

Brij Mohan *The Future of Social Work - Seven Pillars of Practice*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2018, xiv+158 pp. Rs. 995. (hb) ISBN-978-93-528-0625-6.

The title of the book is attractive to all those who love social work and the contents are prepared in a way to set certain directions for the new generation by an ardent social work Guru and practitioner with many critical views and reflections. Brij Mohan expresses his passion for the profession and throughout the book one can sense the vigour of self-criticism of the profession to which he dedicates his entire career and expertise. Many times the criticisms are directed to the market-based changes and approaches to the profession, but he believes the mechanisms that caused the emergence of the social work profession will work on to reproduce the system of this profession. The book has ten chapters totalling around 140 pages with a well allied analysis of social welfare, social work, models and suggestions. The seven pillars of social practice, the author suggests, are given succinct rationale, scope and their future inevitability.

The first chapter, 'Poverty, war and welfare', creates the premise of the book and the core aspect of welfare. Slavery, inequality and poverty are the children of the human mind and therefore control and power are applied to nurture and institutionalise inequality among human beings. War is the major instrument of power control and this has been there since time immemorial. Inequality, fundamentalism and war are the different points in a string that creates misery for human beings. Fundamentalism could be the result of more organised religion and rituals. The inequality created in the past is mightier than the current measures.

The author indicates that "the past devours the future"- the wealth accumulated in the past grows faster than 'output' and 'wages'. While explaining the 'paroxysm of populism' he indicts anti-immigrant policies especially against certain categories of people. Racism, class conflicts and political dogmas are realities (the antithesis of post-material praxis) and indicative of the fact that inequality 'will continue to co-exist'. The author critically analyses the social structures and the historical indices that are created by the victors in power acquisition.

The power holders who created inequalities in society dictate the terms and paths of welfare, and it ensures that dissents are buried either using power or furthering the unequal paroxysms. He finds many cultures that hold people under poverty and the culture of poverty. He is very deterministic to say that 'if poverty is the midwife, untouchability is its womb that delivers children of injustice fathered by the perpetrators of a predatory culture'. The systems created by the nefarious interpretation of origin, dharma and karma in the Indian context cause the subhuman destiny of many people. The hegemony of power thus established and the social order imposed by a few still rule the land in one or another form. The author cites the efforts of B. R Ambedkar who tried to discern the roots of 'ritualised behaviours that sustain the contours of primordial psyche'. He is critical of the new world orders under 'Trumpian' (Donald Trump) neopragmatism that may cause violence, terror, insecurity in America and 'cow vigilantes' in India that create a social order of injustice, insecurity, inequality and a culture of poverty. In this context the book vehemently asserts that the challenge of the century is not to restore social welfare, but rather the elimination of the need for it. Social welfare as an institution is prostituted by charlatans in a hyperdemocracy (p.23). Considering the created inequalities and the sustained power imbalance, social work is seen as a by-product of dreams and delusions, invented by self-righteous altruists to heal the wounds of war and poverty (means of oppression), with guilt under the cover of philanthropy.

The World of Welfare introduced in the book as policies, services and programmes to cater to the needs of people, with a caution that it is like health, if health involves 'ill-health, welfare can involve "ill-fare"'. In a string of intriguing professional phraseology, welfare, policies and social work are connected and explained. The book ascertains that it is 'the war against poverty' that changed American society and the welfare state concept became instrumental in institutionalising social needs and to find exigencies of living from cradle to grave. This seems to be a combination of welfare and policies, whereas social work as a profession applies socialised methodologies of 'help' to the 'clients'. It is more of a field specific,

of interrelated interventions targeting a particular group or number of individuals. The critique of the social work profession seems to be the pedagogy based on the textbooks awash with chapters without any novelty, new models or findings. Traditional methods and concepts in social work are liberally defined by schools matching their styles and 'accreditation requirements'. The book approves the idea that the welfare, policy and social work need to focus on the entire universe that grows smaller and the vision is to become a 'world citizen'. This idea of welfare, policy and social work appealing as they would be persuaded to find equality, justice and freedom from poverty. In this idea of 'world citizenship', the new forms of challenges and manners of divisions exist in multilayered compartments. The techno-digital progress in a globalised economy with increased inequality has fashioned an allied dissonance which entails 'attached detachment'. America's nativism, India's nationalism, China's silk route and Brexit are cited as the classical formulas of attached detachment in the world's citizenry. In this 'self-interest- focused' world the author conveys his sense of understanding on equality as an 'ideal' just like world peace. In this world order, social work and social welfare have clear-cut functions to perform but the policies are to be open enough, national and global resources are to be available and the intervention tools are to be flawless. There are many challenges like anti-immigration policies that created 'we' and 'they' in this new social order, 'not by men but by guns' attitude of destruction and restricted economic and social policies.

Human-social Comparative Social Development (HSCSD), an amalgamation of various sub-disciplines, is recommended and it is seen as a "synthetic unification of integrated whole that incubates and nurtures the entire process of personality development in a complex environment" (p.31). The significance of social policy in the frame of social welfare and social work is emphasised in the book and the author would like to view social policy as a 'co-determinant' of economic policy. Social work research needs to create the culture of the science by producing knowledge and truth. The appealing criticism to the existing patterns of social work research by the author is that the contemporary social work research is "fraught with perceived alternate reality unrelated to the roots of causes" (p. 33).

Plateaux and platitudes of the practice of social work are depicted in the third chapter with the concerns over human miseries as a result of misfortunes, human ingenuity and a permutation of both. The directional aspects of this chapter are the human conditions in the social order that seek to mitigate the spread of oppression. Social work with its hallmark ideas of 'help' and 'altruism' faces the exclusivity of knowledge that is lost in understanding welfare, human nature and challenges of debates posed by others. The welfare, most of the time, becomes a visible maintenance of the status quo, without expressed pain and stress by the public. Government systems holding more power, there are NGOs and individuals who share the responsibility of welfare. The book is a critique of the aspect of coreless knowledge, depthless statistics and 'sociological imaginations' expressed in the literature that numb critical understanding. The academic publications without discussing the basic root causes are real concerns of the profession. It is very authentically critiqued about the lack of knowledge on the social reality before getting involved in any sort of intervention in social work. The lack of knowledge of the 'social construction of reality' is due to being 'alien to social thought'. The social order, social preferences, social inequality and oppression are the realities and interventions will never find the desired results without this reality consciousness. It is inimical to achieve equality and justice when professionals overlook the realities. In the deeper sense the author suggests social practice – "...discursive idea of transformative practice that might lead to a post human condition" (p.39). The social work profession is also challenged in its practice based on dated ideologies and contrasting concepts. A social worker being ignorant of social realities is one of the reasons for the profession being putatively an altruistic endeavour, which seeks the status of profession. It is emphasised that the pivotal role of social work is to establish social justice and professionally licensed social workers hardly work on the achievement of social justice. The professionals deal with alternate reality and therefore the 'profession will cease to exist as apps, robotics and algorithms take on human specialisations'. In addition, globalisation and its forces draw the lines of class wars and inequalities in different colours and formats. Globalisation of social

work is a natural outcome, but the author throws out the question of as to whether world peace is a slogan more than a reality.

The archaeology of social practice describes the historical search of artefacts (search for the monumental constructs) that civilisations are built upon. The social practice is seen as the carpentry of fractured relationships and institutions. The improper settings or relationships of systems and institutions with people adversely affect their wellbeing. People, property (inclusive of status) and pugnacity (war, fights or conflicts) constructed a civil order that perpetuates the glorification of barbarians. The archaeology of social work practice reveals that it took its way to existence out of the yoke of poverty, war and industrialisation. It is also paradoxical that the wealth and prosperity brought in by modernity could never quench the thirst for solving social problems of nations but only of meeting the material deprivations. When the realities are overlooked, the traditionally taught and practiced ethical points like confidentiality and face-to face communication are said to be myths the practitioners concentrate on. In the context of welfare states and legitimacy, the problem, policy and practice extend a cycle of hope, as the 'human existence is trapped in an absurd quest for happiness in an inherently unjust world'. The author argues that "social work was invented as a detour to a goal that was inherently unclear at best" (p. 47). The reason to believe so is that the 'social institutions and systems with a hybrid philosophy of naiveté and arrogance' never mitigated social-personal problems ranging from terrorism to personal mental health issues. The death of civility, rise and control of techno-political enterprises and the ineffectual opposition by the masses cause the mindless criminal leaders to pervert public and social policy. The social work knowledge sources (new additions by so called 'intellectuals') have started flooding into the commercial book stores. The professional associations have agreed upon tenured leaderships and the anti-intellectual cultures thus created trap professional advancement. 'The trappings of human nature call for unified science to unravel the human-social development (HSD) paradox'. The HSD demands more than social work in an era of social meltdowns. These social components may make some sense to integrate to fight against the confused state of knowledge.

In a transforming world, where individuals, families and institutions strive for functional sustainability, a reflective analysis of social work is crucial and that constitutes transforming social work. The three major areas reflected in this context are the mission of social work, education of social work and the service aspect of its delivery, research and values. The new framework proposed here is the mission, education and service. The mission of social work has always been to humanise systems of assistance for individuals, groups and the community. Social work education infrastructure that can coordinate research, linkages and system analysis is vital in advancing the profession of social work. In the service delivery the profession needs to bring back the 'social', so that the problems caused by the demise of 'social' (family, community, society and responsibility) are social constructs in the profession. It calls for a paradigm shift in the practice.

In the hermeneutics of help, the significant question is whether social work needs a theory or not. Social work is an applied combination of many theories; however, those theories need validation or refutation. It is viewed that 'political and social development got embedded in the social system as a functional expedience'. Knowledge base - episteme - is a critical component or attribute of any profession, but the book criticises the myths created by the textbook authors who recycle borrowed constructs to make the knowledge base shaky for the social work profession.

The seven pillars are explained for practice as a best choice for the profession to excel rather than devolving into extinction. The seven pillars suggested as seven transformational 'algorithms' are: mission, education, service, embedded in empathetic humility, authenticity/ liberatory assistance, and praxis. These pillars would support the profession to reach above the oppressions and they would enable the profession to anchor better in social realities. Environmental justice and social justice are interlinked to establish human social development. The inconvenient truths are not to be hidden or overlooked in the profession. Rather, they need to be deliberated, analysed and acted upon. The profession needs a freedom and vocabularies of change, which can make out the profession in the

era where a zero-sum game is between freedom and oppression. The last chapter entitled 'The End of Social Work: Epilogue' sums up the arguments in a very thoughtful way. "The rise of inequality and injustice call for new algorithms of social transformation to stave off an unprecedented human crisis" (p.139). The modern world transforms very fast but the social realities of inequality, injustice, oppression and freedom of taking away the freedom of the oppressed remain the same. For social work to exist as a practicing profession, the book suggests seven pillars of practice. The aim is not limited to human development but extends to human social development.

The book clearly describes the context of social work expected to be practised in this modern world, which displays diversity as a matter of attraction and division. Injustice and inequality are explained by the hegemony of power. The inequalities are created to make the power imbalance, so that power is enjoyed by a few. Globalisation of social work is many times narrated as the need of the hour, but what makes the point of significance is the welfare, policy and social work. The concept of social work is to be realigned, rather than depending on the commercial textbooks that create inequalities. The associations for social work need not be associations for the leadership tenures. The profession needs to create the freedom within and the vocabularies of change. To summarise, the seven pillars as suggested in the book clearly show the future path for social work. Moreover, this is a very powerful language to improve the human condition in a most troubled time through social practice.

Rajeev. S.P
rajeev@rajagiri.edu