

# Can Prout Transform Universities?

By Sohail Inayatullah

A decade back, in a book titled, *The University in Transformation*, we - Jennifer Gidley, president of the world futures studies federation and myself - identified four drivers creating new futures of the university. These drivers were globalization, virtualization, democratization and multicultural-neohumanist pedagogy. In this essay, I ask: are these drivers still relevant, active? The essay concludes with recommendations for Prout policy on the futures and politics of the university.

## GLOBALIZATION OF EDUCATION

The first driver identified was globalization. While in its current neo-liberal form it is focused solely on the free movement of goods and services there are many types of globalization. Indeed Sarkar's Prout is a type of globalization as are the utopian sentiments of the ecological "Gaian" movement. However, for universities, globalization has expressed itself as resistance by states to continue to subsidize education. More and more students are expected to pay full fees and universities have been asked to cut back to core areas.

This has meant a mindset shift from considering education less as an investment and more as a cost. Specifically it has meant categorizing parts of education as an export (in Australia for example, for both Brisbane and Melbourne, education is the largest export, surpassing tourism) and aspects as an expense. In the USA, Europe and Australia, the curriculum areas that are export based seeking to bring in students from the Asia-Pacific, particularly India) tend to be in the real-world areas of engineering, business, information technologies and vocational skill development. These have grown (especially when they are linked to migration policy) while other areas of knowledge philosophy and even languages, have been subjected to immediate market forces and cutbacks and thus have declined. The overall reason of education - as a civilizing force, as the right to dissent against conventional paradigms, as part of humanity's treasure and as a long term investment in children - has been put aside for shorter term market concerns. In the last ten years, this trend, and the drivers, creating it, have not in any way subsided.

These trends are likely to continue. However, what is likely to change is the direction of the exports. With the rise of Chindia, (China plus India) we can easily imagine a future where Chinese and Indian students stay at home, learning from local outposts of western universities and Chindia's own rapidly improving educational institutions (China is likely to in the near future overtake the U.S. for number of patents filed). Over a period of twenty years we can even imagine Western students migrating to the Asia-Pacific for higher education (and not only for language learning or culture). While this may seem difficult to imagine now, if we go back twenty years, it would have been difficult to imagine the colossal economic rise of China (for the first time having more millionaires than Europe) and certain segments of India (now having eight billionaires in the top 100). While equity remains a critical issue, especially in India, education for Chindia remains an investment. Not a cost. Education for Asia is first.

## VIRTUALIZATION

The second trend we identified was the virtualization of education. With fewer funds available for bricks and mortar and the logic of increasing students, universities and Ministries of education (with India, Indonesia, Turkey, China and other Asian nations leading the way) have focused on using the Web to deliver education. While the savings are high and outreach stunning, what has hampered the success of distance delivery has been the mindset of university administrators and academics as they still remain committed to the expert driven feudal model. By this I mean there is an unquestioning dominator hierarchical system with the orders coming down from the Minister to the Vice-chancellor to the Dean to the Professor to the lecturer to the student. While functional hierarchy leads to efficiency, dominator hierarchy leads to the death of innovation; each generation copies blindly from the last. Academics are the experts seeing others as unable to provide solutions to problems.

That said, new applications indeed, "an app for everything" is the new analogy for the futures of instruction - are changing the nature of pedagogy and with exponential technological advancement we can easily see the virtual becoming more like face-to-face. And costs will continue to go down. Innovation will continue to find ways for academics and students to become more comfortable in future virtualized classrooms. Indeed, the founder of the Khan Academy, a one person virtual "university" has delivered over 46 million lectures in the past few years foundationally challenging the traditional notion of the university. Over the long term the current distinctions between virtual and real will disappear and we, particularly digital and genomic natives, will become comfortable with different types of reality. The important shift will be from merely more technology in the class room (technology as the silver bullet) and classrooms created by technology to digital pedagogy, wherein students, teachers, "apps" and university leaders make the difference. Students, particularly, digital natives, will more and more be seen as critical stakeholders.

## DEMOCRATIZATION PEER TO PEER

The third trend we identified was the democratization of education. By this we meant enhanced student participation as well as a general flattening of the university. Over the last ten years, this has come about but not in the ways we expected. The peer to peer web platform has been the greatest flattening process from wikipedia to wikileaks to ratemyprofessor.com; even the cynical must admit the world has changed. I remember well one foresight workshop I ran recently in Singapore for Raffles Institution with forty 14 year olds. All used wikipedia, and over 50% claimed to have contributed content to wikipedia. A few, one or two had heard of Encyclopedia Britannica. Most had heard of the United Kingdom. They understood the latest technologies and social movements and in one scenario they imagined using social movements and nano-technologies to create environmental sustainability in the Ganges by 2040, a clean, green, socially innovative India! In the ideal peer to peer world, it is the user who adds value, not the producer (the university dean or professor, as in the traditional hierarchical university).

However, and this is crucial, democratization while partially recreating who creates knowledge has not empowered students or academics in formal university or high school settings.

Indeed, the opposite has occurred.

First, there has been a backlash against increased power of those below; a desire to return to the good old days of authority and domination. Second, as universities have adopted the neo-liberal globalization model, creating profits or merely surviving has meant retiring expensive professors and hiring the far cheaper younger PhDs. And, critically, the hiring has not been full-time but casual instructors. Experimental courses (new web courses, in particular) especially futures studies, gender studies, peace studies, consciousness studies, for example, have gotten up by paying academics near volunteer wages. For those at the bottom pay scale, the problem becomes that of loyalty not just to the particular university (why should I stay loyal when I am paid peanuts) but to the university model of education itself; that is, why should I not globalize myself and receive the benefits of globalization. In this regard, we can anticipate as loyalty breaks down, far more innovation in the tertiary sector new academic run cooperative universities and alternative universities (with either particular ideological leanings or broader missions or Gurukul which combines both). Along with some able to innovate, there will be many who will prefer and rightly so, if not wisely so - a politics of grievance in and to the university itself. As cutbacks continue, we can anticipate a far more challenging labor environment.

Returning from globalization to the good old days where education was solely about national development and nationalistic strong national regulation - is unlikely - but this does not necessarily mean retreating on the dignity of the academic and the nobility of the academic profession; alternative futures are possible. For elite professors, the walls of the university and particular university branding will be far less important. In terms of phases, we can see a movement from lower run casual academic to a portfolio academic approach (being linked to a number of universities) and finally to a model wherein the professor becomes a brand unto him or herself.

## WAYS OF KNOWING KNOWLEDGE ON THE EDGES

Our fourth driver or trend was multiculturalism generally and neohumanist education in particular becoming an acceptable part of pedagogy. There is no easy way to measure this but certainly the rise of the web with multiple languages and platforms has created more spaces than traditional hierarchies of knowledge. The rise of Chindia (China foreign reserves recently hit 3.2 trillion dollar reserves, for example) as well is slowly changing the game as the West as an economic centre is undergoing relative decline. With economic rise will come cultural change. Already China has set up hundreds of Confucius centres throughout the world (the goal is to establish 1000 by 2020). Indian culture as well is being exported to the West with Yoga for example becoming a 15 billion dollar industry in the USA.

Multiculturalism and neohumanism have infiltrated the university through the broader sustainability agenda. This has been a focus on solving global problems such as climate change through trans-disciplinary approaches to knowledge management. Non-western, indigenous and "Gaian" ways of knowing have not been marginal to these concerns but central to finding solutions to greed and overconsumption – the problem of cultural and economic obesity.

But far more impressive has been technology itself as a way of mediating reality. While diverse ways of knowing continue to blossom, it is technology as a way of knowing that has been the disruptive, if not transformative, factor. With at least six billion mobile phones now in global circulation and more and more phones becoming smart, pedagogy will keep on jumping the boundaries of the real into the differently real. However, in the short run, universities and high schools are still not using smart phones as ways to make pedagogy far more interactive. Fact checking can be done via google. The role of the professor becomes that of inner motivator, mentor and facilitator enabling students not providing them with more data.

## THE DISRUPTION

As always, leaving behind factory models of learning and teaching will be crucial as we move to a more 24/7 virtualized and globalized world. Focusing on ensuring equity and life-wide and life-long learning for those academics who do not become brands unto themselves or have portfolio careers will be critical.

And: if national accreditation does break down or become porous certainly the trillion dollar education industry will be ripe for major creative destruction. It will not be google or facebook that will become the new Nalanda, Nanjing, Al-Azhar, Al Karaouine, Bologna, or Oxford, but someone will create the new platform for the pedagogies of the future. Is it wiser to nation-states to hold on to national accreditation or regionalize as with the EU or attempt to create something truly novel and lead the world and create an institutional jump? Or?

## PROUT POLICY AND STRATEGY RECOMMENDATIONS

For Prout, the focus, I argue, needs to be on:

1. Helping lower level causal academics keep their dignity through negotiating better wages and conditions.
2. Helping all academics globalize in the sense of helping break the feudal expert knowledge and university structure and narrative. This means wisely embracing parts of economic globalization without allowing the true reason of the university - to dissent, to continue to carry the culture treasures of humanity and to stay focused on past and future generations - to be lost. This means moving ahead while not losing sight of the mission of the university.
3. Challenging attempts to retain national university regulatory structures or focus the university on national development. Prout is focused on human, spiritual and ecological development and not on the narrow dimensions of the nation-state. Regulations should help universities become more ecological, more neohumanist, more global, not less.
4. Working with vipran academics to integrate other aspects of their personalities; this includes a focus on the body (exercise, diet, yoga, for example), a focus on the economy (not being dependent on the state for income but developing entrepreneurial skills, creating value), a focus on social justice (challenging oppressive structures) and a service orientation (particularly serving the needs of students). This is crucial as vipran approaches to reality while strong at theory disown the economy and thus intellectuals remain at the mercy of others, be it the State or the Corporate sector.
5. Overtime, Prout needs to develop academic cooperatives and working to create new university structures that are planetary, neohumanist and inclusive of many ways of knowing the world. Cooperation is not easy for academics, however, as the current university structure rewards individual excellence not community excellence. Cooperation is a learned behavior requiring enhancing ones emotional intelligence, and is challenging as the current university structure favors the intellect, not the heart.

In conclusion, developing universities and academics with strong intellects and open hearts that learn from doing, from engaging with all types of communities can become the value added of Prout to the futures of the university. Globalization is tearing apart the traditional university, as is virtualization and democratization. While some will miss the good old days of the protected campus subsidized by the state with deep hierarchical structures along with the neck tie to bifurcate the mind from the heart - others will see this as a chance to innovate and create new universities. These new universities, to succeed, will need to balance the practicalities of wealth generation with social justice with service to community with ideas that inspire. Prout can help in this process of creating the new university for the new future.

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come, become adopted by nations, to replace the present-day Political Party Democracy or Corporate Democracy.

*As we part company, we would indeed be echoing the benevolence of the supreme neohumanist Prabhat R. Sarkar, that Everyone live in harmony and peace; everyone can have unbarred opportunity for all-round development and for contributing to mutual welfare. No one be neglected and threatened, be left starving and without shelter, be left ill and uncared-for, be tormented and made dysfunctional. All can move together in unison, to the pinnacle of human existence and cosmic desideratum. This article is dedicated to usher in such a neo-humanistic global order and era!*

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