Line etc. And Two : what we define as **alternatives which are radical challenges to the very premise of Industrialism** in all spheres of human civilization --- economic, ecological, technological, political, and socio-cultural and its core values.

Today Industrialism continues to grow and spread, the crisis continues to worsen, and the alternatives remain a small minority. If the crisis grows faster than solutions, human civilizations may collapse as they have done many times all over the world during last 3000 years. Except this time civilizations are likely to collapse worldwide! We believe that as the crisis comes knocking on the door with the planet overstepping its crucial boundaries there is an urgent need for these alternatives to multiply and grow. Hence this course. By highlighting these alternatives which act as lighthouses to guide us to look beyond Industrialism and rearrange our ways of being and living; the course aims to provide counter currents of hope and action.

The course is designed as follows:

### **1 : Key Alternative frameworks and Ideologies**

*You see things , and say why ? But I dream things that never were, and I say why not ?* : Bernard Shaw

We present and discuss some key frameworks/ideologies/imaginings contrary to Industrialism : like Gandhi and Tagore's vision of a good society, Anarchism in Europe, Ubuntu in Africa, Buen Vivir and Sumak Kawsay in Latin America. As the crisis deepens, newer ones are appearing – Toffler's Wave Analysis , Ecofeminism, the De-growth movement in Europe, Radical Ecological Democracy (RED) in India, Rights of Nature in Latin America to name a few. Networks of these alternatives are emerging to try to radically transform collapsing Industrialism with the hope that solutions can and will arise and spread fast to overcome the crisis. All of these talk about a **world which consists of just, equitable, healthy, happy, peaceful , creative, caring , sharing, self- sufficient, self- governing, eco-sustainable, non-exploiting, rural and urban communities ( not Nation States )** .

### **II: Rethinking Economy**

*There is sufficiency in the world for Man's Needs , but not for Man's Greed* –Gandhi

The focus here is on alternatives to unlimited growth which is characterized by and associated with features such as over consumption, private and state capitalism, economic globalization, monetization and privatization, unbridled upward economic mobility and toxic competition. Towards this it will present some examples of localization, producer-consumer partnerships, rising recycling economy, non-monetized forms of trade and exchange based on the values of **frugalism-limits-enough , well- being for all, equity, and community assets**.

### **III: Appropriate Technology**

*Every machine that helps every individual has a place, but there should be no place for machines that concentrate power in a few hands and turn the masses into machine-minders, if indeed they do not make them unemployed.* —Gandhi

We showcase examples that counter mega technology which is eco-harmful and increasingly jobless. It will introduce the key principles of 'Appropriate Technology'. The case studies chosen in the areas of energy, water and construction will highlight the emphasis on decentralized production, appropriate scale, renewable resources, contextual and indigenous efforts taking place all over the world.

### **IV: Politics and Governance**

*Every village will be a republic capable of managing its affairs. This does not exclude dependence on and willing help from neighbours or the world. In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever widening, never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual ----the outermost circle will not wield power to crush the inner circle but will give strength to all within and derive its strength from it.* – Gandhi

We focus on initiatives that challenge the existing forms of nationhood and concentration of power spawned by Industrialism, its associated instruments of governance and representative democracy. It will introduce the idea and existing efforts of urban participatory democracy, eco-regional democracy, the new anarchist movements.

### V: Socio- Cultural Futures

*A Good Society is one which creates conditions enabling all the people to lead healthy, happy, creative, active lives in harmony with Nature and the rest of Humanity* : Mahbub al Haq (with a very crucial addition by us – Nature )

We bring you case studies and stories of communities world wide that are attempting a new way of life that provide a revolutionary alternative in the way social cultural relations are formed and practiced.

Unit	Topics
Unit 1 : Frameworks for Alternative Imaginations	Collapse of Industrialism. Planetary Boundaries –Ecological Crisis. Gandhi Tagore Visions. Anarchism. Indigenous Visions of South America and worldwide. Ubuntu of Africa. Toffler Third Wave. Ecofeminism. Degrowth. Radical Ecological Democracy (RED) ; Development measurements of a Good Society & Happy Planet Index. Living Utopias Transformation Framework.
Unit 2 Rethinking Economy	Solidarity Economy. Detroit –the most exciting city in USA . Community Supported Agriculture. Local Currency. Mondragon Cooperatives. Kumarappa & Localization. Kuthambakam Panchayat –towards self sufficiency. Urban gardening, Slow Food movement
Unit 3 Appropriate Technology	Gandhi-Schumacher. Community Gobar gas Plant in Punra. Community Solar Plants in Bihar & Maharashtra. Pedal Power. Rainwater Harvesting –Chennai and Rural. Mud Block Buildings. Bamboo Architecture. Waste Recycling industry
Unit 4 Politics and Governance	Gandhi Oceanic Circle. Rising Global –Local government and dwindling of Nation State. Toffler-Diamond-Harari ideas. Mendha –Consensual Democracy. Urban Participatory Budgeting. Arvari River Parliament. Bio-Regional Democracy. Rights of Nature.
Unit 5 Socio-Cultural Futures	Amish rejecting Industrialism in USA . Zapatistas in Chiapas-Mexico: Indigenous Vision +Feminism . Kibbutz In Israel –Community Socialism. Rojava Movement in Syria –Anarchism+ Feminism in action. Eco-Villages and Transition Towns. Democratic schools. Nai Taleem ( Gandhi-Tagore ) Education for the future.

### Readings

- Pluriverse: A post Development Dictionary, 2019, Editors : Ashish Kothari, Ariel Salleh, Arturo Escobar , Federico Demaria , Alberto Acosta
- 21 Lessons for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, 2018, Yuval Noah Harari
- Gandhi Notebook , 2017 , Sujit Sinha and Pallavi Varma Patil
- Alternative Futures : India Unshackled , 2017, Editors: Ashish Kothari , K.J.Joy
- Degrowth: A vocabulary for a new era , 2014 , Editors : Giacomo D’Alisa, Federico Demaria and Giorgos Kallis
- Entropia , 2013, Samuel Alexander
- The World Until Yesterday : What can we learn from traditional societies, 2012, Jared Diamond
- Free At Last : The Sudbury Valley School , 1987 , Daniel Greenberg
- Island , 1962, Aldous Huxley