

## **Learning to Learn with Ivan Illich: Regenerating Soil Cultures**

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### **Who are My Ancestors?**

I am a dark brown Punjabi woman; unable to speak my mother tongue for the first 69 years of my life. What rendered me disabled, so severely handicapped?

My ancestors come from the Punjab, the fertile land of the five sacred rivers in North India. I am half-Sikh and half-Hindu. My maternal ancestors are Sikhs. My paternal ancestors are Hindus. Both sets of ancestors share the same mother-tongue: Punjabi.

My Sikh ancestors wore colorful turbans; battled the Muslim Empire on horses, flashing their swords; tilled the soil and milked water buffaloes with their strong, sturdy, peasant hands. They were proud of the soil in their fingernails. Every aspect of their humble, joyous, exuberant being illumined the meaning of "living down to earth." My father's people had no dirt in their fingernails. Subtly, hidden from any overt notice, I inherited from them their sense of cultural and religious superiority over my earthy, maternal ancestors.

In my mother's womb, I heard daily recitations of Sikh prayers sung out loud in the pre-dawn darkness from the Sikh holy book, the *Guru Granth Sahib*. She also read aloud from the Hindu holy book, the *Bhagavad Gita*; as well as from the *Bible* that her best friend, a Christian, gifted her. Not so long after leaving her womb, I turned a deaf ear to such recitations: first expressing my preference for Hindi; and, as soon as I started

schooling in Catholic convents, I responded to my extended family only in English.

At the age of five, I began speaking English as if it were my mother tongue. Even though the British were finally forced to leave India in 1947 -- half a decade before my birth, they left behind their colonial legacy. English became one of our national languages -- supposedly unifying peoples enjoying the greatest linguistic diversity to be found anywhere on earth: 33 % of the world's languages, threatened by extinction, are still alive and being spoken in the Indian sub-continent. Only 1% of remaining languages on earth are spoken in Europe. English education ensured that children like me became oreo-cookies for life: brown on the outside; white on the inside. I prayed that some fairy godmother would wave a magic wand and I would become blonde and blue-eyed on the outside as well. Neither Hindu gods nor Sikh gurus answered my colonized prayers.

With Illichian hindsight, I now see my prayers and my learned "English only" prejudice for what they are ... the remnants of colonialism: a colonized mind. Once Illich "happened" to me, I was finally free to be "me." This, despite the repeated rebukes of my bosses. These still resound in my being, long after retirement: "She does not know how to teach philosophy of education; she only knows how to teach Madhu!"

They will never guess the secret Illich whispered in my heart: that their professional deprecations and dismissals that were from other cultural standpoints (including that of my maternal ancestors) were supreme compliments. This realization came on the heels of Illich's guidance and influence, pointing me towards ancient, ancestral pathways for "escaping education." (Prakash and Esteva 1997). On these paths, I learned how to distinguish between professional masks worn by educators to hide their "real selves." I discovered the importance of authenticity for teaching and learning habits of the heart--for living "the good life."

My ancestors' tongues, unlike mine, could not be twisted around to speak the Queen's English. Unashamedly, they spoke English with their distinctive Punjabi accent and grammar -- setting them apart as

“different” anywhere in the world. This turned them into “backward” beings – in the eyes and words of professional educators. Such school lessons, explicit and hidden, I dutifully mastered; and, inevitably, they mastered me; enslaved me; cut off my roots in soil cultures; cast me away from the peoples to whom I belonged and who belonged to me.

Among the many gifts Illich brought to my life was guiding me back full circle to the soil cultures of my Sikh ancestors; rejoicing in the magnificence and beauty of their tongues (dozens of Punjabi dialects, changing every hundred miles, still persist – despite the State’s official deprecations). Had I not witnessed Master Illich swimming with delight in 14 languages, perhaps my son would be as distant from the Hindi and *Español* of his parents; doomed to following the long path distancing me for most of my days on earth from my ancestors’ Punjabi.

Prior to encountering Illich, I was trapped in the throes of the deadly Development dis-ease: desecrating soil cultures in the rapidly expanding galaxy of education for global development. The higher I rose in this galaxy, the further away I got from anything to do with soil cultures. Soil was beneath me – literally as well as metaphorically. The longer my list of credentials grew, the more fervently I prayed to the Gods of Education, along with all the other Gods of Professionals, who constitute the elites of industrial societies. I had neither interest nor appetite for the soil cultures that kept India lagging miserably behind in the global race to achieve the Development Dream. My ancestors’ frugality and earthy virtues of place belonged to the Dark Ages. In the Age of Moonshots and Space Wars, nothing was going to hold me back, keep me “down to earth.”

Before Illich, I joined the enemies of soil cultures, waging war by their side. After Illich, I began to search for the peace only offered by soil cultures. During this second half of my life, Illich turned around my heart and mind; my gut and imagination; shone the light in the darkness of our times so that I could begin finding my way home – from a superior assailant of my ancestors and their ignorant and lowly ways to finally becoming their long-lost daughter; ready to know and love what she had forsaken and abandoned since childhood; forgiving myself my predictable educated, colonized ignorance.

## **A Pedagogy of Liberation? Or A Liberation from Pedagogy?**

Ivan Illich arrived at a time in my life when the soil of my being was ill-prepared for the seeds of social ideas he had been experimenting with and casting far and wide for three decades. Ignorant of my ignorance, I failed to recognize the significance of the teacher life brought to my doorstep; unplanned, like most of the countless other blessings of my life. Called “part-moon, part travelling salesman,” (Cayley 1992, iix). Illich arrived on my campus in Fall 1981; literally a few weeks after I was hired by Penn State to start professing. The brilliant moonshine of this “travelling salesman” blinded me; my heart closed; my being shut down. Why? It would take me more than half a decade to answer that question.

Armed to the gills with my credentials in economics, business administration, and philosophy, I was ecstatic discovering the field called philosophy of education. It aroused all my “do-gooding savior” fantasies – to blindly “do unto others” what had been done to me. My Ph.D. in Education, certainly, would enable me to lift the wretched and the hungry millions in India from their grinding poverty; from degrading caste systems that still kept them oppressed; robbed of hope; too crippled to clamber up social ladders I could climb because of my middle-class agility. I landed in the USA, convinced that the best thing I could do for the rest of my life was to export back to India the just, equalizing, and excellent educational system of America.

Schooling taught me to fully embrace the secular faith being globalized through Truman’s post-WWII divisiveness: dividing up the world into modern caste hierarchies – constituted of “Developed,” “Underdeveloped, and “Developing” cultures and nations. Through Truman’s gaze, I learned to see myself as a needy, poor “underdeveloped” woman; a pitiable citizen of a Third World country. (Sachs 1992) I was compelled to ask: as a snake sheds her old skin, could I successfully leave behind my underdeveloped self? How? All answers pointed unerringly westwards to an American education.

In Fall 1976, I landed in JFK airport fast asleep like billions: dreaming “the American dream;” blindly in love with the USA; smitten with its

global advertisements of “democratic” education for the world’s most developed, number one democratic nation. From “sperm to worm,” the educational system – whether American, Indian or Mexicano – ensures that no one awakens from “the American Dream;” discovering the reality that it is a global nightmare.

My dreams of doctoral studies at Syracuse University were seconds away from taking flight; my enthusiasm for “real learning,” soaring; liberated from the “parrot” memorizing of the first quarter century of schooling life to be left behind; forever. I am a snail-slow learner. It took me a decade to realize how little I discovered about “the real world” of education of/by/for Development while earning a doctorate, tenure and promotion. Through this decade, I remained incapable of being “all shook up” by the brilliant, most “savage” critic of industrial societies.

The more I began discovering the injustices of American society and their perpetuation through its educational system, the more passionately I embraced all brands of critical pedagogy. Once I “lucked out” and landed a “real tenure track position,” I was hell bent on exporting critical pedagogies to India; successfully transforming its vicious, centuries old caste system. Bedazzled by the promises of critical pedagogues, I fully bought into their curricula and pedagogies designed for “liberation.” Theirs was the best way and the ONLY way forward for global equality and justice. In contrast, Illich’s insights into liberation FROM pedagogy appeared absurdly impractical; best left behind; as my commitments to growth economics and global development strengthened.

When Illich arrived on our campus, my newly minted Ph.D., like all the long line of diplomas preceding it, had successfully shut down my mind to anything and everything Illich offered: to reimagine, regenerate and recreate societies healed from the “diploma disease:” a rampant global epidemic; even more deadly than the pandemic casting its mantel of global fear since March 2020.

Already infamous and dismissed for his books *Deschooling Society* (1970) and *Medical Nemesis* (1976), Ivan Illich came to Penn State to present his

book, *Gender*(1982) <sup>1</sup>, having been just birthed. Proud of the professional position I had just secured with competitive competence and noble-minded professional zeal; enjoying the sense of being liberated from the medieval limits that had held back my mother and grandmothers, I knew with certainty: Ivan Illich was plain wrong in his haughty dismissal of what he called “the dis-abling professions.” Furthermore, he was even more off the mark in celebrating the “common sense” of the “vernacular” gendered worlds from which I had made my great escape. Confident of both Illich’s myopic romanticism as well as in the certainties of my profession, I rose to challenge one of the most important social critics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. My heart raced as I stood in front of him with all the audacity I could muster: *Are you suggesting that my mother and grandmothers were better off than me: a professor; with a doctorate; at a Big Ten university?*

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<sup>1</sup> The historical transformation from “vernacular gender” to “economic sex” is the decisive pre-condition that enabled capitalism to take hold and the most important anthropological transformation resulting from capitalism rise. This central thesis of *Gender* took me several decades to begin unravelling for comprehension. Now, I continue to re-read *Gender* in order to better understand Illich’s central thesis: distinguishing between centuries of “vernacular” gender from “economic sex” in modern times. “Vernacular gender” alludes to the differential existential condition of men and women in traditional peoples, in which places, times, tools, tasks, forms of speech, gestures and perceptions associated with men are distinguished from those of women, in an enigmatic and asymmetrical complementarity. “Economic sex” alludes to the polarization of human labor force, libido, character or intelligence and all common characteristics attributed to all human beings after the late eighteen century. (pp.3 & 4 of *Gender*).

Today, in our COVID times, Illich’s insights on gender are brought further home for me. Women’s struggle for “gender equality”, always fought on masculine turf, renders us the perennially underpaid “second sex.” *Qua* woman, today, I aspire for birthing new worlds. Our Mother Earth Manifestos, beyond white male founding fathers, cannot but be inviting to the table, for co-creation, good men who despise slavery with all their beings. Together we have all it takes to begin imagining and experiencing contemporary arts of living, after renouncing the so-called “comforts” or “conveniences” of economic sex, as Illich suggested. We leave behind all notions of “black inferiority” or “white superiority;” any classification or mechanism transmogrifying some of us into disposable trash. Joyfully, we open ourselves to being surprised on the new paths we make by walking them.

Seconds later, I received from him the most important “Zen Slap” of my life. My professional questions about gender and equal educational opportunity – Illich simply dismissed them as expressions of historical amnesia and Western one-eyed cultural blindness. With zero interest in debating me; unceremoniously, he sent me packing. I did not know it at the time: he saw right through me; in a blink he knew I was a typical academic; and, as such, had not understood a single thing in his presentation on *Gender* and *Deschooling*. Sadly, I had missed the point completely: it departed too radically from the familiar fodder I had been fed every day of my previous education.

The sheer forceful brilliance of Illich’s genius, notwithstanding, I was appalled at being dismissed by him for being a successful academic; a sincere, dedicated, “alternative” educator; who would do right by her students; secularly saving them from grade envy or credential addiction; who would design an “empowering” curriculum or “radical” pedagogies; who would create the best “liberation,” “authenticity” and “happiness” promoting classrooms; working with a Dream Team of “alternative educators” for reforming, revamping and radicalizing education.

Illich’s immediate impact was completely counterproductive. Even his behavior basically confirmed that he was totally wrong: an arrogant intellectual critic, male, unable to really understand the value of education in general; and, particularly American education--especially for a woman of color rising out of the “dark ages.” Instead of writing with an equally enraged colleague a scathing critique of *Gender*, I took the easier route: marching on the warpath of teaching *Deschooling Society*; deploying all the arsenal I had acquired as a pedigreed analytic philosopher to junk it; send it to our landfills; to be buried forever. Half a decade later, I did finally realize that despite my doctorate--or, more accurately, because of it--I remained completely clueless, confused and lost from this book’s opening lines:

Many students, especially those who are poor, intuitively know what the schools do for them. They school them to confuse process and substance. ... The pupil is thereby “schooled” to confuse teaching with learning .... A diploma



with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new. [Their] imagination is “schooled” to accept service in place of value. Medical treatment is mistaken for health care, social work for the improvement of community life, police protection for safety, military poise for national security, the rat race for productive work. Health, learning, dignity, independence, and creative endeavor are defined as little more than the performance of the institutions which claim to serve these ends, and their improvement is made to depend on allocating more resources to the management of hospitals, schools, and other agencies in question. (Illich 1970, 1)

Unfortunately, I was not alone in being lost. I was one of the confused majority: the swine before whom Illich cast his pearls of wisdom. Friends of Illich are right that his “moment of legibility” is NOW: half a century after he published such words. In 1970, he was far too ahead of his time. Illich was doomed to be “a voice in the wilderness;” heard by a miniscule minority; and understood by the tiniest fraction of those who read about him on the front cover of *The New York Times* or *Le Monde*; or, drawn by his short-lived super-star status to travel to Cuernavaca, Mexico to listen to him in the flesh, surrounded by the luminaries of “alternative education.” Fifty years later, in the Age of Climate Collapse, COVID-19, and Black Lives Matter, my hope is that the second paragraph of *Deschooling Society* will *not* be as perplexing and confusing as it was when I first began reading and teaching it in 1981:

In these essays, I will show that the institutionalization of values leads inevitably to physical pollution, social polarization, and psychological impotence: three dimensions in a process of global degradation and modernized misery. I will explain how this process of degradation is accelerated when nonmaterial needs are transformed into demands for commodities; when health, education, personal mobility, welfare, or psychological healing are defined as the result of services or “treatments.” I do this because I believe that most of the research now going on about the future tends to advocate further increases in the institutionalization of values



and that we must define conditions which would permit precisely the contrary to happen. We need research on the possible use of technology to create institutions which serve personal, creative, and autonomous interaction and the emergence of values which cannot be substantially controlled by technocrats. We need counterfoil research to current futurology.

I have chosen the school as my paradigm, and I therefore deal only indirectly with other bureaucratic agencies of the corporate state; the consumer-family, the party, the army, the church, the media. ... Rich and poor alike depend on schools and hospitals which guide their lives, form their world view, and define for them what is legitimate and what is not. Both view [healing] oneself as irresponsible, learning on one's own as unreliable, and community organization, when not paid for by those in authority, as a form of aggression or subversion." (Illich 1970, 1-3)

Illich rendered naked the dark, pock-marked, underbellies of what he deliberately described as the "disabling professions" (Illich 1977) – starting with the Educational Enterprise. In this category, he encompassed all modern "radical monopolies;" including the medical, legal, transportation, birthing, and dying establishments; each promising to fulfill "basic human needs"; controlled by credentialed specialists professing their exclusive knowledge -- while delegitimizing as "underdeveloped" peoples who "failed" to feel "needy."

As an avowed believer in the modern concept of human "needs" (starting with the "need" for schools and education), my responses to Illich's provocations included personal and professional rage. I declined Illich's invitations to gatherings that imagined and enacted creative "alternatives TO education." I clung to my devout secular faith in "alternatives IN education." I was certain that we, educators, could "fix" everything: from "dis-interest," "hyperactivity" and other "disabilities" to the dominant dis-eases of "underachievers," genetically programmed D's and "dropouts." I refused to grant Illich any room to disabuse me of my educated "certainties."

## ***Koyaanisquatsi*: Education Finally Escaped**

*Koyaanisquatsi*, a Hopi word, means “life out of balance;” or “life of moral corruption and turmoil.” (Reggio 1992) It is the title of a 1982 film inspired by several seminal radical critics of industrial societies, including Jacque Ellul, Leopold Kohr, and, yes, Ivan Illich. Godfrey Reggio’s film’s opening scenes reveal the magnificence of Creation, while juxtaposing these to images of technological “progress” -- smokestacks, speeding commuters, factory farming, tacky urban development, an endless list of horrors. Such images depict the consequences of industrial “civilization,” which Illich sought to analyze and explain as a brutally violent and uncivilized despoiler, rapidly ripping apart the rich, diverse web of life called Mother Nature by my ancestors.

The invariable provocations that defined Illich’s public lectures since 1981 suspiciously starting arousing my curiosity. Despite my blind professional rejections of his ideals, I was increasingly moved by Illichian gatherings to start studying “stuff” far afield from what is normally considered the field of philosophy of education. The Fates pushed me to study the “State of the World” and The Club of Rome Reports, which catalogued social and ecological unravelling. My disease increased as more and more research publications (all outside my “field of expertise”) pointed unerringly towards the Hopi conclusion: *Koyaniskaatsi*. (Reggio 1992) Life was out of balance: my ancestors’ Mother Earth sick and desecrated; forests, rivers and oceans poisoned; the entire web of creation torn asunder by the “progress” defining economic Development. Every moment, species are becoming extinct, rendering human life tenuous. Cancer epidemics, like climate collapse, constituted the Absurdistan that Illich and his conspirators were awakening me to from the nightmares of development.

It is the straw that breaks the camel’s back, states an ancient proverb. The straw that broke my back happened at a gathering of famous critical pedagogues in the mid-1980s. Fully aware of my rank and status as an unknown junior professor, grateful for the invitation to be included in this august circle, I finally gathered the courage to voice questions that had begun to haunt me. Humbly, I requested the most renowned among

them to share critical pedagogical strategies being implemented for addressing global warming and other ecological disasters that affected “the oppressed” far worse than “the oppressors.”

Resounding silence prevailed for a few, fleeting minutes. My question fully ignored, a hasty change of topics ensued: directed towards familiar re-designing of new curricula for greater equality between the oppressors and the oppressed in our schools and universities. Again, I was summarily silenced, stupefied, numbed and dumbled by renowned educators who were pushing me past the conventions of my professional training. Initially drowning in despair, I groped for hope. I soon found it in the most unexpected of places.

### **Myth Maker, Story Weaver: Celebrating the Rebirth of Epimetheus**

For the first time in more than half a decade, 1986 found me beginning a careful study of Illich, starting with his 1969 call for “institutional revolution” in *Celebration of Awareness*: “to celebrate our joint power to provide all human beings with the food, clothing, and shelter [we] need to delight in living; to discover, together ... what we must do to use [our] power to create the humanity, the dignity, and the joyfulness of each one of us.” (Illich 1969, 15) I began to understand that this delight, dignity, and joy comes with peoples’ movements, from abandoning the drudgery of modern serfdom dominated by mechanical clocks, and from recovering something of our ancestors’ non-hasty daily lives. I was moved by Illich’s hopefulness: exercising autonomy, we could break ourselves free from our driven lives as “needy humans” -- *Homo misérables*. We had the capacities and the imagination to begin cultivating the arts of living with *eutrapelia* (for Greeks the graceful, gentle, beautiful dance of being alive) for all – and not just for the elites.

Next, I entered the story-weaving, mythmaking, poetic world of Illich in the last chapter of *Deschooling Society*: the “Rebirth of Epimethean [Wo]Man.” I had read it many times before while teaching *Deschooling* – with the foolish purpose of discrediting Illich. No surprise, therefore, that I entirely missed the central point of this last chapter. Why did Illich end his book juxtaposing the renowned Greek hero, Prometheus, next to

his brother Epimetheus – who remains completely unknown amongst moderns?

My ancestral memories started resurfacing. Mythmaking and storyweaving are integral to my birth – auspiciously in the birthplace of the world's two most famous epics: the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The wombs of our mothers and grandmothers nourished us from the moment of conception with *mythopoesis* ... songs and stories of divinity incarnated; of the good life lived and suffering endured era after era, cyclically returning us to our beginnings; re-member-ing us with all the elders who had come and gone before us.

Educated “certainties” constructed concrete highways offering speedy departures from the “backward” mythmaking worlds of my mother and grandmothers. Once Illich turned my heart towards “escaping education,” I found myself reading and, repeatedly re-reading the myth of two brothers: Prometheus and Epimetheus. Vaguely, I recalled some fictional references only to the first brother. Illich's re-telling the myth of Prometheus points unerringly towards the hubris and futility of modern technological planning. I began to see with Illich how education can leave us chained and confined to a manmade industrial world, designed for self-destruction. The “price of progress” we continue paying is nothing short of the complete “death of nature” – what is referred to today as “climate collapse.”

While steadily warning us against hopeless, “apocalyptic randomness,” Illich guides us towards the hindsight and hopefulness of Epimetheus, the brother of Prometheus, who marries the Greek Earth Goddess, Pandora: worshipped on the slope of Mount Parnassus, the “center and navel” of the Earth. Misogynist Greeks had little use for Gaia or Pandora. It is Pandora who opens her amphora, allowing all human ills to escape while keeping secure the virtue of hope for human flourishing. Illich offers ancient myths – Greek and other – to comprehend our modern tragedy of self-destruction through desecrating Mother Earth. Illich's storyweaving found me remembering how the ancient Hindu Epics – the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* – also warned us about our human ignorance leading us towards the precipice of self-annihilation. No longer could my educated mind dismiss my ancestors' epics as

irrelevant stories to be discarded for the rigors of modern science and philosophy.

Learning to learn with Illich, I began my adventures into the depths of ancient Hindu wisdom. With him, I was learning to distinguish between the hubris of planning and the humility of hoping. Planning ties us down to *chronos*, the ticking modern clock; hoping offers the freedom of *kairos* – the timelessness of this propitious moment of eternity. Yet as an ambitious modern woman, I remained trapped by my expectations and fantasies of a planned future. Along with so many educated masses, I was sacrificing living with vitality and joy in the present moment for...what? When, in the presence of Illich, my Promethean fantasies came face-to-face with our self-destructive era, his invitation to become an Epimethean woman undid me.

How do we cultivate the virtue of hope in our hard times? For Illich, this remains the pressing contemporary question, central to all his philosophical investigations. His answer smashes many modern illusions:

To hell with the future ... It's a man-eating idol. Institutions have a future ... but people have no future. People have only hope. ... no sane person can project the future of the economic utopia of endless growth in which we live as anything but catastrophe, sooner or later, ... the future as an idol devours the only moment in which heaven can happen upon us: the present. Expectation tries to compel tomorrow; hope enlarges the present and makes a future, north of the future. (Illich in Cayley 2005, XIX)

These words take on a special significance, especially today: as COVID-19 reduces our engineered plans into ghosts. Illich's hopeful call to enlarge the present surfaced for me as I isolated myself in a "safe zone" within a COVID-19-stricken California. Illich resonated in my being, reminding me to transform each present moment of living into one of learning, sharing, and caring.

## Hope and Hospitality: Stepping Over Illich's Threshold

Reluctantly at first, I began accepting invitations from friends who prepared simple dinners every week in Illich's home; offering the hospitality of local wines and seasonal CSA (community-shared agriculture) harvests cooked and served around a makeshift, surprisingly expandable dining table. The frugality practiced in Illich's hearth .... with aromas of freshly kneaded breads, baking pasta, simmering sauce and warm cinnamon cider ... laundry drying outside on the clothesline ... complemented conversations that brought me down-to-earth; even as the fiery, bracing philosophical reflections sent my literary imagination soaring.

Crossing the roads separating the university campus from the oasis of Illich's home, my senses came alive with the hospitality at the heart of Illich's ideals: the virtues of friendship. Here began my complete healing from the dis-ease of being "underdeveloped." Instead of the tedium of professional meetings, I savored the moments, silently witnessing the leisurely playfulness of ideas taking flight over the course of long evenings – in slow time. Instead of the familiar rush to run home, I enjoyed lingering with kindred spirits sharing "*conspiratio*" into the long night. Each highly anticipated fall evening en-fleshed for me his ideals of *scholē* and *eutrapelia*: the arts of leisurely, graceful and beautiful learning/ dancing / delighting.

After years of resisting learning anything from Master Illich, I became more and more open to being surprised, delighted, and all too often completely confused by his bracing, always adventurous, unfamiliar historical and intercultural pathways. Such confusions were an essential aspect of groping together in the uncharted intellectual adventures of his shared explorations – going beyond all "certainties" defining modernity. Slowly, I started losing familiar schooled anxieties about not being "caught up" with others in Illich's circle where we unceremoniously sat or lay down on the encircling cushions. Why had it taken me so long to realize that Illich had never called for the closure of schools, universities or hospitals in his misunderstood bestsellers: *Deschooling Society* and *Medical Nemesis*? I began living such questions – without impatiently waiting for quick answers. In the interim, between academic semesters,

guided by others within the Illich circle, while travelling throughout India, I began to “look and see” anew ... to see the “un” and “undereducated”, the “illiterates” and “unschooled” living and learning at the grassroots, as anything but “disposables,” or as “needy men and women,” needing the mandated curriculum that would invariably label them as “dregs”, “wastes” and “dropouts”.

Now, it became natural to respond to his call for action: to recover the “common sense” of commoners and “common-ing.” I began imagining the end of Truman’s era of Development: its engineered scarcities -- of teachers or the genius of learners; of healing freed from high-tech hospitalizations. I began joining Illich’s conspirators in hoping for worlds freed from state-mandated, credentialed education; with endless opportunities opening up for learning and teaching freed from the compulsory confinements of classrooms. I came to appreciate the sense and sensibility of extending the separation of Church and State; to boldly include the separation of State and School – weaning us from fundamentalisms that went beyond imposing “right” religions to requiring pedigreed credentials for living fulfilling, creative, fruitful, rich and sane lives. Such insights moved me to embark on journeys home to my ancestors – rich in practical skills and wisdom; unburdened by the tomes that I had memorized and mastered for a well-credentialed and feverishly updated Curriculum Vitae.

Among the countless blessings of savoring pasta in Illich’s home on Friday nights was witnessing the birth of *The Development Dictionary*. (Sachs 1992) Scholars from different cultures and lands (jocularly called Illich’s Flying Circus) came to share Illich’s passion for *interculturality*: desecrated by the oil slick of Development. Twenty toxic words (including “Education”, “Planning”, “Population”, “Poverty”, “State”, “Environment”, “Equality”, “Science”, “Development” and others) were thoroughly exposed for the ways in which they poisoned our hearts and minds – divorcing us from our soil cultures; while incarcerating peoples world-wide; pushed, as I had been, into waging Development wars on themselves and others.

Moved by Illich, I surprised myself – learning from one of his heroes – St. Schindler: saving “his” Jews while fraternizing with the Nazis.



Failing in all my attempts to leave the academy in order to re-root myself in soil cultures, I could not, however, continue teaching the “stuff” of my award-winning doctoral dissertation; nor subscribe to the Bell and other curves that made it “notable” within the academy. Instead, I fully embraced the many challenges of creating new conditions for honoring the unique genius of all learners – in all their singularity and particularity; even when, and *especially* when they had already fully bought into self-deprecating categorizations of themselves as ONLY “Bs”, “Cs”, “Ds”, “failures” and “dropouts.”

This came with a heavy price I was forced to pay within the academy. With predictable regularity, I received “collegial” taunts for “lacking standards,” “lowering the objective bar for “As.” Even as a Full Professor of Education, I was publicly shamed for my incapacity to teach professional philosophy of education – as taught at Stanford and the other Ivy Leagues. I was condemned for giving centrality to nourishing slow food and soil in my curricula and pedagogy; composting shit and other “waste”; preventing climate collapse by promoting ecological literacy rather than only the modern Rs.

Rank and tenure did not protect me from professionalized abuse. Nor did such rebukes stop me from opening up windows to other landscapes of learning. In all my courses, I began exploring why “underdeveloped / developed,” “illiterate,” “primitive,” “uncivilized,” “illegal” were words as toxic as the vast family of terms related to the “N” word. I began including stories from what I was learning at the “grassroots”; including co-creating communities where building our dwellings with adobe was as central as banning flush toilets: re-sacralizing soil and water through dry latrines.

Step by step, I began finding ways to learn from my ancestors while living in the belly of the Development beast. I began confessing to my own complicity in working for a system that produced more “dropouts” globally than it did successes. Furthermore, I began accurately naming these “successes” – which included me—for their role in promoting unsustainable life styles. We would need six planets to fulfill the illusion of equality which allowed the “other” seven billion to “enjoy” our

privileges. Such “enjoyment,” I could not hide from myself or others, was severely short-lived; abjectly suicidal.

### **Soil Cultures: Remembering, Recovering, Regenerating Peace**

More than a century ago, Gandhi’s prescience predicted that if an independent India adopted the “civilization” of her colonizers, she would destroy the earth with the speed of locusts. On more than one occasion, Illich confessed that his own vast corpus of published and unpublished works remained a mere footnote to Gandhi’s 90 volumes on the practices of *Shanti* (peace) won through *Ahimsa* (non-violence). Illich’s passion for “techno-fasting,” for example, had been articulated a century before by Gandhi. Both remained equally unimpressed by the modern feats of “machine” driven moderns.

Educated to be as ignorant about Gandhi (India’s *Bapu* / father), as I was about all the soil-cultures he celebrated, Illich aroused my curiosity; starting my Gandhian *Ahimsa* pilgrimage—once again while crossing over the threshold of his home in Central Pennsylvania. Guided by Illich, I began with Gandhi’s tiny, pamphlet *Hind Swaraj*, (Gandhi 1938) written by hand in 1908 on board the ship taking him back to South Africa from London; only two years into the birth of the *Ahimsa* movement that had already won him global recognition. Unqualifiedly, it called for peacefully liberating ourselves from the servitude of being Britain’s “jewel in the crown”; de-colonizing our hearts and minds. Illich’s 1980 short essay, “The De-linking of Peace and Development” (Illich 1992, 15-26) offered a perfect companion for my inspired foray into “peace studies.” Such juxtapositions with Illich’s social thought moved me towards the first of many small steps into Gandhi’s 90 volumes – which require several dedicated life times of *studium*.

On December 1, 1980, Illich’s opening address at the Asian Peace Research gathering in Yokohama, Japan, began with a confession of ignorance: regarding the multiple meanings of the word “peace” in different languages and cultures (for example, *shanti* in Hindi, or *shalom* in Hebrew). Illich’s confessions of his ignorance about the multitude of ways for speaking about or enacting “peace” over centuries shed light on the fact of my own ignorance about the Indian ideals of *shanti* and

*ahimsa*. He clarified for me how Truman's post-war declaration for global development, announced on the day he took office on January 20, 1949, marked the launch of a new era for systematically warring against the peace of soil cultures, Illich urges: "[L]imits to economic development, originating at the grassroots, are the principal condition for people to recover their peace." (Illich 1992, 16)

The environmental and ecological alarms Illich sounded half a century ago, I now hear being echoed globally as horrors bombard the daily lives of billions; as temperatures soar and fires consume rain forests; as climate collapses with carbon, pulled out of soil cultures; as COVID-19 disproportionately kills the most thirsty, hungry, homeless and poverty stricken; as fear and despair spread the rot of their contagion. Repeatedly reminding me of the moral imperative to recover the virtue of hope, Illich heals another affliction being globalized: "apocalyptic randiness." (Illich in Cayley 1992, 146) In lieu of the hysterical "arousals" attending "the end of the world is here" pronouncements, Illich's hope is cultivated through quiet acts committed to the healing friendships born of moral action: "Carry a candle in the dark, *be* a candle in the dark, know that you're a flame in the dark." (Illich in Cayley 1992, 147)

On December 6, 1990, Illich and friends began circulating another pamphlet for remembering, recovering, and regenerating soil cultures: "Hebenshausen: Declaration on Soil." (Illich et al unpublished) Pithy and to the point, in less than two pages it flew me home; crossing oceans, mountains and continents; while teaching me how to become rooted, flowing water in Central Pennsylvania. My awakened imagination, stretching through time and space, brought me to where my ancestors had stood tall for centuries; with their feet firmly planted in their cultures – replacing rigidity with resilience; their lives shaped invariably by the virtues of soil. In a few short paragraphs, this pamphlet completely undid four decades of the indoctrination I suffered since birth. Finally, I was freed to fall in love again with what I had forsaken as a little girl: the soil cultures of my Punjabi ancestors. It awoke childhood memories of profound pleasures eating vegetables freshly harvested from fields; slowly stirred atop handmade, earthen *chullahs* (stoves); flavored by freshly churned butter from buffalos milked a few hours ago by the hands of our extended family members.

Only in hindsight do I realize that at the very moment of my first encounter with Illich in 1981, the soil of the Punjab was already being poisoned and lost by the violence of the scientifically engineered Green Revolution; seducing Punjabi farming communities with all the false promises of Development. Once renowned for the abundance created by their soils and waters, today Punjabi farmers top the charts of worldwide suicide statistics: the inevitable effects of agribusiness takeovers of peoples' places, palates, and intestines.

This violence can be undone, Illich's hopefulness reminds and reassures. It *must* be undone. Illich leads the way for me and other "conspirators." It is, he says, [our] duty to speak about soil. For Plato, Aristotle and Galen it could be taken for granted; not so today. Soil on which culture can grow and corn be cultivated is lost from view when it is defined as a complex subsystem, scarce, resource, problem or "farm" – as agricultural science tends to do... As philosophers, we offer resistance to those ecological experts who preach respect for science, but foster neglect for historical tradition, local flair and the earthy virtue, self-limitation. Therefore, we issue a call for a philosophy of soil: a clear, disciplined analysis of that experience and memory of soil without which neither virtue nor some new kind of subsistence can be. (Illich et al unpublished, 2)

Illich's call carried me to another vast treasure-trove of writings on the destruction of soil cultures: the essays, poems, plays and fiction of his friend, Wendell Berry. Their answers bring me "down to earth," literally and metaphorically. I restate them here in the simplest terms: to nurture and be nurtured by two types of soil: physical and cultural. Both are inextricably interconnected. Physical soil is sacred in the cultures of Punjabi and all other soil cultures. Agri(soil)culture, displaced by Agri(soil)business, destroys family farm communities globally, including that of my ancestors. Illich and Berry guide my understanding of two types of deserts (physical and social) that follow the displacement of soil cultures by agri-businesses.

Oral stories of place shared intergenerationally are central to cultivating roots that keep both cultural and physical soils where they belong. In the company of Illich, joined by many of his kindred spirits – including Gandhi and Berry, I began living my way into the question: What are people for? Daily, all three nudge me towards my ancestral wisdom about the daily rituals of slowing down; essential for making soil – physical and cultural. Among my favorite stories of hope for COVID “lockdowns” include the regeneration of Victory Gardens, with young people discovering from their elders’ cultural practices centered around slow food.

### **Who is Ivan Illich?**

Who is Ivan Illich? This question nags me more persistently than it did when I began this essay. It is all too clear that I offer the very roughest of sketches; inadequate for revealing the genius and bracing intellect of a “larger than life” public intellectual; whose vastness of vision, exuberance of spirit, and passionate cultivation of friendships challenged and stretched my imagination more than any other teacher. Travelling with Illich sporadically for a few, brief, interrupted weeks and months over the course of two, too-short decades, I have found myself arriving where I came from 69 years ago; and, knowing it for the first time.

In these final “snapshots” ... brief as fading photos, I seek to offer glimpses; expressing gratitude not only to Illich but to the large legacy of those who, like David Cayley among other “conspirators,” have dedicated decades of their lives to honoring the life and work of the “most radical thinker of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” ... also known as one of the most significant “witnesses” of his time. My wild hope is that in these celebrations of Illich, some readers will savor flavors that will lead them directly to the source: the original books and essays for which Illich was both admired and reviled; in equal measure, inspired by some, while still remaining completely misunderstood by many others. (Sacacas nd)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> L. M. Sacacas’s *The Convivial Society* podcast and newsletter provide a fine introduction to Illich and his legacy: <https://theconvivialsociety.substack.com/>.

Often asked to be a guide into Ivan Illich's literary worlds, my experience compels me to start at the very beginning ... with one of his earliest essays while he was still a Monsignor of the Catholic Church. Written and orally delivered to secular or religious proselytizers visiting Mexico in 1968, Illich's essay "To Hell with Good Intentions," (Illich in Kendall 1990, 314-320) boldly proffers the gift of the Illichian Zen Slap. The brevity and simplicity of his 1968 wake-up call offers invaluable insights into the vast corpus of his writings. Here, he warns "do-gooders" not to impose their so-called "developed standard of living and educating" upon "underdeveloped / illiterate / developing" diverse cultures – flattening them into the monoculture of modernity.

Further steps toward Illichian insight can be taken through the annotated bibliography crafted by his good friends, Lee Hoinacki and Carl Mitchum, in their 2002 edited book: *The Challenges of Ivan Illich*. For those concerned about the desecration of soil and sacred water (as I am, given the reverence for rivers and other waters in the Hindu-Sikh cosmovision), I urge exploring another often-misunderstood masterpiece by Illich: *H2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness*. (Illich 1985) Now that climate collapse is no longer a well-kept secret, it helps me guide people towards deeply appreciating traditional cultures' reverence for soil, water, and all the gifts of Mother Earth.

Given the vast range of his literary explorations in social thought, it is important for me to remember that there are as many Illiches as there are pupillas with whom he shared "the gaze": in and through which, seeing our reflections, we come to know and be known. I pause before the first among the multitude of Illiches I have chosen to give most importance to in these pages: the one who guided me home to my Sikh and Hindu ancestors. Master Illich opened wide my heart and mind into recognizing the wealth of their soil cultures; their ways of living, learning and dying: no longer dismissible as "underdeveloped."

Illich was a rare 20<sup>th</sup> century intellectual who cultivated deep friendships with his literary/ intellectual ancestors; travelling as far back as the 12<sup>th</sup> Century to celebrate his love for and friendship with Hugh of St. Victor; studying the latter's *Didascalicon* with rare dedication. As evidenced in Illich's book, *In the Vineyard of the Text*, (Illich 1993) the list of his ancient

and contemporary teachers is a long one – celebrating as he does his life of a robust, contagious “*polyphiliac*.”

With Jacques Maritain, Illich discovers the modern sin of “planning.” With Jacques Ellul, he studies the prison of the industrial technological system. With Lewis Mumford, Leopold Kohr, and others, he delves deep into the proportionality and scale appropriate for humans’ five senses – growing out of them the sixth one: common sense. Once again, Hugh of St. Victor guides Illich to clarify:

“Science BY the people” is the flowering of common sense. In contrast, “Science FOR the people” ... simply R and D ... is usually conducted by large institutions –governments, industry, universities, clinics, the military, foundations ... It is usually a highly prestigious activity ... expensive and tax-exempt. [It has] no bearing on the immediate everyday activities of him who does it. R and D can be carried out on neutron bombs, muscular dystrophy, solar cells or fish ponds – (supposedly) always for the service for the people. (Illich 1981, 513)

In celebration of “Science BY the people” of soil cultures, Illich found it critical to point out the industrial chasm separating it from R and D, or “Science FOR the people” – imposed upon common women and men, like the Green Revolution or Agribusiness.

The second Illich who comes to me is the one I have focused least upon in my *studium* with him: the striking towering man with the distinctive tumor on his cheek: as large as a softball; lumpy and grotesque in its protrusions; completely layered over on top with additional smaller lumps; all of which, over decades invaded his skull; insidiously spreading its tentacles into his jaws, ears and teeth; too-often destroying his sense of balance and equilibrium; while regularly negating his capacities for concentration or restful sleep. No longer could he simply walk, talk or teach without that vast tumor arousing horror and fear in strangers. Some crossed over to the other side of the street when they witnessed the protrusion from afar – as if running away from a monster.



Others demanded a change of seating in planes when placed next to him. Illich often shared such stories with the same lightness and humor with which he spoke of his other distinctive facial feature: his Jewish nose marked him out; forcing his escape from his ancestral home in what became Hitler's Vienna. Still a terrified teenager, fully responsible for the safety of his widowed Jewish mother and younger twin brothers, he fled with them to Florence, Italy. Ivan mastered the arts of embracing these life gifts. With serious humor, he celebrated that nose which rendered him a refugee in Nazi times, honoring it in the same spirit as he did his highly cultivated sense of smell – not just to savor delicious cuisines; but, equally, to smell situations ... relationships ... and, most significantly, the friendships and kindred spirits with which he defined his being.

The inescapable, excruciating pain of that tumor took him deep and far in cultivating the “arts of suffering”: that pain often publicly forcing him into a fetal position before he could relax himself into straightening his body – once a small dose of opium subsided some of the anguish.

Why, I wondered along with others, did he not have the best medical experts remove it, while sedating his pain “away” with morphine? Why did he choose to live with it; and die with it only a few minutes before a scheduled public address in Bremen on December 2, 2002? *Medical Nemesis* – one of his instant best sellers in 1976 – offers critical clues for answering such questions. Decades after its publication, life sent him his “new cross”; leading him to thoroughly research his painful predicament: revealing all the threats posed by state-of-the-art surgeries, opioids and other advanced medical interventions posed to his vibrant vitality and creativity. Deliberately, carefully, he chose the path of learning to live a rich, remarkably creative life, while embracing his pain and suffering.<sup>3</sup> In lieu of the “nemesis” and counterproductivity of medical expertise, he befriended his pain, his personal “cross.” He cultivated the virtues necessary for doing so with courage, grace and equanimity – as part of practicing the arts of suffering and dying;

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<sup>3</sup> Illich opted for small opium dosages over morphine and other opioids. For the former rendered his pain bearable; taking off its excruciating edge; while allowing him the alertness, lucidity and awokenness he sought--to be fully present both to his work and friends.

essential for living the good life. "Yes, we suffer pain, we become ill, we die. But we also hope, laugh, celebrate; we know the joy of caring for one another; often we are healed and we recover by many means. We do not have to pursue the flattening-out of human experience. I invite all to shift their gaze, their thoughts, from worrying about health care to cultivating the art of living. And, today with equal importance, the art of suffering, the art of dying." (Mitcham, 2003)

In hindsight, I realize I missed invaluable opportunities to learn from him how sickness and pain, if borne with grace and equanimity, become our teachers, returning us to our bodies. Only recently, I learned from a friend suffering COVID-19, that Gandhi almost died from the Spanish flu of 1918-20. It took him years to regain his strength. When he did, he confessed that his illness had been his spiritual teacher: taking him much further along on the path of peace through *ahimsa*. Perhaps it is bold of me to conjecture that Illich, too, went much further along his journey of cultivating the virtues of friendship – given the growing interdependence that came out of his immense pain; as public as was the vastness of his facial tumor.

His pain is an even more significant teacher for me today. Suffering from a mysterious chronic, often unbearable pain for much of 2020, I yearn to gaze into the *pupilla* of the Master; learning to learn from him how he gracefully bore his “cross” for more than two decades; while remaining unmatchably creative; celebrating his awareness of suffering as much as the joys of friendship. He fully lived his hospitality offered to strangers and friends crossing over his threshold, without allowing his agonies to become a narcissistic barrier to the fullest flowering of friendship.

The third Illich continues compelling me to practice the virtues of friendship. Once Illich announced that he finally knew who he was by seeing himself in the eyes of his friends, “from your eyes, I find myself.” (Illich and Mitcham 1998, 59) Illich departs from the virtue of *philia* in Plato’s Republic. ... where it springs from the politics of the democratic *polis*, appropriate in scale, while scarred by misogyny and slavery. Reflecting on the scale of our nation states, Illich recognized that that Greek ideal of friendship was no longer a possibility:

Today, I do not believe that friendship can flower out of political life. I believe that if something like a political life is to remain for us in this world of technology, then it begins with friendship. Therefore, my task is to cultivate disciplined, self-denying, careful, tasteful friendships. Mutual friendships always – I and you and, I hope, a third person – out of which perhaps community can grow. Because perhaps here we can find what the good is. (Illich and Mitcham, 1998, 60)

Illich devoted himself to performing that task: cultivating tasteful friendships--always political--yet entirely detached from what we usually call politics today in the age of show. He reminded his friends, as he did himself, about what could be grown for the common good out of the soil in which these friendships were rooted. Such friendships are cultivated, I learned, through the leisurely hospitality I savored, crossing over Illich's threshold. It offered me what my colleagues could not. Illich created the conditions for friendship to flourish:

I remain certain that the quest for truth cannot thrive outside the nourishment of mutual trust flowering into a commitment to friendship. Therefore, I have tried to identify the climate that fosters and the "conditioned" air that hinders the growth of friendship. ... Only the gratuitous commitment of friends can enable me to practice the asceticism required for modern near paradoxes, such as renouncing systems analysis while typing on my Toshiba. (Illich in Hoinacki and Mitcham 2002, 235)

Following Illich's gaze, I have also come to discover myself in the pupilla of my friends. As his gaze carries me home to my Punjabi ancestors, I see the vastness of the web of relationships in which I am a knot, among the wondrous rendering of knots I celebrate today in the mythologies of divine Indra's Net.

## Regenerating Soil Cultures with Ancestors

We revere and adore the true teacher who sees us whole, our faults dissolved.

*Sri Guru Granth Sahib* (in Kaur, 2020, 323)

This was to be a journey of ancestral re-member-ing – honoring my literal and literary ancestors as “a labor of love.” Sadly, that was *not* how writing this essay unfolded for me. Why? In addition to the intense and inexplicable pain that overcame me during my anxiety-filled, COVID-19 evacuation from India, I found myself “stuck.” I was unable to find words for sharing how Illich turned my life around as a woman of color; wading her way through all the violent competitiveness of the academy; suffered both by students and professors. Why was it so hard to birth the love letter to Illich I had intended? Why was it as daunting as birthing my son Krishna “naturally” -- instead of the C-Section I had started to “scream” for in the hospital – only to be gently silenced by my patient, nurturing doula?

Once again, answers arrived in surprising ways. One of the conspirators of this book, Estrus Tucker, shared the timeliness of “revolutionary love” celebrated in *See No Stranger: A Memoir and Manifesto of Radical Love* by Valarie Kaur – a Sikh American (Kaur 2020). Her call to revolutionary love in December 2016 at the AME church in Washington DC, invited by Reverend William Barber, reflected on the hellish pain of birthing a new nation following the terrifying election victory of Trump. Her words went viral; with more than four million people across the earth singing hallelujah to her talk, which began with words from the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Within minutes, recognizing a kindred Sikhni, I downloaded her audio-book. Over the next month, I listened to her recitations repeatedly; and, for the first time in my 69 years on earth, comprehended the Song of Hope my mother had recited decades before and after my conception. That song speaks to me of the hope Illich guided us to cultivate – in the 1960s; and, even more so today in 2020; trapped as we find ourselves today in the suffering of COVID-19, climate collapse and the race riots provoked by the most divisive and dangerous President. Kaur’s “revolutionary love” speaks to me of Illich’s “radical love” exemplified by the good Samaritan: the Palestinian who picks up and tends to the

discarded, “dissed” Jew in the ditch; revolting against all the established walls separating “foes” from “family”; de-humanized “illegals” from “legal” citizens.

Journeying home to my soil culture ancestors today, I hear Valerie Kaur’s voice joining my mother, grandmother, and great-great-great grandmothers: reciting our centuries-old Song of Hope. Singing this song today in Central Pennsylvania, Illich’s presence is as palpable for me as that of my mother Rajinder Dandona, her mother Shakuntala Devi, her grandmother Biji, and all of my ancestors. I invite you to join me in rejoicing with our sacred Song of Hope; hoping for the healing of Creation: which remains, despite the continuing hate, violence and wanton desecration, nothing short of wondrous:

Wondrous is sound, wondrous is ancient wisdom  
Wondrous are the creatures, wondrous are their varieties  
Wondrous are the forms, wondrous are the colors  
Wondrous are the beings who wander around unclothed  
Wondrous is the wind, wondrous is the water  
Wondrous is the fire, which works wonders  
Wondrous is the earth, wondrous the sources of creation  
Wondrous are the tastes we seek and seize  
Wondrous is union, wondrous is separation  
Wondrous is hunger, wondrous is satisfaction  
Wondrous is divine praise, wondrous is divine adoration  
Wondrous is the wilderness, wondrous is the right path  
Wondrous is closeness, wondrous is distance  
Wondrous to face the divine, ever-present now  
Beholding these wonders, I am wonderstruck  
.... [T]hose who understand this are blessed.

*Guru Granth Sahib* (in Kaur 2020, 320-321)

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## Learning to Learn with Ivan Illich: Regenerating Soil Cultures

Madhu Suri Prakash

**Abstract** In looking back over her immensely fruitful life and her many influences, Madhu Suri Prakash thoughtfully ponders her Punjabi ancestry and the disabling impacts of colonization, including the colonial legacy of the English education system in India and its creation of colonized minds. She tells her education story from her work as a critical pedagogue, through the transformation she experienced given her long association with Ivan Illich enabling her to escape the disabling of conventional education and professionalism, toward her work regenerating soil cultures, including coming full circle to honour her mother and grandmothers as well as the humble and storied culture of her youth.

**Keywords** soil cultures, regenerative culture, Ivan Illich, ancestral belonging, global development, development disease, liberation pedagogy, education in India, critical pedagogy, disabling professions, commoning, hope and hospitality

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## Apprendre à apprendre avec Ivan Illich :Régénérer les cultures du sol

Madhu Suri Prakash

**Résumé** En revisitant sa vie immensément riche et les nombreuses influences qui l'ont façonnée, Madhu Suri Prakash réfléchit à son héritage pendjabi et aux impacts dévastateurs de la colonisation, notamment l'héritage colonial du système éducatif anglais en Inde et sa contribution à la formation d'esprits colonisés. Elle retrace son parcours éducatif, depuis son travail en tant que pédagogue critique jusqu'à son



engagement dans la régénération des cultures du sol, en passant par la transformation profonde qu'elle a vécue grâce à sa longue association avec Ivan Illich. Cette relation lui a permis de s'affranchir des effets invalidants de l'éducation conventionnelle et du professionnalisme, pour finalement revenir à ses racines et rendre hommage à sa mère, à ses grands-mères et à la culture humble et riche en récits de son enfance.

**Mots clés** cultures du sol, culture régénérative, Ivan Illich, appartenance ancestrale, développement mondial, pathologie du développement, pédagogie de la libération, éducation en Inde, pédagogie critique, professions invalidantes, mutualisation, espoir et hospitalité

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## **Aprender a aprender con Ivan Illich:Regenerar las culturas del suelo**

Madhu Suri Prakash

**Resumen** Al reflexionar sobre su vida profundamente fructífera y las numerosas influencias que la marcaron, Madhu Suri Prakash analiza su ascendencia punjabi y los efectos debilitantes de la colonización, incluido el legado colonial del sistema educativo inglés en la India y su contribución a la formación de mentes colonizadas. Relata su historia educativa, desde su labor como pedagoga crítica, pasando por la transformación que vivió gracias a su prolongada relación con Ivan Illich, que le permitió liberarse de las limitaciones de la educación convencional y el profesionalismo, hasta su trabajo en la regeneración de las culturas del suelo. Este recorrido culmina en un reconocimiento a su madre, sus abuelas y la cultura humilde y cargada de historia de su juventud.

**Palabras clave** culturas del suelo, cultura regenerativa, Ivan Illich, pertenencia ancestral, desarrollo global, patología del desarrollo, pedagogía de la liberación, educación en la India, pedagogía crítica, profesiones limitantes, comunitarismo, esperanza y hospitalidad