



The Future of Social Work: Seven Pillars of Practice by Brij Mohan

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Social Work as a profession confronts many challenges. The one that concerns most is the digital revolution that is fast replacing humans by autonomous machines. Does it add to professional excellence? Answers to this question may vary from people to people.

Three decades ago Professor Brij Mohan wrote about the “crisis of social work”. There was no internet at that time. Social Work was—and continues to be—a “helping profession.” Helping others is altruism at best provided that the “helper” is both benevolent and competent. The advocates of artificial intelligence (AI) contend that people are essentially flawed, and computers are infallible and efficient. Drones, self-driven automobiles, and robotic controllers simply demonstrate evolution of human ingenuity. Obsolescence, furthermore, double-downs the human factor.

Dr. Mohan believes that social interventions will atrophy in a culture that commoditizes knowledge, health, and mental health-social services. The *Description Uberisation of Social Services* is inevitable. This is a frightening reality. Alternate facts, in this post-truth era, pose a virtual threat to the fundamental purpose of social work.

Social is embedded in the “second dimension” of modern civilization. In today’s *One-dimensional* culture, confounded by information revolution, definitions and nature of basic institutions have changed. Think of “marriage, family, and community”. Mohan argues that AI has transmuted the nature of both “Social and Work” implying the redundancy of what we offer in the field of social work. The mushroom growth of on-

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line social work programs and diplomas thrives on new market needs without legitimizing the essence of sound practice.

The Contents of this Book Include

A stupendous Foreword by Professor Peter Herrmann, Fellow at Max Planck Institute for Social Law and Social Policy, Munich, Germany, followed by 10 thoughtful chapters, the last being an Epilogue on “The end of social work”.

1. Poverty, war, and welfare;
2. The world of welfare;
3. Plateaus and platitudes of Practice;
4. Transforming social work;
5. Hermeneutics of help;
6. Seven pillars of social practice;
7. Environmental justice as a practice model;
8. Freedom and vocabularies of change;
9. Epilogue.

In his Foreword Herrmann observes

“The book is valuable and timely contribution as it provokes the reader: not another sober analysis adding to many that already exist, but personal, emphatic resistance against a profession and training of professionals that reinvents the humanity by misdirecting social existence toward a planet of ice and the jeopardy of a cage for which the key is lost by the age of reason...”

A reader who is not knowledgeable with the author’s philosophy is likely to take this book as “anti-social work.” It’s therefore helpful to comprehend his basic premise:

Social work ought to be end of itself. Conferences, colloquia and dissertations will debate, discuss, and deliberate this formulation that underlines the soul of this book.

Dr. Mohan has earned some epitaphs—“Sartre [and Habermas] of Social Work,” “Father of Social Psychiatry in India”—that call for an explanatory note best illustrated in his own words:

“I wasn’t born an American; I became one. This odyssey is a formidable story. My work is a product of this compelling journey.”

The author prides on his doctoral education at Lucknow University, India under the supervisor of the late S. Zafar Hasan, Dean Emeritus, College of Social Work, at University of Kentucky (formerly Professor and Head, Department of Social Work, Lucknow University, Lucknow). His compelling journey, since he is one of the few deans and professors—the only one from South Asia—who has no formal American education. It’s obvious how and why the author looks beyond the narrow lenses of social work as taught and practiced in North America.

A framework for Social Practice—not Social Work—that he offers involves “seven pillars” inclusive of

- i. mission,
- ii. education,
- iii. service
- iv. embedded in empathetic humility,
- v. liberatory praxis; (authenticity)

- vi. transparent effectiveness,
- vii. buoyancy above the sea of oppression

These tenets include elimination of BSW and DSW in the so called 'continuum' and strengthening MSW; a horizontal incorporation of social work curriculum across cognate disciplines; total re-orientation of agency based, 'client'-centered field work training. He questions the nature and culture of social work research as well. The book is provocative, stimulating, and radical, albeit a significant contribution to re-think the purpose and utility of contemporary social work education and practice.

"A Master of social welfare, social work and comparative social policy has written a masterful book. Enough already of professional social work, it has denounced itself with decades of foolish accommodations, empty scholarship and even a wondering commitment to those in need. Unique in these sorts of analyses, Mohan asks for the consideration of elements outside of the ambience of social work but with a humane and humanistic commitment."

Refernce

1. Mohan, B. 1988. *The Logic of Social Welfare: Conjectures and Formulations*. New York: St. Martin's.
2. Mohan, Brij. 2011. *Development, Poverty of Culture and Social Policy*. New York: Macmillan Palgrave.