

# Spectrum

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## Empowerment for all

Rajesh Kumar Aggarwal

**Organizing for Social Change: A Dialectic Journey of Theory and Praxis**  
by Michael J. Papa, Arvind Singhal and Wendy H. Papa. Sage. Pages 297. Rs 360.

**T**HE six chapters of the book explore dialectical approaches to social change, which has been described as a process where a group of individuals gains control of its future. Social change is also the process whereby poor, vulnerable, silenced and marginalised people of the world gain political, economic and social power and achieve freedom and equality through democracy and participatory governance.

The book argues that dialectical struggles between competing opportunities are fundamental in organising for social change. When disempowered people organise for social change, the complexity of the process becomes apparent. They who are in power sustain their privileges by reinforcing control or further denying rights to the poor. Bringing about social change is a complex, non-linear, circuitous and dialectic process of struggle between competing poles of communication action.

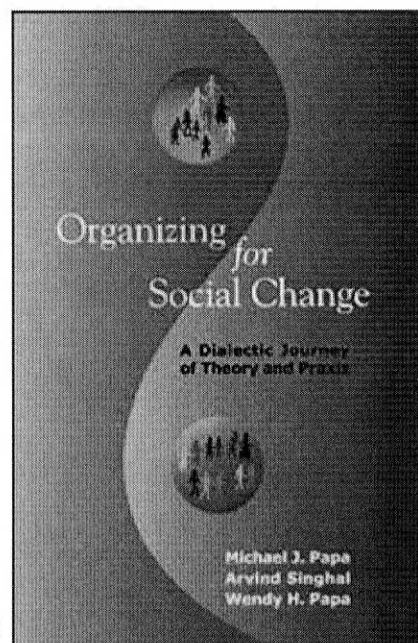
The book conceptualises dialectics, including elements such as contradiction (co-existence of different forces), motion (activities, movement or changes), totality (constant interconnection and reciprocal influence of multiple individual, interpersonal and social factors) and praxis (describing human beings as simultaneously subjects and objects of their own actions). It explores four dialectical tensions namely control and emancipation, oppressed and empowered, dissemination and dialogue, and fragmentation and unity. These tensions have been explained in four different social contexts where the poor attempt to organise for a social change.

The dialectics of control and emancipation have been explained through the communicative practices and organisational patterns of the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh. The people cannot be organised into collectives without some sort of control that orients and guides member behaviour.

The dialectics of oppression and empowerment in organising for social change is explained through India's dairy cooperatives, especially the ones that women run. Empowerment is when relatively powerless persons engage in dialogue with each other and come to understand the social sources of their powerlessness.

Democratically organized cooperatives can provide empowerment opportunities for members through communicative actions such as decision-making, negotiation and dialogue. Here dialogue can promote individual and group empowerment through self-reflection, self-knowledge, and liberation from oppressive beliefs.

This chapter also illustrates different dimensions of oppression and empowerment. Competition with others, disconnected analytical thinking, separation from others, powers over others, unreciprocated emotional labour, superior-subordinate work relationships, passive acceptance of expert opinion are some of the dimensions of oppression, whereas, cooperative enactment, integrative thinking, connectedness, sharing power, reciprocated emotional labour and egalitarian work relationships and dialogue are some of the



dimensions of empowerment.

The dialectic of dissemination and dialogue are present in communities struggling with social change. Dialogue involves sharing of information, ideas, stories and experiences among the poor. The chapter illustrates how an Indian radio soap opera, *Taru*, motivated young men and women in Bihar's Abirpur village to establish a school for the lower caste children, despite initial opposition from some members of the community.

The book describes the dialectical tension between fragmentation and unity by investigating the community suppers that feed the poor, hungry and homeless in the Appalachian region, one of the poorest regions in the United States. The book ends with a lesson that practitioners of social change should focus on the poorest of the poor and the most oppressed members of the community.

The book deals with multi-dimensional and complex social issues and focuses on social change processes that are pro-poor, pro-disempowered, pro-homeless, pro-hungry, pro-women and pro-vulnerable. The illustrations and case studies are relevant for the policy makers, project-officials, NGOs and academicians.

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