

Book Review

Seven Pillars of Social Practice

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Social Work (SW) as a profession grew out of the post-war despair. Social Welfare, however, has pre-existed since the dawn of civilisation. Socio-cultural factors and the politics of regulating the lives of the poor and powerless have shaped models of charitable and philanthropic institutions based on apparently benign altruism that masquerades as social welfare. Mohan thinks that our society is in a state of institutional meltdown.

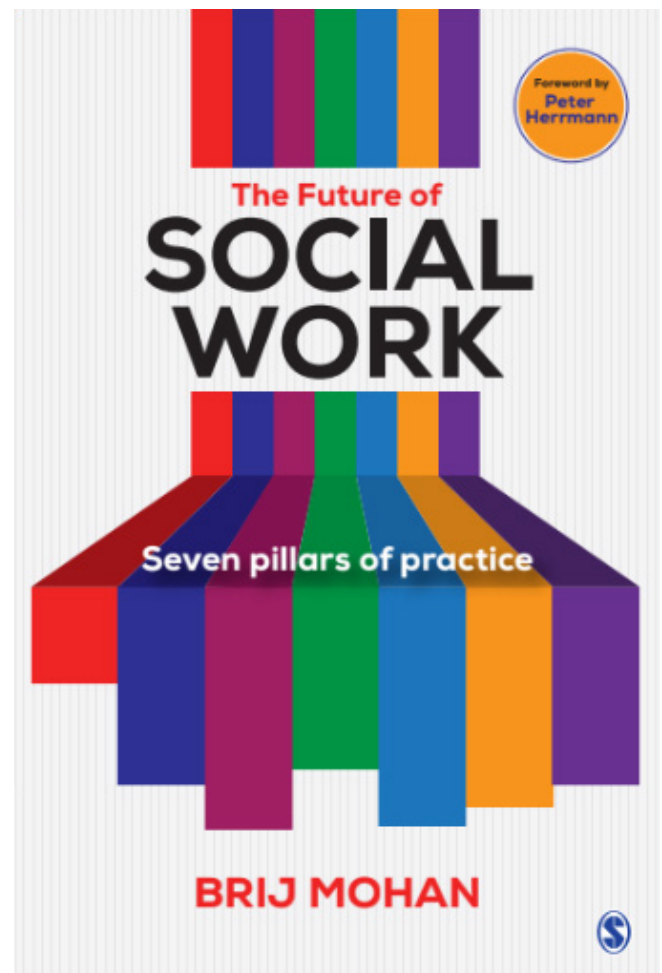
Professor Brij Mohan's new book, *The Future of Social Work*, is a refutation of the age-old dogmas that sustain "poverty of culture" (Mohan, 2011: *Development, Poverty of Culture and Social Policy*, NY: Macmillan Palgrave).

The author is a "Social Work Pioneer" (NASW, 1995) who has enriched the understanding of human behaviour and social policy that undergird all social intervention. Born, raised, and educated in India, he moved to the United States more than four decades ago to explore and transform his own moorings and concerns that universally prompt 'push and pulls' about the inherent *otherness* of an intellectual. As an unofficial biographer of this man, this reviewer is inclined to make some comments that will help social scientists to comprehend the nature of his work succinctly embodied in 145 pages of this monograph.

An ordinary social work educator might simply pass this book as a heretic's viewpoint whose disillusionment with modernity is so eloquently portrayed. This will be a mistake. Brij Mohan delves into the social dynamics much deeper. In several of his most recent books, he has critiqued the 'Enlightenment' movement as a failed messiah. His plea for *Enlightenment Two* is basically the focus of his entire oeuvre.

I am not a social work educator; I am a student and teacher of philosophy. Many of Brij Mohan's critics fret about his tough-minded 'social philosophy'. He believes most social workers are philosophically illiterate and ill-equipped in the welfare industry that a therapeutic culture perpetuates without fundamental social changes.

In a recent interview with the author in New Delhi, I asked him about his take on *Enlightenment Two*. There are three takeaways from this exchange. First, modernity is fraught with contradictions of development that sustain inequalities and injustice. The Age of Reason triggered upheavals and democracies began to emerge with inherent flaws. People

**About Book**

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left behind have been angry, dissatisfied and violently aggressive to attain what freedom would imply. Second, science and technology are powerful tools of social transformation, but our educational and cultural systems use these vehicles to widen hierarchical gaps. Lastly, the digital revolution has fundamentally changed the meanings of “social” and “work” and, thus, chanting the mantras of a dated approach will be counterproductive if not suicidal.

I have confined my comments on the soul of this book without narrating its structural elements (chapters, contents etc.). Also, the author’s consciousness of *things* as they are in the focus, *no-thing-ness*, notwithstanding. Philosophical reality without much impact on social reality--unless social philosophy is *practiced* as a way of life rather than a means of employment--loses its meaning and essence. In his formulations of seven pillars of practice, Brij Mohan expertly underscores this approach.