

# TRANSFORMATIVE STRATEGIES FOR THE PROUT MOVEMENT

By Sohail Inayatullah<sup>1</sup>

Understanding the futures of any movement is by definition problematic. The future, for one, does not yet exist (except from perhaps an absolute spiritual perspective wherein past, present and future exist simultaneously). Yet it is possible to identify certain patterns within all movements. Charles Paprocki<sup>1</sup> has analyzed the rise and fall of social movements based on Sarkar's Wave Theory. He argues that new movements appear once old movements (cosmologies, ideologies and the institutions that support them) cannot sustain legitimacy. The old movement dies because of its own internal contradictions; that is, its inability to maintain agreement or belief. By providing a more coherent analysis and explanation of reality, the new movement challenges the past and, if it is successful, becomes the new thesis.

## WORLDVIEW/PARADIGM CHANGE

Thomas Kuhn has echoed this approach in this classic, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.<sup>2</sup> However, he adds a demographic dimension. Knowledge revolutions occur when a particular age-cohort retires or dies off, thus allowing a new batch of scientists with different assumptions of reality to gain hegemony. What is studied, what is considered the norm, then shifts.

Leading educationalist Richard Slaughter<sup>3</sup> sees this through the lenses of the "Transformative Cycle." In phase one of this cycle, traditional meanings break down and are referred to as problems. In phase two, new ideas emerge that reconceptualize or renew meanings. In phase three, there is conflict between the new and old meanings. Out of this conflict, a few proposals, new ideas, and new movements gain legitimization. This is the fourth phase. These new ideas then become the paradigm through which we view the world.<sup>10</sup>

Prout asserts that we are in the midst of a transition from an old paradigm to a new one. Recent intellectual history has attempted to explain the world from the position of mechanistic Newtonian physics and materialistic liberal capitalism. While the world has numerous specific problems, many of these are a result of the larger paradigms that we use to construct and explain empirical reality. For example, the breakdown of the family, crime,

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desertification, global warming, and the global financial crisis appear to be unrelated problems, a litany of unconnected events and trends. But, in fact, they are outcomes of a materialistic worldview that places the individual first and society second; that disowns nature as it focuses solely on technological progress. Moreover, social divisions are blamed on the individual and the family instead of the inequitable structure of the economy. This worldview is also short-term oriented, mortgaging the future for present gains.

## EMERGING ISSUES

Many of the ideas of Sarkar and the Prout movement can be considered as emerging issues.<sup>4</sup> Emerging issues are at the bottom of the s-curve of events. They have a small following, their frequency of mention in journal articles is low and the issues are not considered urgent for world leaders to attend to. At this stage, the window of opportunity to make foundational or deep changes has decreased since the issue has now become politicized via the tar pit of party politics. It is earlier, in the emerging issues phase, where transformative possibilities abound.

From a Proutist viewpoint, many of Sarkar's ideas – vegetarianism, the rights of animals and plants, meditation as part of daily practice, world government, the theory of microvita, cooperatives – will move up the s-curve eventually moving from fantasy to reality.

In this sense, the Prout movement may be at the same stage in many parts of the world as the ecological movement was a generation ago. From Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*<sup>5</sup> to Earth Day to electoral victories in a few nations to Al Gores, *An Inconvenient Truth*, environmentalism has become normalized. Seen with this perspective, Prout and its core ideas is an emerging intellectual

force. Like the ecological movement, its ideas are likely to become quickly popular. It will then possibly become a trend and eventually a movement that will have to be grappled with by academia, civil society, business and government.

At present, in any discussion of the futures of humanity, the Green alternative is always raised. In the near future, through publications, movements and social service, Prout too may be in that position. Once Sarkar's movement enters the mainstream press, they will challenge old movements. Then there will be a debate for legitimacy. Proutists, like the Greens, or the socialists of the past, will argue that their image of the world and future is more compelling, elegant and realizable in the real world of material and emotional suffering. At this stage, the strength of Prout will be tested. Can it provide a new paradigm surpassing liberal capitalism or environmentalism? Can its image of the world provide new meaning to individuals?

## ALTERNATIVE FUTURES

A number of alternative futures are possible.

First, Prout succeeds. Like other social and economic movements, Prout and its core ideas becomes the dominant framework. This occurs because (1) through its alternative economic framework issues (focus on guaranteeing basic needs) of survival for the global population are resolved; (2) issues of thrival or growth are realized through increased productivity (more efficiencies, greater purpose in work, higher equity leading to more integration and involvement in the world economy); (3) issues of identity are resolved as humans become truly planetary as that is the only way forward. Other identity formations – patriarchy, religion, and nation-state – point the way to civilizational collapse; and, (4) issues of purpose and direction are served through Prout's focus on integrating the spiritual and material, self and other, nature and technology. Thus Prout succeeds because it meets foundational needs for survival, growth, identity and purpose.

Second, Prout as an organization remains marginal but its ideas succeed. Prout's main contribution is in helping create a new worldview which leads to foundational shifts in survival, growth, identity and purpose. Prout itself as an organization does not become a global political player (for example, a world Prout political party does not eventuate).

Third, Prout is unable to play a social or political role and its ideas do not captivate leading thinkers, policy think-tanks and decision-makers. Instead, world capitalism continues moving forward, purchasing dissent every step of the way, and at every bottleneck of accumulation, every world crisis, it adapts. Prout and other movements' ideas are appropriated by world capitalism making the capitalist system even stronger and more durable.

Certainly, for Prout thinkers and activists, the first two are desirable and third not preferred. The first assumes the organizational structure remains

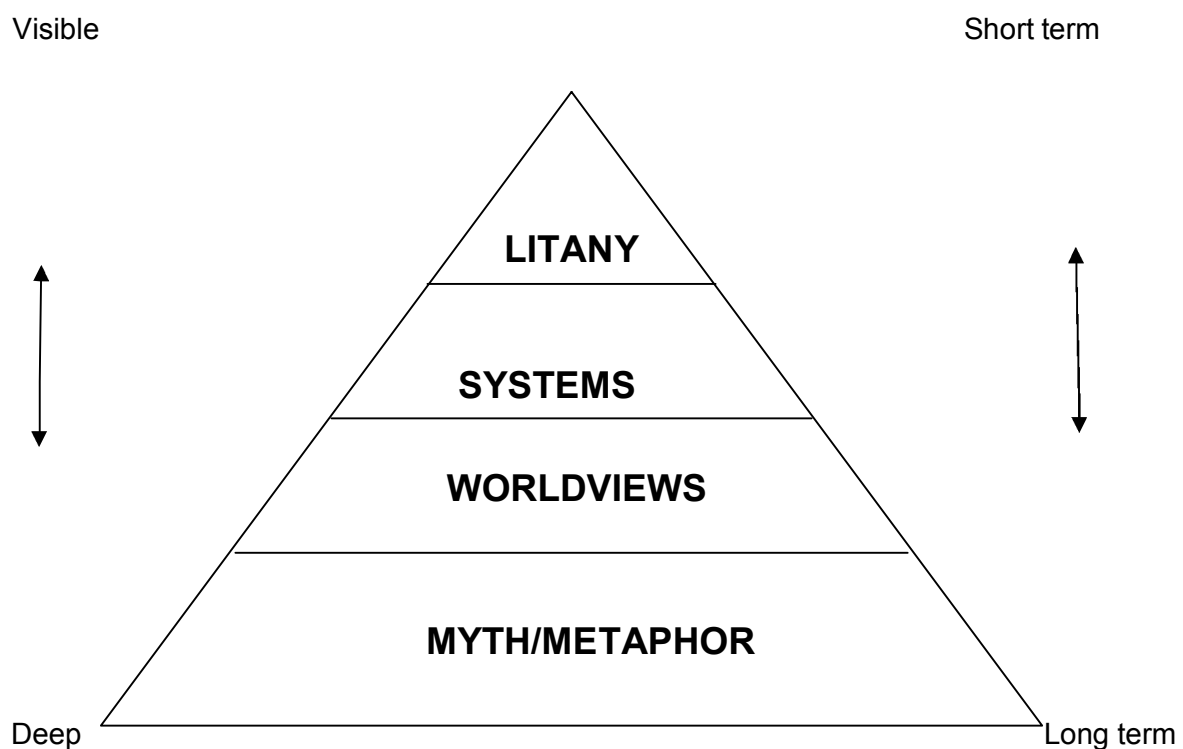
hierarchical, with clear lines of discipline, thus allowing political-institutional success. In the second scenario, it is the portability of Prout projects that is crucial. It is not so much organizational structure but peer-to-peer inspiration. It is the decentralization of projects and ideas that creates a wave of ideational change.

Finally, which will become reality depends on one's own image of the future as well as on decisions humans will make over the next decades. However, using Prout's theory of the social cycle, foundational change is most likely. Capitalism has been able to adapt and reinvent itself, but the current crisis is overwhelming touching on almost every issue (global governance, climate change, terrorism, change in the images of what it means to be human) and likely to entail a transformation of the system, not a continuation.

For Prout to play a role, successful strategy is a necessity.

### STRATEGIC SUCCESS

This challenge to be successful requires strategy at four levels, moving from the most visible, the empirical litany to the least visible, the realm of myths and metaphors.



The first level of change is empirical litany, repeating the daily headlines over and over until we see them as official reality. Changing these measurable indicators means that Prout must offer new measurements that better reflect its vision of the future. These would measure core areas:

- (1) neohumanism (equal opportunity, no discrimination, rights of nature, animals – is there movement toward a vegetarian society);
- (2) political-economy (movement of money, ratio of maximum-minimum income);
- (3) spirituality (spiritual seen as not only a legitimate way of organizing society but a preferred measure - % of individuals involved in a spiritual practice);
- (4) coordinated cooperation (cooperation between genders but also between other groups in society – worker/management, for example); and,
- (5) governance (is there a legal contract between political leaders and citizens, does the constitution guarantee purchasing power, and is there increased movement (conferences, binding treaties, laws) toward regionalism and world federalism?)

The second level of change is systemic change. Systemic change ensures that new ideas prosper. For example, governments can change energy use by repricing – they can subsidize oil consumption or wind-solar. They can provide grants for first time home owners that require solar energy to be used to access the grant. Each state creates systems that support its values. For a new system, such as Prout to become the norm, numerous systemic changes are required. First in schooling, a space and time for quiet meditation time would slowly change the nature of what student's value. Given the relationship between regular meditation and enhanced IQ as well as decreased illness, we can expect to see productivity gains and decreased social-health costs. Second in economic structure, governments can create legislation that favors the cooperative model instead of the corporatist model. This would allow a flourishing of new types of enterprises. They can also enhanced employee-managed and owned businesses by changing taxation strategy as well as pension-superannuation funding. Third, creating new global organizations and insurance schemes that solve problems that states are unable to handle (a global tax on speculation, a new world peace insurance scheme to reduce the military costs of nations, a new world currency) would enhance federalism as would reform of the United Nations.

The third level of change is worldview. We are currently in a transition where the modernist worldview focused on shopping ((shop therefore I am), the nation-state (my nation is better than yours), patriarchy (rule of the strongest male or nation-state) and externalizing all costs (nature in particular) is giving way to a new worldview. What this new worldview will be is still up for grabs. Will it be transmodern, that is, going beyond the modern (by including other ways of knowing) but keeping the progressive nature of rights that modernity brought or postmodern, with new core values by allowing all perspectives or

will it be a return to fundamentalism of the nation-state or religion. For Prout, not only are new indicators and systemic changes crucial but so is being part of the debate of creating a new worldview. This debate is not just "rational" but part of the unconscious – essentially how we see the self, others, and the transcendent. Prout views this as essentially a spiritual transition, an awakening of the self linked to a new planetary ethical framework. Currently, the emerging image is ahead of current reality (which is still defined by the narrow boundaries of nation-statism and economic short-termism). Many individuals believe that a new spiritual planetary future is possible but they are unable to reconcile the desired future with the often brutal and irrational realities of the present. However, more and more there is evidence that current reality itself is undergoing a transition.<sup>6</sup>

The final level of change is the mythic and metaphorical. This is about reframing issues at the deepest level. Instead of debating which system is truer or better, more important is telling a new compelling story about what it means to be human. Sarkar offers the analogy of humanity being on a journey together, moving forward like a family and ensuring no one falls behind. This is very different from the modern capitalist story of technological progress and survival of the fittest. For Prout, the new story includes the worldview of evolution that is not only about physical survival, but also an intellectual struggle, a battle of memes, and, most importantly, with a spiritual direction. Life is more than just the economy or society, it is about individually and collectively moving towards *ananda*, bliss. As Joseph Campbell said, "Follow your bliss."<sup>7</sup> Prout offers this new mythology as well as a practical way to achieve it. But ultimately this is not a path to bliss or Prout, Prout *is* the path, bliss *is* the path.

The way will certainly be very difficult and full of struggles, as Sarkar often reminded us. Humans can always quit, choosing the easier downhill path that moves away from our bliss. For this reason, it is crucial to imagine and feel that the future has already arrived, it is not distant, we are living it today. As Sarkar said:

“Even a half hour before your success, you will not know it.”

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Paprocki, “On Proutist Methodology”, unpublished paper available from the author. Paprocki is a member of the Board of Directors, Proutist University, New York. cpaprocki@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Khun, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago, the University of Chicago Press, 1962.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Slaughter, *Futures Tools and Techniques*, Victoria, Australia, Futures Studies Center, 1987.

<sup>4</sup> For more on the methodological framework in this paper, see Sohail Inayatullah, *Questioning the future: Tools and methods for organizational and societal transformation*. Tamsui, Tamkang University 2007. Articles are also available at [www.metafuture.org](http://www.metafuture.org)

<sup>5</sup> Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, 40th anniversary edition. New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2002

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<sup>6</sup> For example, see Graeme Taylor, *Evolution's Edge*. Bagriola Island, Canada, New Society Publishers, 2008. Bill Halal, *Technology's Promise*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. Sohail Inayatullah, Positive trends amidst the doom and gloom. [www.metafuture.org](http://www.metafuture.org). May 15, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> See the works of Joseph Campbell at the Joseph Campbell Foundation. <http://www.jcf.org/new/index.php?categoryid=31>. Accessed May 13, 2009.