

Book Review

Society and Social Justice: A Nexus in Review. Brij Mohan, 2012, Bloomington, iUniverse. ISBN:978-1-4759—0796-4(sc)pp.xx+102, Price.\$13.95

Brij Mohan is a versatile thinker who is popularly known as the Father of Indian Social Psychiatry and due to his attraction towards the philosophy of Jean Paul Sartre he is also known as Sartre of Social Work. The Book titled, *Society and Social Justice: A Nexus in Review* is a collection of thoughts, constructs and philosophical insights and deliberations of the author. The five sections of this book are: 1) The Human Condition, 2) Theoretico-Philosophical Streams, 3) Social Constructs and Interventions, 4) International Aspects and Issues, and 5) Science, Society and Values.

The human condition has been the general foundation of conceptual framework of Brij Mohan. He states thus, caste as a system of stratified inequality is the fundamental rhythm of Indian life, and has globally survived in different forms since times immemorial. Its functionality on the sub continent, however, is sustained by a mythologised social reality that runs contrary to the ideals of social democracy. Caste in India seems to be the essence of the social structure, its survival and its all pervasive influence characterises the Indian way of life. To eradicate casteism and untouchability, a caste war has to be fought, no doubt but its ideology and programme of action should be objectively progressive. It would be self-defeating and nationally devastating to resort to reactionary methods and thinking.

The advancement of science and technology especially in fields that relate to human well-being has brought paradigmatic changes but the problem had been confounded by the politics of new fundamentalism. Terrorism and counter-terrorism continues to be a nexus of evil. Terrorism is one of the ugly faces of evil; counter-terrorism is a vile reaction to evil which sustains both evilness and its villainy. When state and its agents become instruments of terror, it leads to the moral dissolution of its legitimacy. Terrorism has its roots in annihilating suffocation, blind rage, unexamined faith, unkind beliefs and lack of both rationality and humanity. Counter-terrorism derives its strength from its own nefarious motives and tools. To distinguish between the two, one must critically analyse the dynamics that breed terror, arrogance, hopelessness and violence.

A new consciousness to deconstruct the existing culture of islands, alienation, and institutional-individual narcissism calls for a paradigm shift that essentially boils down to certain basic rules of civility. A responsible society must promote and sustain the elemental humanity of each individual and community. This seems to be better, perhaps the only, way to transform the world. The pain of hunger is no more a third world curse; scourges of poverty and authoritarianism are pervasive. Even the most advanced nations in the world are not immune to the rages of new poverty—a phenomenon that marks the failure of the post-industrial society in meeting common human needs. Scientism on the one hand and heuristic orientation on the other tend to distort free inquiry and its impact. The outcome is intellectual territoriality, social exclusion and cognitive dogmatism. Institutional-individual narcissism poisons academic climate and a sort of new fundamentalism tends to pervade the entire research culture. Behavioral sciences, in their reliance on quantification and mathematical rigour, represent a flight from (human) reality.

Mental illness and mental health are not an absolute condition; the former becomes distinguishable mental desired attributes of the latter which appear to be disappearing. While impairment affecting role and status calling for psychiatric attention helps us define mental illness, personal maturity marked by adequate socio-personal adjustment, integration, self-restraint, reality orientation and cultural adaptability enables the identification of positive attributes that characterise mental health. In social psychiatry both conditions needs to be studied in togetherness. This opens unlimited vistas of collaboration between the psychiatrist and the social scientist. Caring and sharing nurture a civil-responsible order. Modern social workers have scientific knowledge and tools to alleviate social problems. As specialists they perform complex functions offering problem/population-specific services in a host of settings, they seek to professionalise the whole problem-solving process.

In the section on theoretico-philosophical streams, the author is critical about the teaching-learning process in social work education. The entire teaching-learning spectrum of social work education is almost philosophically illiterate and as a consequence, anti-intellectual. A new text book

culture patronised by our leading professional organisations and commercial publishers has nearly killed the art of independent scholarship that sustained and promoted original works. The result is the models and recycled texts that have replaced intellectual habits that nourished creative minds.

The future of social development is discussed in the section on Human Society, Social Constructs and Interventions. Social development depends on the foundations of a civil society's stand on the twin pillars of global equality and social justice. Clientisation is not a humanistic approach and to emphasise "micro" at the expense of its "macro" dimension and their symbiosis is an intellectual impossibility. Social work as a profession is a 20th century American innovation. Its evolution is a mark of the rise of a welfare state. This state of welfare institutionalised residual functions and ensured people's security against the contingencies of modernity. The 21st century realities are starkly daunting and different. We notice meltdowns in our basic social, economic and political institutions and a devastating blow to the existing social contract. Physical fundamentalists have however conveniently asked for a law of the jungle in the market while commanding an authoritarian hand over other aspects of law and order. This paradoxical double behaviour has crossed a situation which calls for a revolution that is Social Contract II.

The troubled manifestations of these cultural crises are beyond the SW-EPR (Social Work Education, Practice and Research) purview competencies and even imagination. A truly post-modern approach to problem solving implies radical changes in programme and curricular structures, pedagogy, epistemologies of change. Social Workers are people who have studied and learnt the art and science of caring. This professional endeavour involves a litany of roles, goals and strategies as conceptualised by the skilled pioneers in the field.

Social work's epistemological foundations are based on academic parasitism, unreflective view of social reality and uncritical self awareness. It is common knowledge that social work faculty and students abhor deeper discussion on philosophical-critical issues. Without exaggeration, the social work culture is expediently anti-intellectual. Social work has become a faith based calling in its own perverted style. Administrators wallow in unabashed self promotion and careerism flourishes at the expense of professionalism and scholars write more text than they read. In short, academic social work has become practitioners' haven for faith based theodicy that is neither committed to knowledge building nor philosophically sound pedagogy. In the name of scientific research we have become apes of unfounded empirical logic which lacks both authenticity and legitimacy. Social work is not what we occupationally pursue as careerists; social work is what we do professionally and personally to change this world. Social work, a quintessentially human rights approach to most of the human made tragedies, may well reequip itself, both pragmatically and epistemologically. Theory and practice of social work warrant emphasis on inclusive citizenship, universal equality, freedom and justice. What we need is practice of hope rather than politics of expedience.

Social policy is quintessentially a democratic response to societal needs. Social policy must be conceptualised as a liberating mechanism directed towards social justice. There would be no need for any policy innovation if human society were an impeccable system. Since we live in a less than perfect world, intellectuals, especially policy thinkers and practitioners, must reflect on and build upon individual and collective experiences that will ensure a better world for our positivity. Social policy is a creative decision making process that involves a complex system of cognitive offshoots and politico-social-economic variables undergirding a unified whole of transcendental values and techno scientific advancements. Policy making is a tough value-oriented balancing of probabilities rather than hunt for convenient possibilities.

Social policy ought to be conceptualised as a possible theory and practice of the preferred societal values, goals and interventions. The range of social policy includes alternatives that economise resources and optimise human function without oppression, allocation that generate creative mechanism without ugly political maneuvers and strategies that promote conducive social arrangements without counterproductive results. A decolonised society with an aversion to progressive social change, rampant with political corruption, becomes a fertile field for the mushroom growth of divisive and disruptive forces. While stress, restlessness, anxiety and insecurity grow in general, disparity between haves and have-nots and the gap between principles and practices internally destroy/decompose the entire system.

Social interventions ought to design and implement mechanisms of change that maintain human equilibrium without oppressive hierarchies. All we need is a peaceful coexistence that promotes humankind's wellbeing.

The section on international aspects and issues deals with the multiple challenges of social work practice in the globalised world. An internationally accepted definition of social work is not necessarily international social work. It may be defined as a discursive discipline that employs the

knowledge and tenets of social practice in a diverse, dynamic and independent world. In reality, it is more of a field rather than discipline. International social work ethics and methodology are designed by contours of social reality that represent human life as an end (in itself) in an otherwise divided world.

Contemporary social developmentalism is fraught with the fallacies of growth. In a world plagued by paroxysm and global inequalities, universal needs-survival, violence, justice and human dignity call for new strategies for social transformation. International social work, especially with emphasis on comparative methodology, is human response to unraveling differential social issues, problems and approaches. Enhancement of the human condition-beyond territorial, ideological and socio-cultural barriers-is a global challenge. Scourges of governmentality perpetuating global oppression negate the essence of freedom that all people are entitled to enjoy. Social welfare offers no panacea; it represents a consciousness against cross-national dehumanisation that thwarts global welfare.

In the last section, the author discusses science, values and social reality of the modern world. A search for society that is free from violence, terror and dehumanisation is a continuous process. If scientific progress had followed, the ethics of development in harmony with universal values, the dawn of the 21st century should have been pregnant with equality and justice across nations. Instead, we have a world ravaged by horrors of new tribalism. Human rights are conceptualised as inalienable rights of all people required for the survival, security and dignity of each individual, group and community without prejudice or discrimination. Human commonalities, despite vast differences, constitute a system of unity that may be called 'universal humanity.'

Society and Social Justice: A Nexus in Review is a collection of major themes that run across the deliberations and thoughts of the author. This book challenges the readers with radical interpretations of global issues and concerns in the light of contemporary social work practices. To follow the threads of thought of the author in this book, the reader needs to have a deeper reading of the other books authored by him from where these gems of thoughts have been incorporated.

Anil John
aniljohn@rajagiri.edu