

## BOOK REVIEW

# Transforming social work: Transcending vocational purpose—new book challenges current perspectives on social work

**Mina Tehrifard\***

Mohagegh University, Ardabil, Daneshgah, Iran

\*Correspondence to: Mina Tehrifard, Mohagegh University, Ardabil, Daneshgah, Iran; Email: Psy.tehrifard@gmail.com

**Received:** September 16, 2015; **Accepted:** October 29, 2015; **Published Online:** December 3, 2015

**Citation:** Tehrifard M, 2016, Transforming social work: Transcending vocational purpose—new book challenges current perspectives on social work. *Environment and Social Psychology*, vol.1(1): 74–75. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18063/ESP.2016.01.006>.

“The evil that is in the world almost always comes of ignorance, and good intentions may do as much harm as malevolence if they lack understanding.”

—Albert Camus

In his monograph “Transforming Social Work” (Rapid Book Service, Lucknow, India), renowned author Dr. Brij Mohan cautions that the social work profession now stands at the crossroads of change in a globally transformed world.

“While basic societal institutions falter,” he notes, “individual, family, and community strive for functional sustainability. The status, legitimacy, and need of a professional discipline can only be sustained if the structure of a profession is organized in congruence with cultural, social, economic, and political realities embedded in the forces of change.”

Mohan, Dean Emeritus of the School of Social Work at Louisiana State University (LSU), Baton Rouge, USA, is a profusive author of 21 books and over 400 articles, chapters and reviews encompassing a spectrum of disciplines which include humanities, social sciences and international social work/policy/welfare and comparative-social development.

He has attained a world-class reputation as a master-teacher, administrator, thinker, writer, editor, speaker and critic. Mohan is also the editor-in-chief of Scholar’s Publisher, Toronto, Canada, as well as the

founding editor-in-chief of the Journal of Comparative Social Welfare, now rebirthed as the recently inaugurated Journal of International and Comparative Social Policy by Whioce Publishing, Singapore.

Praising Mohan’s life work, Prof Priscilla D. Allen of LSU School of Social Work wrote: “Dr. Mohan is often termed a ‘social work philosopher’, and lauded as ‘a journeyman, a philosopher, and a prolific and profound force in the social work world whose work literally bridges the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries.’”

In Mohan’s keynote address at the 3<sup>rd</sup> National Indian Social Work Congress in October 2015, he argued that his book seeks to examine three basic aspects of professional consequence: mission of social work; educational infrastructure; and service aspects of its delivery, research, funding and values.

He added:

These stances differ from much of what we know about and do in Social Work within and beyond educational settings. A critical examination unravels concerns that merit attention of the professional community to adapt to and align with realities that dictate transformative practice to achieving sustainable peace, prosperity and progress in a global community.

In a book review by Mina Taherifard, an editorial

board member of *International and Comparative Social Policy* journal, she commented, “Brij Mohan presents critical-analytical view of American social work that has shaped and influenced various models of its training and practice. In many developing nations, it seems, it has been replicated without much self-critical examination.”

Taherifard, from Faculty of Education and Psychology at University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, Ardabil, Islamic Republic of Iran, noted that “Social Practice is a way of education, thinking and change that is long overdue.” Mohan’s book, she commended, has relevance unconfined to only Indian subcontinent and the developing world.

“It’s more important for the western countries and their leaders to rethink about their roles to fix their broken systems. Also, uncritical duplication is not going to solve any problem anywhere,” she added.

His thesis merits serious examination, Taherifard emphasized. “[Mohan] views Social Work as a dated mode of intervention because 21<sup>st</sup> century presents far more complex social problems than people faced in the last century,” she observed.

“He argues for a radical transformation of the profession, which pays lip service to human equality and social justice. The seven steps model involves many layers of approaches that are worthy of critique,” Taherifard furthered.

Mohan’s seven steps, as outlined in the *Transforming Social Work* book, posit 21 smaller approaches—from addressing social work in a digital age, to adapting social science in a changing higher learning institution – with hope that, as Mohan writes, “Social Practice will transcend its vocational purpose morphing into a renewed force of intuitive self-empowerment.”

He argues for a transformation that will require social practitioners to be a different breed of ‘helpers’. “The contours of a new techno-digital society have fundamentally changed the nature of human interactions, economic productivity and social values that bind us together as global family. It’s crucial to comprehend the design and structure of this Brave New World,” he reasons.

Taherifard commented, “Mohan’s solo work and his continued contributions shame many think tanks and heavily endowed institutions that play fiddle while the world is on fire.” She praised Mohan’s monograph of relatively smaller but conceptually deeper analysis which shows courage of convictions based on his de-

cares of international experiences and an unmatched record of productivity.

“India should be proud of his yeomen service; America ought to listen to him; and the world of social work should be grateful to him,” she wrote.

The National Association of Social Workers - Louisiana Chapter (NASW-LA) has already honored Mohan with a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2008 and Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidaypith University awarded him a Doctor of Letters honoris causa in 2004 for his outstanding contributions. In addition, the LSU Foundation has endowed in his honor a Brij Mohan Distinguished Professor Award to recognize since 1998 fellow faculty members who serve in his footsteps as a model for the community in demonstration of a commitment to peace, equality, and social justice.

“Social Work is a call for action — incessant transformation,” Mohan writes in his book. “Social Practice is reflective action, a calling, not career. It’s a perpetual quest for freedom inherent in primordial human condition and culture.”

Social work should be the end of itself, he further reflects. “The End of Work is no scientific fiction. A few simple algorithms have changed the world we live in. This ‘new brave world’ will not have Social Work as we define, offer, and practice today,” he alerts.

“Hope everyone is listening,” Taherifard concluded.



“The End of Work is no scientific fiction. A few simple algorithms have changed the world we live in. This ‘new brave world’ will not have Social Work as we define, offer, and practice today.”

—Mohan