



## The Rise of a New Social Paradigm

by Ravi Logan

Two years ago, I had a chance encounter with my friend Luna, who had been out of town for most of the past year traveling in South America. She was excited to tell me that she had attended this year's World Social Forum in Brazil. At the conference, she encountered a buzz about PROUT.

The World Social Forums have emerged as important gatherings for an international alliance of grass roots groups to advance resistance and alternatives to economic globalization. While the anti-globalization movement has a compelling critique of economic globalism, it lacks a compelling alternative vision. Which is where PROUT comes in.

PROUT (the Progressive Utilization Theory) is a new paradigm of development based on economic decentralism, social equity, bioregional devolution, cultural empowerment, a planetary polity, bio-equality, and spiritual-humanism. As such, it compliments the critique of globalization with a deeply thought out and coherent alternative. But recognition of the value of this alternative developmental model has been slow to take root in the progressive community. Until now.

I had heard that Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez had expressed appreciation for PROUT, particularly for its advocacy of cooperative enterprise. And I knew that Leonardo Boff, a founder of Liberation Theology, and Frei Betto, the famed Dominican friar and political activist, had long spoken highly of PROUT. But I was surprised to hear that interest is now extending to a wider constituency.

Luna was excited to share this news with me because she knew of my interest in PROUT, though she did not how deep my connection with it goes. Few in my local community do. My involvements of late have focused elsewhere, but in the early 90s my lectures on PROUT took me to five continents.

### **PROUT on Five Continents**

At that time, I was the director of the North American PROUT Institute and the associate editor of *Common Future*, a visionary PROUT journal that looked synthetically at the interrelated economic, ecological, cultural, and spiritual components of development. These positions, backed by my in depth study of PROUT, led to some significant speaking engagements.

At a symposium in New Delhi I shared the speakers' table with India's Foreign Minister, and with its former President, Ghyani Zal Singh. My address was on PROUT's view of the factors for ensuring enduring civilizational vitality. President Singh added emphasis to my talk by praising PROUT's propounder, P.R. Sarkar, as being "one of the greatest modern philosophers of India."

Upon the collapse of the Soviet Union, the governor of Khabarovsk, a state in the Russian Far East, came to know of the interest in PROUT by the Russian Far East Public Academy of Sciences. Their interest stemmed, in part, from a two-day seminar on PROUT that I'd given to key Academy members, and from subsequent lectures they arranged for me to give to influential constituencies in Khabarovsk. In response to the interest that was created, the governor invited a PROUT Institute team, composed of Professor Carla Dickstein and myself, to submit an economic development plan for his state as a part of efforts to envision a new economic model to replace the failed Soviet command economy. In recognition of work on this project, I was made the first foreign member of the Russian Far East Public Academy of Sciences.

Other activity in East Asia included lecture and seminar programs in the principle cities of Korea, and a keynote talk at a global PROUT convention in the Philippines. While in the Philippines, I was asked to address the Philippine Congress on the subject of PROUT's approach to economic revitalization. I declined, as there were local Philipinos better able to address their Congress than I. But I did go to the Philippines' southern most island of Mindanao for further speaking engagements. I also traveled to Jamaica for a two-day seminar — and to meet with Prime Minister Michael Manley (which got canceled due to a schedule conflict). At the 1993 UN Earth Summit in Rio, I gave several talks on PROUT as a part of the parallel program organized by the international NGO community. And I was a featured presenter at a symposium in Copenhagen, held at the time of the UN World Social Summit. A separate speaking tour of Europe, with colleague Roar Bjonnes, took me to Poland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, and the United Kingdom. During this period, interest in PROUT in America was meager in comparison with the receptivity I encountered in international settings. But I did speak at the annual convention of the American Association of Transpersonal Psychology, and was brought to Cornell University by Professor Jaroslav Vanek, the world's leading authority on cooperative economics. (I took particular pleasure in this engagement, as Vanek was one of my intellectual heroes.)

### **The Intervening Years**

After 1995, my life took different directions. I got remarried and had a second child. I took a two and a half year training in yoga philosophy and meditation, following which I taught meditation and yoga.

I also embarked on the building of Dharmalaya. Dharmalaya ("the abode of dharma") is a center for human development, a model of sustainable living, a gathering space for community and progressive activities, a space for meditation and yoga, and a

sacred space for community spiritual events. In the five years since construction began, thousands have participated in programs at Dharmalaya. Between its construction and its program activities, it has consumed much thought, sweat, and time. But, from its inception, Dharmalaya was intended to also play a role in furthering social transformation by serving as a site for PROUT trainings and classes. An important lesson I learned during the period when I was actively propagating PROUT was that PROUT's acceptance and the implementation as a model of development was limited by the lack of people having a working understanding of PROUT as a socioeconomic paradigm. Many progressive people recognized that it met the need for an alternative to globalism, that it offered a path of development that was viable and sustainable. But few people possessed adequate understanding of the theory with which to formulate alternative policies and to develop model projects. So there exists need for training that imparts these competencies. Dharmalaya is, in part, a response to this need.

Equally needed, in my view, was a text on PROUT that clearly and systematically explained the theory *as a model of development*. There are PROUT books and PROUT web sites which contain good information about this social theory. But there had not been a comprehensive and systematic text for use in trainings and study groups, and by people seeking a working understanding of PROUT. At the urging of P.R. Sarkar, PROUT's original propounder, I had taken up this writing project years ago, but became daunted by it and put it aside. In the mid-nineties, I returned to it, and was fortunate to receive valuable assistance on theoretical questions that had remained unclear. Following a surge of progress, I finished the manuscript and of the 600 page book. It only required editing, minor rewrites, an appendix, and an index for final publication. But then it sat neglected as the construction of Dharmalaya and my activities as a meditation teacher became so consuming.

During the past decade, while I've been outwardly away from involvement with PROUT theory, I've had many experiences with applied PROUT. This has come through association with, and learning from, eco-builders, permaculturists, renewable energy installers, ecological designers, community culture activists, appropriate technology advocates, and others engaged in the nuts and bolts of building a sustainable way of life. And it's come through a deepening of my spiritual life and practices and the building of spiritual community.

## **Ten Years Later**

My encounter with Luna coincided with a turning in my life. Major construction of Dharmalaya was done, and its place in the community established. The PROUT book was published in galley edition. The practical visionaries I learned from had become a network of colleagues with whom I collaborate in promoting a sustainable culture. The spiritual community surrounding Dharmalaya was thriving. The spiritual trainings I've taken give me clarity of mind, sustaining inspiration, and deepened compassion. A sound base was formed for me to reengage in my central life work of teaching and establishing the PROUT model of development.

At the same time, humanity is ratcheting up the instability that will bring an end to the dominant global order and to the crass materialism that corrupts the human spirit. The need for a viable and sustainable socioeconomic vision has never been greater. And it will only grow.