

Book Review:

Social Work and Social Development: Perspectives from India and the United States

by

Shweta Singh (Editor), 2013

Social Work and Social Development: Perspectives from India and the United States

Chicago: LYCEUM BOOKS

448 pages, ISBN 978-1-933478-66-1

This is a book of great ambition edited by Shweta Singh, including contributions from over 30 Indian and US scholars in the fields of social work, sociology, theology, philosophy and women's studies. As the title indicates, the book compares India and the United States' approaches to social work and social development. The book is divided into five parts, each of which contains an introduction and a set of chapters that cover the range of the underlying issues. Part one (Chapters 1-4) deals with the roots of social work. By exploring how different religions and philosophy of life have influenced social work in India, this part emphasizes the situatedness of the specifics of social work. Part two (Chapters 5-16) discusses the social development trajectory and its human and environmental consequences. To depict the developmental process and its various constituents, this part compares the Indian and US approaches, in which both rural and urban contexts are covered, and issues such as farmer suicides, human displacement, environmental protection and land grabbing are discussed. Part three (Chapters 17-23) focuses on family social welfare and corrections, covering gender-related issues such as child welfare and caregiving of the elderly, as well as the emerging issue for social work intervention, namely criminal justice. Part four (Chapters 24-29) discusses health- and mental health systems, policies and outcomes across both India and the US. The last part (Chapters 30-32) depicts the increasing complexities in the fields of social work and social development, and suggests expanding the social work curriculum by adding emerging issues of importance.

The book offers not only a wide spectrum of deep theoretical perspectives, but also rich empirical materials to help understand social work and social development in the two countries. It is ambitious, innovative and timely in these three main aspects:

Firstly, it provides a unique framework for international comparison between India and the US that are normally not considered comparable, at least in the fields of social work and social development. Furthermore, the comparison goes beyond the binary construction of the US as the developed country which shall "export" or "share" knowledge, while India as a developing country that shall merely "import" or "receive". By focusing on the similarities between the two countries, such as cultural pluralism, democratic political structures and welfare policy commitments, and by

valuing the local experience and knowledge equally in both contexts, it enables an inclusionary exchange of knowledge. Such a comparative framework therefore challenges the ethnocentric paradigm in global knowledge production, while also being an inspiration for other international comparative studies.

Secondly, while focusing on social work and social development in two specific contexts – the Indian and the US, the comparisons are also well framed in a global context. Such a framing enables and encourages the readers to move the examination of social problems and policy issues between different analytical levels. Finally, in particular to its relevance to social work, the book has through its interdisciplinary lenses provided its readers with multiple perspectives to (re)understand social work (both as a knowledge field and as a practice field) and to grasp its complexities. In particular, I appreciate its explicit attempt to bridge the traditional concerns on gender or gender-related issues in social work with the theoretical development from current women's studies and feminist theories. Considering that social work with families has recently been given much attention among the Nordic social work researchers who are also engaging in international comparative studies, I would recommend this book, especially part three, to these scholars.

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