

Think like a family, act like a hero

The inner spirit of Prout

– PROgressive Utilization Theory

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In Jamalpur, India in 1959 P.R. Sarkar gave his pioneering discourses of Prout, the Progressive Utilization Theory. The opening sentence of his final discourse was, "The universe is just like a joint family" – a joint family is an extended family, including the children of more than one generation. It is this family kind of thinking, I am certain, which is the key to understanding Prout. Imagine for a moment that your parents were extraordinarily prolific and that all the people around you, indeed everyone on the whole planet, is your family.

Does your family allow people to starve to death? Does your family allow stronger members to torture the weaker ones or to pile up luxuries by robbing them of their basic necessities?

Do you allow some members of your family to wander shelterless or simply stand by and witness murder, theft and rape without intervening? Of course not.

Does your family feel that your house belongs to everyone or just to mother and father? And does everyone have an exactly equal say in decision making or are decisions taken by the wiser and more senior members of the family, those who have proven that they can think for the benefit of all? Finally, don't you encourage all members of the family to develop and utilise their full potential?

For those of you that know a little of Prout I hope you will begin to agree that the spirit of the ideal family is the inspiration behind Prout thinking. Although there may be strict rules in family life there is no question of oppression, suppression or repression. From guaranteeing the basic requirements of life to

controlling the accumulation of wealth, as well as the benevolent leadership of moral persons, Prout principles clearly reflect the family spirit of love and fairness. And where there are areas of Prout policy yet to be formulated I am confident that all we need to formulate them correctly is to put our heads in 'family mode' and go ahead.

Practicality

But is this practical? These are high ideals but the question is, will it work? How will it compare to capitalism and democracy when it comes down to dollars and cents and protecting people's rights?

To begin with I don't think capitalism and democracy, as we know it, present such a great challenge. Today, in a world predominantly capitalist and democratic, more than half the world's population lives in poverty. Excluding the Asian economies, the majority of countries in the world, including those in the EU, keep experiencing declining purchasing power, large bouts of unemployment and growing social despair – which has been happening since the middle 1970s. In this regard, a country as affluent as Australia has a large number of youth suicides. Its neighbouring Asian Tigers are subject to economic ups and downs, and when downsides occur these push millions of people into financial crisis and some to the brink of revolt.

Emerging economies have slowed, such as Brazil which did not invest in improved infrastructure for the country. The now democratized and capitalist Russia has resulted in high equity ownership (i.e. massive wealth concentration) in the hands of a few due to the much criticized 'loans-for-shares' scheme that turned over major state-owned firms to politically connected 'oligarchs' after the fall of communism, when the chance was there for a more equitable and fair distribution of resources and wealth across the economy through a cooperative enterprise system so as to avoid future economic and social chaos. The faces of China's new capitalists also arose through a quasi-privatisation process with many instances of asset stripping (which is not productive to the economy) involving managers of state-owned enterprises selling off its assets while leaving behind

debts or losses to the state from the creation of those state-owned enterprises. Again, an alternative was for fairer wealth distribution, through a cooperative enterprise system, so that the domestic economy could have grown ahead of China's status as an exporting nation putting it in a better position to weather economic downturns.

The revival of the Japanese economy remains an ongoing task and the question of energy supply, dependency and its sustainability always lingers on the horizon. Even in the USA (which used to enjoy economic booms because it was a safe place to invest) a husband and wife, or two people in a household, now both have to work, and for longer hours, in order to maintain a life-style comparable to that which could be enjoyed on a single income in 1975 (albeit it with less technological gadgets, but more quality time away from the gadgets). The alarm bells rang in the minds of Americans from 2007 after the Global Financial Crisis, and to get out of the rut output in the USA was stimulated and produced, but with 2 million fewer workers than in 2007 – in other words a 'jobless recovery' has occurred, but where there is a stubbornly high jobless rate and sluggish job growth pain and sweat lingers while people make ends meet.

So, as all the above examples show, around the world economies are not being geared to provide people their basic necessities of life - for most of the world the time to replace capitalism is due.

Why ethics matter

My proposition is that thinking like a family not only works better than capitalism, it is the only approach which will save us and the planet. The first reason for this lies in the very way the universe works.

"The universe is just like a joint family." The world view behind this statement is that we are all interconnected and part of and come from one infinite consciousness – and every atom, molecule, plant, animal and human being is existing and revolving within universal connections and evolving back towards that consciousness. There is no favouritism here, there is no

preferential treatment according to caste, colour, sex or species. The universe is designed as a place for all to evolve, not just the white, the rich, or the human species.

This collective evolutionary flow is such that human beings want to expand their consciousness and make it limitless, because this will give them ultimate happiness – and this is a powerful force. In the Indian spiritual tradition it is known as 'Dharma', in the Chinese tradition, 'Tao'. Dharma represents the underlying flow or momentum of the universe. Once we understand this it becomes obvious that any individual, group, or society which considers only its own interest, and blocks the progress of others, invites its own downfall. Exploitation of this nature is in direct conflict with Dharma. The message is simple: "That which does not genuinely serve the collective interest can never endure".

Thus, it is not difficult to see that the one-sided 'successes' of capitalism, creating rich people and poor, rich countries and poor, can also never last. These successes will always be short term and end up in depressions, wars, ecological disasters and other such symptoms of fundamental wrongness.

Conversely, the powerful laws of nature will also ensure that any individual, group or society which seeks to promote the progress of all its creatures will, like a raft swept along by a wave, be supported and carried forward by the positive or forward flow of evolution, as this sustains enlightening connections between its entities and by this support expands our consciousness, and inevitably establishes people in enlightened states. It is profoundly ethical.

Ethics, therefore, should form the foundation of good economics. And this is where Prout begins. While Prout has 16 principles and a final 17th concluding statement, of these P. R. Sarkar, the father of Prout philosophy, highlighted 5 of them as 'fundamental principles'. The first (which forms an important foundation) of these fundamental principles is an uncompromising ethical statement, "No individual shall be allowed to accumulate any physical wealth without the clear permission of the collective body of the society". We are so trained to think in the laissez-

faire mode of capitalist self-centred thinking that such a principle sounds like an imposition on our freedom.

If, however, for a short moment, we put our heads into “family mode”, considering society as our very own family, then we can accept this principle as completely normal, indeed, essential. For what family allows some members to accumulate huge wealth while others starve in that same family? The key, therefore, is thinking like a family.

Rational distribution

The principle of non-accumulation of excess wealth, or put in another way accumulation that is permitted (i.e. not excessive) forms the first part of Prout’s ‘rational distribution’ policy. Two more principles make up the complete policy. The first is, “The minimum requirements in any age should be guaranteed to all.” This principle means that basic necessities such as food, clothing, medical care, housing and education should be guaranteed to every member of the society. Here guarantee means a social responsibility is owed to all and must be implemented for all. This baseline is the minimum necessities of life.

In fact, in a Prout legal constitution, guaranteed minimum requirements would be set down as a fundamental human right. The words, “in any age”, allow for changes in what we consider to be basic needs. Prout recommends that the proper way to fulfil this principle is to guarantee jobs to all adults capable of work and to ensure that the wages or salaries of these jobs provide sufficient income to purchase the basic necessities of life – that is, purchasing capacity or purchasing power.

Once again, from the ‘me-first’ capitalist way of thinking, such an idea violates the principles of good economics, but if we judge it from the view-point of family management it makes perfect sense. Even in a family however, individuals need reward, encouragement and recognition – that is, incentives. Sometimes an older brother or sister may be given their own room or the use of the family car. According to the value of their contribution to the well-being of the family certain members can earn extra

amenities that will make it easier for them to carry out and express their larger talents and responsibilities.

To meet this need the third principle of Prout states, "The surplus, after distribution of the minimum requirements, shall be given according to the social value of the individual's production." This principle ensures that the individual, as well as the collective, is recognised and treated fairly, thus avoiding the great blunder of communism, that of trying to reduce everyone to the same common level.

Putting these three principles together we see a distribution system which has a minimum, a maximum, and a fair gap between the two. It would be interesting to open the topic of what constitutes a 'fair gap' to public debate. The Mondragon cooperatives in Spain run successfully on a differential of 3 to 1. Others have suggested as large a gap as 10 to 1 or even 100 to 1 at the outermost. The present difference between the minimum wage and the salaries of some top CEO's is as much as 1000 to 1. Even a reduction to 100 to 1 would make a huge difference in social well-being, with the reduction being aimed at providing basic minimum necessities of life as a guarantee to all.

We should not forget technological development and growth. With those factors at work, rather than one group appropriating more than its share, the minimum and maximum levels will rise in tandem as the society's standard of living increases. However, efforts will be made to gradually reduce the gap between the minimum and maximum wage levels, although this gap will never be eliminated entirely – simply for the reason that incentives or special amenities will always be needed to stimulate human ingenuity and creativity.

Prout's system of rational distribution carefully balances the needs of both the collective and the individual. Until such basic principles are accepted humanity will not have evolved the consciousness it needs to pass successfully into the third millennium.

Family economics in practice

Good in theory, but does it work in practice? The answer is, 'Yes'. We can find the proof by looking at economic developments around us. After World War Two Japan staged a dramatic economic comeback and Japanese industry came to be recognized as highly competitive.

Why? Within Japanese companies the distribution of wealth was more like a family. The gap between minimum and maximum wage being smaller, the guarantees of minimum requirements being firmer, and the involvement of employees in the process of management being greater than in non-family-like individualist systems. The Japanese work long hours, but they do so because, at least until recently, top management reciprocally cared for the employees as if they were family members.

Why then has Japan not continued to prosper? Unfortunately, the family thinking which Japan applied so successfully amongst its own citizens, it utterly failed to apply in its dealings with the rest of the world. The global economy is also a family, and a family where only one member prospers and the rest decline will eventually collapse. One sided trading arrangements cannot continue forever. Such one-sided trading arrangements by 'Japan Inc' and the world's multi-national companies ended up strangling the global economy which could no longer absorb an excess of industrial production.

One of the less publicized reasons for Japan's economic miracle was the egalitarian nature of economic reforms imposed on the Japanese economy by the occupying forces after World War Two. Idealistic 'New Deal' reformers, unhindered by the opposition of vested interests which they faced at home, and possessed of unlimited dictatorial powers within Japan, created what amounted to a social revolution. The large family companies (zaibatsu) were broken up, landlords were allocated ceilings on landholdings and vast amounts of land were sold to tenant farmers at rock bottom prices. Prices of agricultural goods were linked to prices in the industrial sector and powerful labour laws ensured good wages and working conditions. Together these reforms created an across the board surge in purchasing capacity

and entrepreneurial activity that formed the foundation for Japan's recovery. To a lesser extent similar reforms were applied in Korea, Taiwan and Singapore and in all these countries governments played a strong role in prioritizing national recovery over individual economic interests. As a result each of the countries enjoyed spectacular economic success yet in all cases, failure to apply the same style of family-thinking outside their own borders inevitably sowed the seeds of reaction in the world economy.

Unselfishness as economic policy

The gap between minimum and maximum wages has important effects on productivity. When there is no gap productivity is low; this was the condition of communism. As the gap is increased productivity increases in response to the stimulus of higher incentives. But if this gap is allowed to go on increasing without control we find that productivity declines again; this is the situation of advanced capitalism. The large gap between rich and poor creates extreme poverty at one end and excessive wealth at the other – both of which are a waste of productive resources. Due to poor education and unemployment the productive capacity of large numbers of poor people is not fully utilised. In frustration many turn to crime and dependency on welfare. Meanwhile the rich typically spend a larger amount of their wealth on speculative rather than productive investment. Economic decisions guided only by the profit motive ultimately also reduce an economy to stagnancy. In an effort to cut costs the number of employees is reduced. If growing numbers of people become unemployed naturally purchasing capacity will be affected resulting in a drop in demand. When demand falls the economy will enter a recession. Capitalism cuts its own throat by selfishness. One does not have to be an economist to understand this point.

Unselfishness, however, strengthens the economy. The more we increase people's purchasing capacity (through providing employment), the more money they will have to stimulate new production – this is motivated by desires such as for self-development, creative explorations and inventive curiosity, which their extra purchasing power can allow for. However, blinded by

greed, capitalists are unwilling to see this simple point, and for this reason, the entire capitalist world faces the increasing likelihood of economic depression.

So we see that, far from being mere idealism, the ethical or family approach suggested by Prout is also good economics. It doesn't matter where you look in Prout, every Prout policy has its basis in thinking of the universe as an extended family. Even if one were not a brilliant economist one could create Prout solutions to almost all problems simply by applying this type of thinking.

Acting like a hero

The outlook of the self-development system of Tantra (expansion of consciousness), upon which Prout is based, is that "struggle is the essence of life". Why is this so and what are its implications in the social sphere? According to Tantra the universe exists due to the balance of two forces, Vidya and Avidya – the centripetal force and the centrifugal force. For human beings these are the forces of internal desire for spiritual development and subtlety of mind compared to external desires towards materialism and crudification of mind. Within this universal equilibrium, living beings are proceeding on the centripetal path towards the nucleus or source of creation under the guidance of Vidya. Human progress therefore is a constant heroic struggle against the centrifugal force of Avidya. Those who are reluctant to accept the necessity of struggle live in a fool's paradise of guaranteed disappointment. Those who do accept it consider difficulties as the hallmarks of vitality and get on with enjoying life. "The brave enjoy the world."

The Samurai is disciplined yet relaxed at the same time. Why? He has accepted discipline as the inevitable necessity of life and no longer attempts, or even desires, to avoid it. It has become part of him, automatic; he enjoys it because it is life.

Political democracy's attractive, perilous illusion of party politics

Struggle means life, lack of struggle means death. In the social sphere this means accepting, indeed, embracing, a constant fight against immorality and exploitation. In the absence of fight, Avidya will inevitably dominate. But where is the fight in today's democratic societies? Is casting a secret vote once in every 3 or 4 years at election time a sign of heroic struggle?

We are lulled into the belief that a system of party politics that seeks to denigrate each party, rather than methods that develop individual and collective heroism, can protect us against exploitation; meanwhile, the noose of exploitation tightens imperceptibly around our necks. Political democracy is the biggest sacred cow of the current century – with party politics it is merely becomes party dictatorship. Nobody dares criticise it, yet there are innumerable forms of new ways of democracy that can be developed – instead of the current hoax of political democracy based on political parties gets esteem. The definition of democracy is “government of the people, by the people and for the people,” yet in that bastion of democracy, the USA, it is common that less than 50 percent of eligible voters bother to vote. Asked why, the most common reply is, “It doesn't change anything.” Is this “government by the people”?

According to common sense there has never been, nor ever will be, a time when everyone governs. Prout recognises this common sense approach. Nevertheless the awareness of people must constantly be increased to allow for maximum social participation. This requires 3 factors to ensure proper governance and decision-making which, in a nutshell, can be stated as:

- (1) Mass education to sufficiently develop people's awareness and general understanding, and to provide them with adequate knowledge to make decisions;
- (2) Moral consciousness, being that which promotes individual and collective welfare, which must be developed and sufficient in the majority of people to counter narrow sentimental influences such as racism, casteism and other forms of social discrimination, and to prevent social inequality;

(3) Social, economic and political consciousness should be sufficiently developed to enable people to be conversant with social, economic and political issues, and to protect against political corruption and selfish leadership.

These 3 essential social factors, will positively affect and influence human behaviour. In addition, the minimum requirements of life must be provided to each individual to enable them to achieve a standard of living so that they can effectively and fruitfully participate in their communities and society.

In the flow of the social cycle, at any particular time in history one particular social psychology also dominates. The psychological group may be warriors, intellectuals or merchants. Their domination may be benevolent or exploitative but, they lead the society. It is a mistake therefore to try and judge the health of any given society from the impossible proposition of government by the people by today's limiting and relative standards. What we should be vigilant about is the character of the dominant psychology and group support of it, i.e., whether it is exploitative or benevolent, capable or incompetent.

Democracy and the merchant class

At present democracy is largely a smokescreen disguising the fact that a small group of people are exploiting the world for all it is worth. This is done under capitalism, in which politicians act like the executive committee of this dominating merchant group psychology. This exploitation can only be maintained as long as people believe in the illusion of political party democracy, which in any case is basically a system of political party dictatorship over society.

This illusion is very carefully maintained. When anger boils over it is diverted into elections to see which party gets the next term of party dictatorship or tempered by government sponsored programs temporarily benefiting special interests. Hyped up media 'experiences' give people the illusion that they are controlling their own fates and meanwhile the political parties indulge in an orgy of campaign extravaganzas, both in terms of

money and media. Afterwards things continue more or less as before. As long as people believe that they are governing themselves they will not strike a significant blow against exploitation. For this reason the capitalists are very careful to maintain the 'sacred cow' status of the political party 'democratic' machinery. Indeed, the triumvirate of political party, corporate directorship and lobby groups and the musical chairs of one replacing the other is the norm, with little scope for real citizen power.

According to P.R. Sarkar, political democracy is the preferred form of government for the merchant class. Under political democracy political power is diffused amongst the entire population, ignorant and wise, moral and immoral. Such diffused political power cannot change or do away with the concentrated economic power of the capitalists. Rather the opposite occurs; politicians without financial backing never see the light of day and popular consciousness is controlled by the capitalist owned media. A concentrated power (of capitalists groups) will always control a diffused one – this is the law of force. Thus, under political democracy the ability of the state to control the acquisitive tendencies of the merchant class is minimal (so allowing for a concentration of wealth in a few hands) and, in the name of personal freedom, a small number of individuals justify their right to horde the lion's share of collective wealth. People urgently need to realise that democracy in this form of political parties is actually facilitating rather than preventing exploitation. To put it even more bluntly political democracy has become a carefully disguised tool of exploitation.

To control the concentrated economic power of the capitalists, a much greater force than the occasional casting of a vote is required. United and well-organised moral people, with foresight, the courage to risk their personal needs and safety on behalf of others, and with a spirit of service, are ultimately what is needed. In other words, 'act like a hero'. This potent strength and readiness to fight will always be the only language which exploiters understand, and therefore the only force capable of maintaining peace and fairness. Spiritual, intellectual, and social force have always been needed in the fight for justice and freedom. As long as it is present humanity can breathe the fresh

air of freedom but the moment it is forgotten the door is left open for those who would exploit us.

Prout advocates economic democracy which emphasizes decentralization of economic power i.e., the ability of local people and local governments to control their economic destinies. Economic democracy is the real democracy because it pertains to everyday life. Only a strong government could implement and preserve the rules of fair-play implied in economic democracy. Thus along with economic decentralization Prout advocates political centralization as a coordinating mechanism and to ensure a common set of laws at all levels of government: world, national / confederations, state/regional, local. The highest principles being developed at a world level and these high level laws being implemented at lower levels of government.

A high quality of government could be maintained by introducing a merit/value based system for candidature and voter qualification. The more complex issues requiring social, economic and political consciousness as well as moral consciousness. The simpler issues (say at local government or community boards) can be decided by common franchise. With economic democracy there will also be greater scope to participate in community social and economic decision making. This is different to political democracy – under the present system we find both political and economic power centralized and concentrated in the hands of a few. While political power appears to be given to all regardless of knowledge, ability or character, the exercise of such a franchise is, in reality, restricted to dominant political parties which operate internally as dictatorships often around a leader or small kitchen cabinet of ministers. The end result is political party dictatorship.

Italy - saved by direct action of mid 1990s

Let's look at an example from previous decades. Italy has been a democracy for a long time, yet, despite millions of votes cast, corruption and political selfishness progressively reached new depths of greed and dishonesty. The people became totally fed up and disillusioned with politicians and the political process. The early 1990s saw more revelations of high level corruption

sparkling several years of arrests and investigations. Bribery scandals also abounded. In the mid-1990s there were clashes with anticorruption magistrates and battles with trade unions seeking reforms. But what brought hope to Italy was not democracy itself, but a small group of courageous judges, prosecutors and policemen who were prepared to risk their lives by taking a tough stand against corruption. Many in fact have been killed in the course of the struggle.

They pursued their cause so staunchly that it even resulted in a full half of the legislature being 'under investigation'. Mafia bosses and business tycoons were also being arrested and jailed, including former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi (who, however, came back in the 21st century to yet again cause similar problems!). The powerlessness which the people felt under democracy and the fear of speaking out against the Mafia and political corruption was swept away to a significant extent in the 1990s. Suddenly people felt that they could take power into their own hands. In the face of this popular wave the entire political establishment collapsed, showing how weak exploiters are when people finally throw aside their reliance on the vote and resort to real opposition.

However, there must be constant momentum to ensure benevolence in government, else the exploiters will use every loophole for a comeback, as has been the case in Italy to date.

Conclusion

People must wake up from the sleep of political democracy and assume the responsibility of real struggle. For under political democracy and its associated system of centralized economic power, we can expect nothing except crocodile tears about rising unemployment while companies relocate their factories in cheap-labour countries and manipulate the media to turn helpless immigrants into scapegoats. The notion of a universal family is something that can be made the basis of economic policy. The spirit of heroic fight against exploitation is recognised as an important and vital force and an inner spirit of Prout. It is not political party democratic elections, but those moralists who are ready to accept this historic role who can guarantee the welfare

of the people and ensure that immoral and exploiting groups cannot remain in power.

Postscript

P.R. Sarkar pointed out the shortcomings of democracy but stated that it was the best system of government so far evolved. He suggested reforms which could remove some of its inequities (see the discourse entitled 'An Ideal Constitution' in the *Prout in a Nutshell* series). However, reforms or no reforms, the fact that a particular socio-psychological class will always dominate a historical era of the social cycle and ultimately tend towards exploitation (even if starting with benevolent intentions), will also always create the necessity for moral activism. Those who accept this responsibility are the real leaders of society. History has shown that it is they who move society forward in its thinking, level of consciousness, and quest for justice and fairness and ultimately the goal of social equality and not the dominance of selfish pleasures for a few.