Growing evidence of the ecological unsustainability and iniquitous nature of the current economic development model is prompting a search for alternatives. While various approaches to ‘green’ the economy are being suggested, these are often managerial or technofix-dependent, without fundamentally challenging the political, economic, and social structures that have created the problem in the first place, and without providing an alternative to ‘growth’ as the dominant economic ideology of today. Are there alternative frameworks that can point the way to a truly sustainable and equitable future? Do elements of such frameworks already exist in concept and in practice, and if so, what principles can be derived from them? What needs to be done to make the transition towards such a future?

The presentation will attempt to answer these questions, focusing on one such alternative framework, Radical Ecological Democracy. This framework arises from the myriad grassroots initiatives at meeting basic needs, and achieving alternative modes of governance, production, distribution, and consumption, that have sprung up in many parts of the world; a key focus will be on India which the author is most familiar with. This framework focuses on meeting human needs and aspirations of well-being through direct or radical democracy, localized economies embedded in ecological and cultural landscapes and free of centralized monetary monopolies, notions of human well-being that relate to actual needs of people and to qualitative values like satisfaction and social security, democratic knowledge and technology generation, and sustaining cultural diversity and exchange. It proposes a mix of localization and globalisation, the former providing communities essential control over means of production and consumption, the latter affording possibilities of intercultural exchange and mutual learning.

While proposing such a framework, the presentation will also raise some key questions for further exploration, including the role of the state and private corporations, the relationship between the individual and the collective, and the political agency for achieving the transition.
About the Speaker

Ashish Kothari is founder-member of environmental group Kalpavriksh, Pune. He has coordinated India’s National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan process, served on Greenpeace International and India Boards and steering committees of two IUCN Commissions. Author or editor of over 30 books, including *Churning the Earth*, Ashish Kothari is currently focusing on Radical Ecological Democracy as an alternative to economic globalization.