

Seeking new imaginations of transformation from the global south



Harini Nagendra

We know more about Science than the imaginations
that shape transformations
And yet... we are human. Human actions are shaped by
Imagination

Environmentalism of the Rich: (Global North)

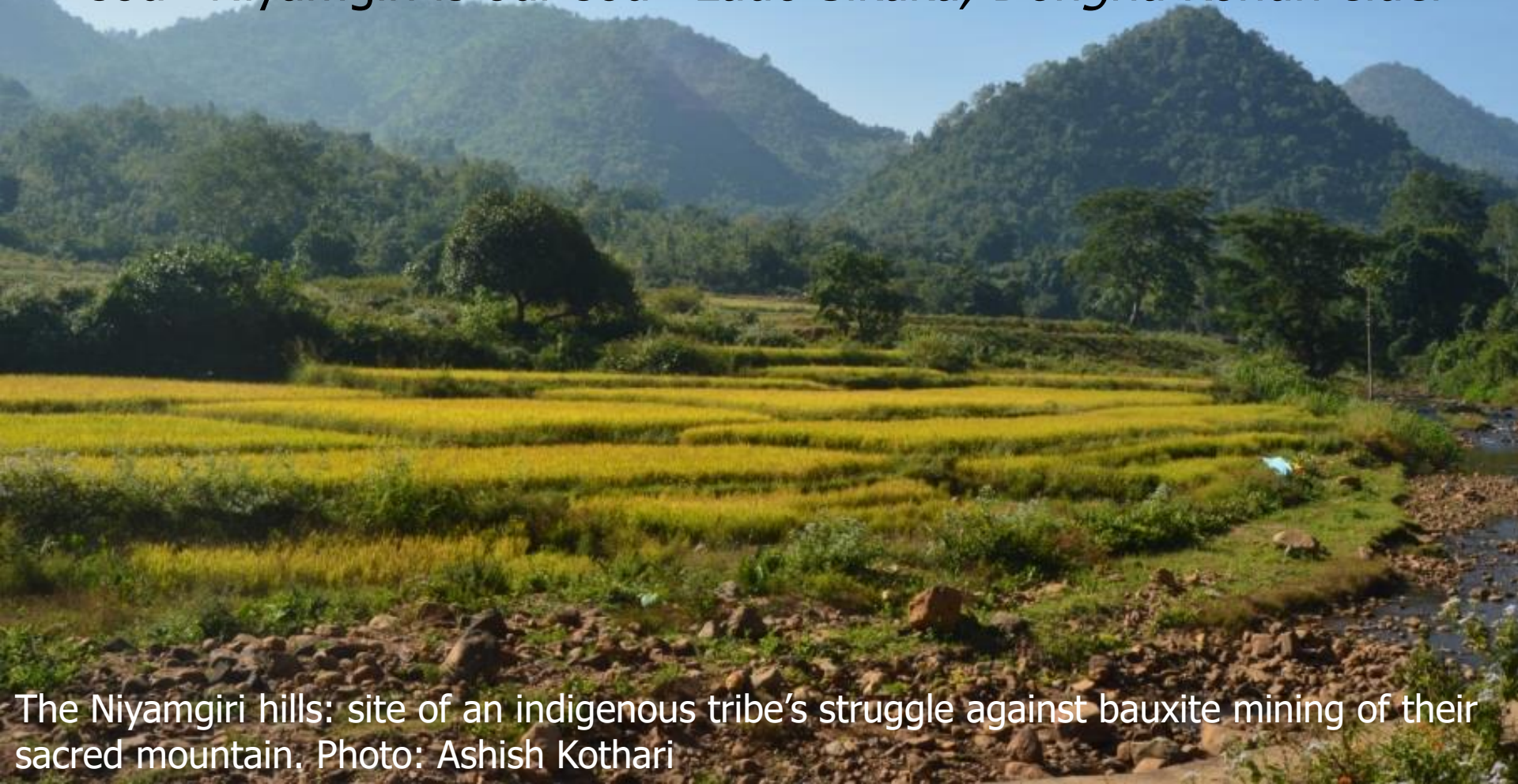
Biocentric fascination with wilderness
Top down, seeks to minimize human presence
Shaped by 'new converts' to the cause

Environmentalism of the Poor: (Global South)

Anthropocentric, driven by livelihoods
Bottom-up movements by embedded communities
Indigenous groups or tribes

Powerful – but 3 ways in which this is incomplete

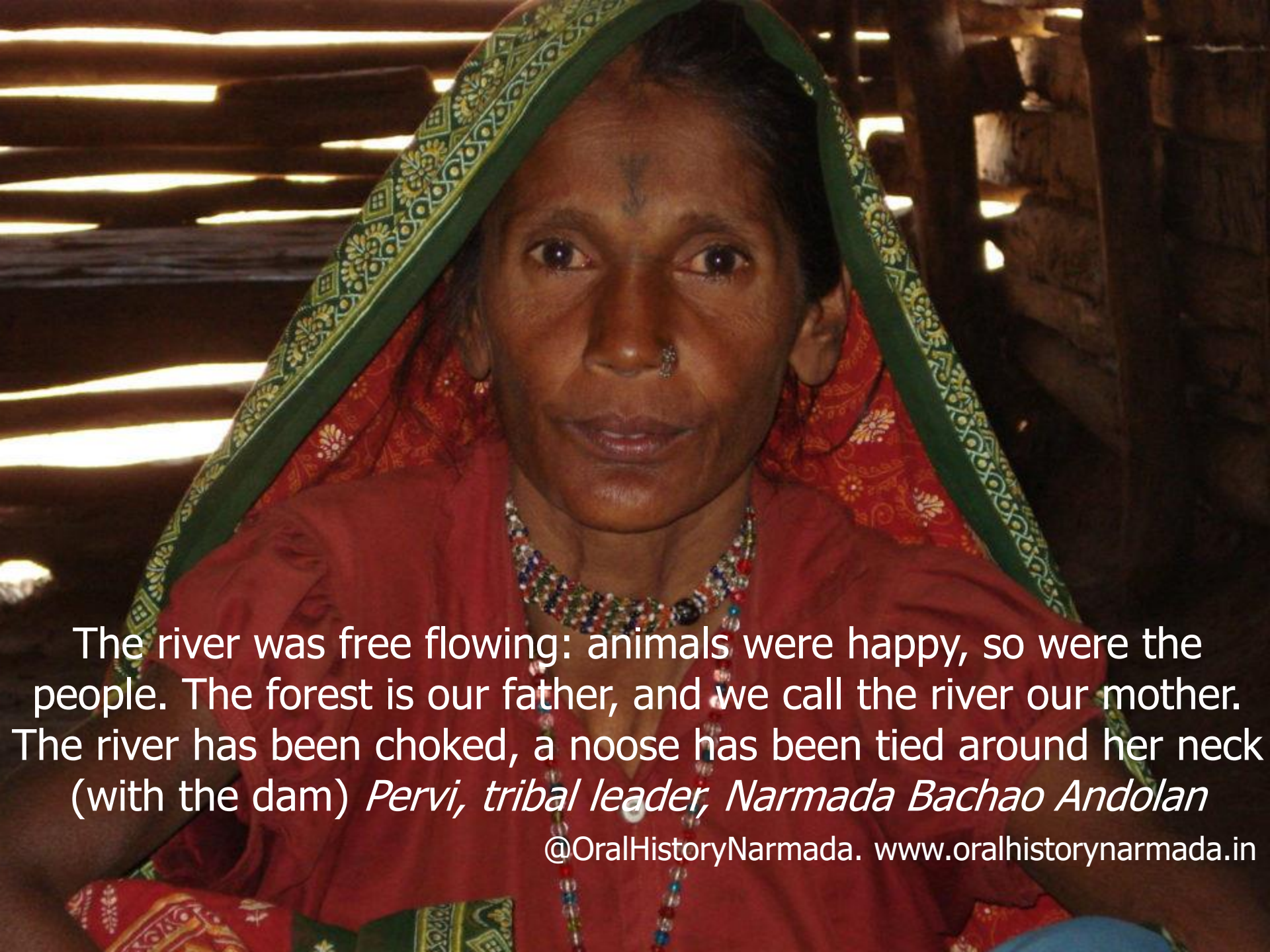
They want to take these rocks from the mountain. These rocks are the reason our children can live here. Because of these the rains come. The winter comes, the wind blows, the mountain brings all the water. If they take away all the rocks, we'll die. We'll lose our soul. Niyamgiri is our soul. *Lado Sikaka, Dongria Kondh elder*



The Niyamgiri hills: site of an indigenous tribe's struggle against bauxite mining of their sacred mountain. Photo: Ashish Kothari

Niyamgiri movement

- Against mining
- Indigenous tribal community, Dongria Kondh
- Support from Survival International, Greenpeace
- Supreme Court recognition of forest rights
- Forest rights derived because of intense social movement, supported by activists, academics, labour groups across India



The river was free flowing: animals were happy, so were the people. The forest is our father, and we call the river our mother. The river has been choked, a noose has been tied around her neck (with the dam) *Pervi, tribal leader, Narmada Bachao Andolan*

@OralHistoryNarmada. www.oralhistorynarmada.in

Narmada Bachao Andolan

- India's most influential environmental movement
- Against large dams
- International pressure - forced World Bank review
 - U.S. Congressional Committee oversight hearing

Environmentalism of the Poor: (Global South)

Anthropocentric

Driven by livelihoods and self-interest

Bottom-up by embedded indigenous groups

- But also connected to global networks
- Shaped by teleconnections
- Dialectic engagement with ideas of transformation from the Global North

Sumak Kawsay , Suma Qamaña, Buen Vivir , Ubuntu
Very influential Global South imaginations

- Conviviality and community
- Values human and non-human
- Strong normative and ethical motivations
- Valuing diversity, embracing different opinions
- Extends to roots of queer ecology (Colombia)

Interview with Brigitte Baptiste, Colombia

Classic scientific categories are constructed to reinforce the qualities of objects, to allow them to be identified ever more certainly. Modernity necessitates this; it's indispensable for the development of a technically advanced civilization. In biology it poses problems. **We have to be conscious of the tendency to excessively prize and presume stability.** Even the species concept in biology does not withstand close scrutiny... So nothing is really stable. **A "queer ecology"... would work to balance a recognition of what's been done epistemologically and ontologically to get us to where we are, and also return to the origin of certain questions, to embrace doubt.**

2

"Indigenous" Global South philosophies engage creatively with ideas of "environmentalism of the rich" and push back against rigid interpretations of sustainability science

3. Global South # indigenous



Rapid urbanization in the South



Night Lights - NASA-NOAA Suomi National Polar-orbiting Partnership
satellite composite: courtesy NASA Earth Observatory



What explains imaginations of lake environmental transformation in cities like Bangalore, by migrants?

Environmental Placemaking

Village residents

Migrant workers

Transgenders

Special-needs children

Nature plays a key role in stimulating a new sense of place

- for those whose place has changed
- and for those in a new place



We need to better understand the imaginations that drive Transformation

- We know more about science than imagination
- Environmentalism of the poor is useful, but not sufficient in indigenous communities
- The South should not be conflated with rural, isolated, indigenous. It is also urban, networked, mixed
- Further studies need to be transdisciplinary – linking Education, Research & Practice