

## Introduction

# Transforming self and society: Plural paths to human emancipation

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead

“Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.”

Karl Marx, The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte

## 1. Introduction

Both Marx and Mead capture eloquently the essence of social transformation. All social transformation can be seen as a dialectical play between three sets of oppositions: between (individual) biography and (social) history, between theory and praxis, and between the micro/local and the macro/global levels of organisation.

What, in these terms, is the nature of social transformation today and what are likely to be its characteristics in the 21st century? A cursory look at the globalised and omnipresent media today may make one think that the world is ruled today by macro forces, historically rooted but rapidly changing, in which micro-level efforts and individuals have little role to play. The most significant things taking place in the world today, besides marvellous technological advances, seem to be wars, natural disasters, conflicts based on religious and ethnic identities, terrorism, starvation deaths and so on. This ‘reality show’ of the world today is indeed depressing, and the only counterpoints the global media offers to distract and titillate the global audience are the spectacles of entertainment and sports. Even in the world of serious scholarship, for instance within the discourse of futures studies, the major focus is on the technological and other forces, and the corresponding trends, shaping the future of humanity.

What is absent in this discourse, both popular and serious, is human agency and creativity. While focusing on the power of the macro forces, we seem to have forgotten the power of the individual visionary and the micro-level on-the-ground initiatives and efforts, spread all over the world, involving the everyday activities of real human beings, which are creatively, positively and often very quietly transforming the lives and futures of millions, if not billions of human beings today.

Perhaps one reason, among others, why we have not been able to recognise this adequately enough is the poverty of theory to understand social transformation today. (Indeed, the tradition of all dead generations weighing down the living applies equally to the tradition of theory!) But we shall not get into the theories of social transformation and their limitations here. Our task, instead, is to point to the neglected reality and the diversity and creativity of human agency in seeking social transformation at the turn of the millennium. For those willing to read the signs, we attempt to direct them to the signposts!

There is something happening today, a stirring of the soul, a movement of the 'spirit'. This praxis needs to be recognised and understood and is the new material that should inform and influence all theory. Who are the people, and what are the initiatives, working, consciously, to bring about transformation today? What are the sources of their vision and inspiration, and what are their methods? And how are they likely to shape the future? These are the questions that this issue of Futures addresses.

But we attempt to answer these questions not through scholarly theory-building, debates and opinions (these are not completely absent, but are not the dominant focus of the papers). Instead, we put forward a number of instances of creative transformation at work, instances that speak for themselves. Only one paper, which tries to build an interesting typology of transformative efforts, is an exception.

## 2. The elements of social transformation

We do not attempt to define 'transformation', because any definition, except in the most general terms, would only try to push, unsuccessfully, diverse and constantly evolving social reality into the confines of a conceptual straitjacket. But it is simpler to look analytically at the basic elements that constitute social transformation. The three basic elements or requirements for any social change to take place are: vision, mobilisation and organisation. One, there has to be a leadership that articulates a radical vision for change<sup>1</sup>; then, a process of mobilisation of people around that vision; and, finally, an organisation or structure through which the attempted transformation can be carried out over wider time and space.

Along the same lines Roberta Garner suggests a threefold 'strategy' for bringing about a transformed society, with an emphasis (besides other elements) on macro-systemic comprehension of events, on the understanding that human beings create their own institutions and on individuals overcoming cynicism and altering their everyday habits and routines [13, p. 411].

The interesting aspect of social transformation efforts today is the fact that these elements are present in literally many thousands of such efforts spread all around the world.

## 3. Diverse approaches and actors

For most of the 20th century, when the communist dream was still alive and Marx's ideas of social revolution still held out hope, the primary and perhaps the only agency

<sup>1</sup>Brian K. Murphy writes that the practice of 'vision' that is an essential part of the life of a socially creative individual is threefold: 'seeing how things are', 'how things are *not*' and 'seeing how things might be'. "The creative life is authentic authorship of self and reality, in harmony with one's vision of what might be possible". [25, p. 18]

which was supposed to be the torch-bearer of radical social change was the working class. The last three decades of the last century saw the emergence of the New Social Movements—the feminist, environmental, peace, human rights and other movements such as the gay and lesbian movements. During these decades these various movements and the diverse set of actors constituting these movements came to be regarded as important actors on the stage of social transformation, while the importance of the working class as a transformative force gradually and consistently declined. This trend was only reaffirmed further with the break-up of the Soviet Union, the decline and breakdown of communism in Eastern Europe, and finally the adoption by China of the capitalist path, albeit in its own peculiar way.

The important thing to note vis-à-vis this change is not (only) that the agents of social transformation suddenly changed, that indeed was most obvious. The more important and fundamental thing, I think, was the immense change in social consciousness, or ‘theory’, and the corresponding effervescence in creative ‘praxis’ throughout the world that this signified. The new social movements signalled the fact that social transformation was being understood and ‘development’ was being criticised from different perspectives and approaches, the most important of these being the ecological, the feminist and the human rights perspectives. Much of the literature on social transformation and social movements produced during the last few decades reflects these developments and describes the work and approaches of a great variety of actors and movements involved in transformative efforts. The literature includes, among others, Carmen, Esteva and Prakash, Khor, Kortén, Roberts and Hite, Seabrook, Sklair, Touraine, and Wignaraja [7,11,21,22,30,31,32,34,35] while Achawat, Bakshi, Bonner, Giri, Omvedt, Pande and The Week [1,2,4,14,26,28,33] deal specifically with instances from India. Seabrook’s *Pioneers of change*, for instance, describes the work of the groups and individuals who received the Right Livelihood Award between 1980 and 1990. In the late 1970s Jacob von Uexkull set up this award, also called the Alternative Nobel Prize, for pioneering efforts in the areas of peace, sustainable development, environmental integrity, social justice and human rights. The work of the recipients of this award over the years is a great comment on the diversity of approaches and actors working for social transformation during the last few decades.<sup>2</sup>

To take another example, Gail Omvedt’s *Reinventing revolution: new social movements and the socialist tradition in India* [26] argues that the notable Indian social movements since the 1970s have not been traditional Marxist class ones, but movements of women, dalits (the low castes), peasants, farmers, tribals and ethnic groups. These movements, Omvedt argues, involve groups either ignored or exploited by traditional Marxism or exploited in new ways (for example, environmentally). Drawing upon Omvedt and upon two other studies from Australia [6] and the USA [5], Leslie Sklair argues that “The inescapable conclusion... is that Marxism definitely needs to be rethought and the idea of revolution needs to be reinvented. Central to this rethinking and reinvention is that NSMs are not necessarily aiming to seize state power, but use many tactics to achieve many shorter-term ends. Indeed, this argument can be expanded to suggest that the actual revolutionary consequences of such movements can far exceed the rhetorical revolutionary utterances of most movements dedicated to seizing state power” [31, p. 342].

<sup>2</sup>Within the green movement itself, for instance, there is a great diversity of approaches to change, as the paper by Dahle in this volume discusses. Clapp and Dauvergne [8], Dryzek and Schlosberg [9], Gadgil and Guha [12] and Guha and Martinez-Alier [16] also discuss the diversity of approaches within the environmental movement.

Another approach to social transformation today, characterised and labelled by Esteva and Prakash as ‘grassroots post-modernism’, and re-affirming a diversity of vision and method once again, points to the struggles and movements of the illiterate and non-modern masses against modernity and the imposition of the ‘global project’. “‘The people’ are revealing a multiplicity of different cosmic visions conceived at the local level, emerging from the ruins left by modernity. After the “end of history”, we can have the continuation and regeneration of thousands of histories’ [11, p. 193].

Yet another concept which has come into circulation in recent years in the discourse on social transformation, and which also emphasises the diversity of actors and approaches is the concept of ‘civil society’ and the related idea of ‘social capital’. While the idea of civil society (and in particular the usage of this term to refer primarily to developmental NGOs) has caught on, particularly in the context of the UN and other multilateral as well as bilateral developmental organisations and aid agencies, a rigorous use of the concept has many serious limitations. Without going into too much detail here, I only want to mention that the concept of civil society too is widely used in the discourse today to refer to the wide variety of non-state actors involved in socially transformative and/or developmental projects and activities. However, the concept has in recent years been scrutinised and seriously criticised by academics for obscuring rather than providing insights into social reality, because it ignores questions of class and political power. Harriss [17] makes a powerful critique of ‘social capital’ and civil society along these lines while Kaviraj and Khilnani [20] include a number of papers with an excellent discussion around the origins, validity and limitations of the concept of civil society.

#### **4. Personal is political: self and society as the twin poles of transformation**

When we think of transformation we have to consider both the changes in social structures and power relations on the one hand and the alterations in the consciousness, values, capabilities, choices and lives of individuals on the other. Transformed individuals become key actors in bringing about social change. Transformed societies or social groups enable and nurture more conscious, sensitive and empowered individuals. Brian Murphy, in his *Transforming ourselves, transforming the world* discusses the linkages between self and society and employing the perspective of humanist radicalism, makes the case for individuals as ‘possibilities in process’ striving to actualise personal potential and the human possibility. ‘Humanist radicalism is a vision of and for self, but it includes all humanity’ [25, p. 36]. Drawing upon the work of Erich Fromm and Ivan Illich, Murphy calls for an ‘open conspiracy’ of enlightened individuals to achieve human emancipation in society through a mutual celebration of awareness, love, freedom and will.

I venture to suggest that one of the reasons that there is, globally—except for those nations controlled by dictatorial regimes—a great ferment in the attempts to bring about social transformation is the fact that we now have many more conscious and visionary individuals who are potential agents, and often the initiators, of radical change. Thus, to extend the argument of the section above, there is now not only a great diversity in the constituents of society actively seeking and working for change, and a corresponding diversity in the theoretical or intellectual sources that inspire and inform the attempts for change, but also that the diversity now extends much further and includes a large number of dispersed visionary individuals who are either immersed in transformative tasks on the ground or evolving new and innovative transformative approaches and methods, and thus,

in their own unique ways, initiating and catalysing change, even if these initiatives are often small or locally focused.<sup>3</sup> The power and global reach of the new communication technologies today is often able to magnify the impact of such efforts by generating support or linking up and joining hands with similar initiatives in other parts of the world. Indeed, it is this emerging public ‘architecture’, involving the interaction among a large number of diverse actors that the World Social Forum (WSF) process reflects, as noted by Jai Sen writing about the WSF in this volume.

## 5. Transformative initiatives

The papers in this volume describe some of the significant and interesting ongoing transformative initiatives in different parts of the world. This is a vast and fertile field, and there are many important initiatives, such as organic farming, or struggling against oppressive regimes or peace-building in conflict-ridden areas, that could not be included here due to various limitations. The dozen papers included here are only a small sample of worthwhile efforts. The papers try to cover a range of initiatives that involve different approaches, issues, methods and geographical areas, but can in no way claim to cover all of these. The transformative efforts discussed here show us some pointers to the nature of social transformation today and how it may evolve in the near future.

### 5.1. *Paths for transition to a sustainable society*

Dahle offers a ‘theoretical’ discussion of the different approaches within the green movement. This paper is the only one in this issue that is not primarily about a single transformative initiative. Taking as his starting point the efforts to build sustainable societies (both environmentally and otherwise), Dahle considers three key questions to help him understand the nature of different strategies suggested for the transition to sustainable societies: One, solutions will be found within or beyond the existing social order? Two, change will come from the elites at the top or from below—through the choices of ordinary people? Finally, the application of solutions can begin right away or will have to wait till an ecological–social collapse forces a complete re-think? Based on the answers to these key questions, he categorises the various strategies or efforts into five ideal types: Reformists, Impatient Revolutionaries, Patient Revolutionaries, Grassroots Fighters and Multifaceted Radicals.

This typology and the characterisation of the different strategies based on the key questions Dahle asks is insightful. Although many of the thinkers and activists Dahle considers are linked to the environmental movement, the typology he suggests is useful to understand social transformation efforts and strategies cutting across different issues. His observation that green thinkers are over-concerned with theoretical critiques and

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<sup>3</sup>The individuals in question are not atomized or autonomous beings; rather they are sensitive, well-socialised, compassionate and often spiritually oriented individuals who care deeply for social values and the well-being of their brethren. The late Indian scholar–activist D.R. Nagaraj described such individuals as spiritually dissatisfied people who respond in an ontological way to the profound restlessness that they feel with the state of affairs. This is a different kind of response from the organic struggles and movements of the exploited lower castes, peasants, women and adivasis (indigenous people), which (while extremely important and valid) tend to be exclusivist. He also suggested that these people can build bridges between the different organic protest movements. For further discussion on this see Kapoor [19].

alternatives to the neglect of implementing the alternatives in practice is an interesting comment on the theory versus practice dialectic, and again, quite relevant to other sectors.

### 5.2. *A global dialogue across boundaries to make another world*

Jai Sen, who has been an active participant and keen observer of the World Social Forum process from the beginning, argues that the Forum is one of the most prominent manifestations of world civil politics today—and arguably, in history. Sen traces the manner in which the Forum has been evolving—both in terms of offering political and economic alternatives at the global level to the manner in which it has been changing from within in response to the demands of its constituents. Beginning as an international event in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in January 2001 the Forum has now evolved into a permanent, horizontal open public space, a commons, which provides an opportunity to diverse organisations and individuals from all over the world to meet and dialogue across boundaries and to interact and exchange information in multifarious ways to work towards making another world possible. Because it has enabled the coming together of transformative, creative agents of change from all over the world around a core of human values for a better world (or worlds) in the future, Sen suggests that the forum is one of the most significant developments of the last century, which is giving rise to a more open culture of politics and is forging a great piece of public ‘architecture’ in our times. In a sense it already contains the other world, or plural other worlds! The WSF process is, indeed, a living demonstration of the dialectical play between the three sets of oppositions mentioned in the beginning.

### 5.3. *Transforming markets and capitalism from within*

Innumerable activists and thinkers from a whole variety of theoretical and political backgrounds have emphatically denounced global capitalism as a social and economic system that destroys the human soul, community as well as nature.<sup>4</sup> Yet, if one answers Dahle’s first question with the view that change within the existing social order is possible, then one of the important ways today in which capitalism is being transformed from within through the conscious choices of individuals in capitalist society is Socially Responsible Investing (SRI). Rajni Bakshi describes the numerous instances where investors (both individuals and institutions) are choosing SRI as a tool to transform and humanise the central institution of capitalism—the market. The philosophy underlying SRI is that the market mechanism is not a law of physics but instead a human-construct which can be moulded to work in different ways. Thus, Bakshi suggests, SRI is of interest even to those who have a sharp critique of the prevailing form of market driven globalisation but are keen to contain its socially and environmentally destructive trends. SRI, along with other means to reign and reform markets could potentially encourage more realistic pricing of both natural resources and nature’s sinks, thus making way for sustainable prosperity.

### 5.4. *Social entrepreneurship as a transformative force*

Social entrepreneurship is an innovative idea, with obvious parallels to the idea of entrepreneurship in business, which has caught on as an important transformative

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<sup>4</sup>For instance, a recent critique by the US academic and green politician Kovel [23] and Edwards [10].

approach and force in recent decades. Ashoka: Innovators for the Public, set up 25 years ago by the visionary Bill Drayton in the US has been the pioneer of this approach. Pritha Sen writes that it was Ashoka, in fact, which invented the term ‘social entrepreneur’. The key idea of this approach is that there is nothing more powerful than a big social idea, in the hands of a first-class social entrepreneur. The organisation works as a social venture capital fund, helping selected ‘Fellows’ with start-up funds to launch their ideas. The work of the Ashoka Fellows inspires others, in turn, to become active change-makers. Ashoka is a constantly innovating organisation, creating an ever-expanding network of change-makers. The organisation clearly puts great emphasis on praxis, on the leadership skills and capabilities to not only dream but to turn the dream into reality. Its implicit concept of social change is that change is the cumulative outcome of more and more local level, innovative and entrepreneurial social leaders, who transform society through powerful ideas put into practice.

### *5.5. Beyond ‘working class’ trade unions: creating a future for informal women workers*

The majority of the ‘workers’ in the globalised economy today, and the poorest and the most exploited and vulnerable, are not the industrialised blue collar workers who Marx envisioned as the primary agents of social change, but the workers, predominantly women, doing contractual or piece-rate or temporary work, or self-employed workers, in the unorganised, informal sector. The growth in the number of such workers in the developing countries is a distinct trend in the globalised economy. Aditi Kapoor writes about the failure of the trade union movement to organise and take up the cause of these informal sector workers. She discusses the trend of the informal sector workers getting organised and seeking justice and better terms for themselves through initiatives such as ‘fair trade’. As a pioneering, remarkable example of organising and unionising informal sector workers and transforming their future, she discusses The Self-Employment Women’s Association (SEWA), a trade union of nearly 700 000 poor women in the informal sector in India, set up in 1972 in the textile town of Ahmedabad, Gujarat under the visionary leadership of Ela Bhatt. She also draws out lessons for creating a better future for informal labour based on an analysis of SEWA’s way of functioning, its holistic approach encompassing socio-economic and political rights and its widespread positive impact. Once again, this is a wonderful example of innovative praxis led by a visionary individual with potentially far-reaching impacts, including the need to rework the ‘theory’.

### *5.6. Exemplar projects for the future through the integration of thinking and doing*

Paul Wildman argues that modern western society has completely disassociated thinking, doing and being. Although this integration was present in Western society during medieval times, it has been lost in the modern period, thanks to the nature of modern ‘education’ systems that focus almost exclusively on the individual learner and have separated the learner from the praxis of lived life. Wildman suggests that overcoming this separation is one of the key challenges for modernity and for the creation of a better, transformed future. He sees some hope for doing this in the ‘bush mechanics’ in Australia—innovative individuals who look forward wisely and solve collective problems today through applying their ingenuity with what is available. He discusses four principles of the Bush Mechanic approach and describes the exemplar projects of some of the

practising Bush Mechanics. Although it is not widespread, the approach has the potential to create living breathing examples today of a desirable future for our children and grandchildren.

### *5.7. Changing the future of villages through decentralised green power*

Dinesh Sharma describes the energy scenario in India and discusses the various non-conventional, renewable sources of energy that today make up for about 5 per cent of grid electricity produced in the country. Despite the growing contribution of renewables to the national power kitty, about 125 000 villages (21 per cent of all villages in India) remain in dark and not all households have power in the villages electrified. Sharma describes the promising efforts of various NGOs that have shown that decentralised, off-grid power generation through biomass-based gasifiers and solar photovoltaics offers a viable, long-term solution to rural electrification. This approach can transform the lives of villagers but government policies have to facilitate the expansion of this approach involving voluntary agencies and people's organisations. In other words, a marrying of bottom-up and top-down efforts is necessary for knowledge-driven change to become more widespread.

### *5.8. Biodiversity conservation: a role for people in environmental governance and planning*

The careful conservation and governance of natural resources is going to be a central task for all nations and for global society in the future. A central question, then, for all (democratic) governments and from the point of view of the substantive practice of democracy has to be: how do citizens participate in environmental governance, in the formulation and implementation of environmental policies and practices? Tejaswini Apte describes an extraordinary initiative of the Indian government involving an all-India decentralised planning process for the formulation of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP). She describes the range of innovative tools and strategies used for this purpose, with the ultimate aims of biodiversity conservation and livelihood security. She draws lessons for the future based on the NBSAP process and subsequent developments, which have relevance for transforming future public planning processes in environmental as well as non-environmental sectors, within and outside India.

### *5.9. The IPCC: transforming the conduct and use of science*

Bruce Tonn discusses the manner in which The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is going about its task "to assess on a comprehensive, open and transparent basis the scientific, technical and socio-economic information relevant to understanding the scientific basis of risk of human-induced climate change, its potential impacts and options for adaptation and mitigation." He lists five ways in which the IPCC can be viewed as an amazingly successful transformative initiative. The IPCC is a model not only for the futures community, as Tonn suggests, but for the whole scientific and knowledge community, since it has put forward an alternative model for the conduct, organisation, and use of science around the world.



### 5.10. *Strengthening leadership and capacities for sustainable development*

Julia Marton-Lefevre and Gillian Mehers describe the work of the Leadership for Environment and Development (LEAD) Programme in training leaders in sustainable development issues and in providing them with valuable cross-sectoral and cross-cultural experience. The innovative methods used and the cross-cultural experiences have had an impact on the lives of the participants, besides imparting them with skills and valuable knowledge on sustainable development issues. The participants become life-long members of a powerful network of change agents found in nearly 100 countries worldwide. This, in terms of Dahle's typology, is a reformist initiative that seeks to facilitate the transition to sustainability through the application of knowledge and skills within societies.

### 5.11. *Multi-stakeholder partnerships*

While for over half a century now the global establishment has been doing 'development', NGOs have been fighting poverty and other social problems at the grassroots and social scientists have been discussing various approaches to and theories of social change, poverty, hunger and disease persist everywhere, including in the North once again. The tool-kit of dealing with poverty—both in theory and in practice—seems to be seriously flawed. Sudhirender Sharma briefly describes and discusses the latest weapon in this repertoire—multi-stakeholder partnerships. Some already tend to dismiss it as jargon, but it is, in fact, one with some of the trends, approaches and innovations noted above. If the actors and agents of social change have to come from different sectors, then partnerships and teamwork across sectors are a natural corollary. Besides socially responsible investing, another important way in which reformists are attempting to change and humanise capitalism from within is corporate social responsibility. So the partnerships between people, NGOs, corporations and governments and international development agencies too are to be expected. How well, or poorly, this approach fares is to be seen in the near future.

### 5.12. *Auroville: a unique, global spiritual–social experiment*

Finally, I describe a futuristic community—'the city the earth needs'—in southern India that is inspired by Sri Aurobindo's ideas of the evolution of the human mind to a higher spiritual plane of consciousness that will transform human nature. Auroville, envisioned by Sri Aurobindo's spiritual companion, the Mother, as a site of material and spiritual researches and a living embodiment of human unity, has brought together human beings from 35 countries into an experimental, innovative community working simultaneously for spiritual, social and ecological change. I describe the origin of this fascinating experiment, the key ideas and principles on which it is based and the different aspects of life in this township. I then suggest the reasons why Auroville is a radically transformative and futuristic initiative.

## 6. **The future of radical social transformation?**

Before we conclude, we have to ask: what are the prospects of radical social transformation in the 21st century? As I have attempted to show generally as well as through the variety of initiatives described here, the diversity of approaches and actors

appears quite certain to continue and even increase in the 21st century. A diversity of approaches means, no doubt, that there will be different paths, differences in emphasis and methodologies, and even conflicts and working at cross-purposes at times. Yet, there are two important observations or likely trends that, it appears to me, will be significant in the future.

One, despite the diversity and differences in theory and praxis, it is possible to read, rather *feel*, a convergence, a common core at a fundamental level. This convergence is referred to by different terms, such as ‘humanist radicalism’ (Erich Fromm) or ‘global humanism’<sup>5</sup> [15]. Perhaps this commonality has to do with the fact that at least there is a shared core of goals and values, found in all human societies and religions, even if the paths chosen to reach those goals are variable—values like love, kindness, peace, justice/fairness, honesty, freedom and responsibility. As Jacob von Uexkull writes, “We face an implementation vacuum, not a values vacuum” [36].

Discussing the future of ‘revolution’, Jeffery Paige writes that while revolution in the sense of violent seizure of state power through class-based revolts from below will almost certainly not happen, ‘revolution’ in another sense could very much happen. “If the contradiction between globalising neo-liberalism and the spirit of ‘68 continues to deepen...[there could well be] a deepening of the currents of human rights, the increasing assertiveness of the formally suppressed gender, ethnic, age and class groups and the rise of the global South may bring the world to a kind of *revolutionary transformation in consciousness, lived social experience and power* relations seen previously only in particular national societies. If this is so, the institutional arrangements will change to reflect the changes in lived experience just as they did in France, America and Cuba. Is there a future for revolution? If we mean by revolution the global deepening of the spirit of ‘68 the future may already be upon us.” [*emphasis added*] [27, p. 29]

Two, it appears to me that the co-transformation of self and society is inevitable, if transformation is to be really ‘radical’, or deep-rooted, complete and lasting. While the struggle to transform oppressive social structures continues, the value of inner change, even an awakening of the ‘spiritual’, is being recognised by more and more human beings. Auroville is a living example of the quest for combined spiritual and social change. But there are a number of other voices now supporting the coming together of spirituality and politics. Majid Rahnema [29] believes that individuals and groups aware of the spiritual dimension in them are in a much better position to find more intelligent and holistic answers. Catherine Ingram discusses the remarkable work of some well-known spiritual social activists inspired by Gandhi [18]. Ananta Giri too refers to Gandhi’s ideas and approvingly discusses the work of spiritually oriented activists and thinkers and calls for a new articulation between self and society, towards a new spirituality and politics. And the American Rabbi Michael Lerner calls for spiritual progressives and activists to build a ‘Spiritual Left’. He argues that we need a political movement that encourages us to develop an inner life even as it simultaneously engages in changing the outer world<sup>6</sup> [24].

<sup>5</sup>This convergence is also to be seen in global public opinion, outrage and public demonstrations against war, violence and other global ills, initiatives in recent years like the Alliance for a Responsible and a United World [37] and the World Future Council [36] and progressive networks like NCN [38] and the cultural creatives [39].

<sup>6</sup>In order to counter the appropriation of religion by the political Right, he has put forward a spiritual covenant with America and he wants the Democrats to make this the centre of their electoral strategy in the next elections! More on this can be found at [www.tikkun.org](http://www.tikkun.org). Rabbi Lerner is the editor of Tikkun and the national chair of the Tikkun community.

Finally, it is illuminating to consider the co-transformation of self and society from the philosophical perspective of non-duality. In the eloquent words of Roy Bhaskar,

“The world that humankind has made and which we currently inhabit is a world of duality: of unhappiness, oppression and strife—more especially, it is a world in which we are alienated from ourselves, each other, the activities in which we engage and the natural world we inhabit, currently hurtling into crisis and self-destruction.

The philosophy of *Meta-Reality* describes the way in which this very world nevertheless depends upon, that is, is ultimately sustained by and exists only in virtue of the free, loving, creative, intelligent energy and activity of non-dual states of our being and phases of our activity. In becoming aware of this we begin the process of transforming and overthrowing the totality of structures of oppression, alienation, mystification and misery we have produced; and the vision opens up of a balanced world and of a society in which the free development and flourishing of each unique human being is understood to be the condition, as it is also the consequence, of the free development and flourishing of all.” [3, p. vii–viii]

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