

BOOK REVIEW

Mangesh Kulkarni (Ed). *Interdisciplinary Perspectives in Political Theory*. India: SAGE Publications, 2011.

This book proves that political theory is not dead. It is neither static nor monotonous in providing perspectives on current political concerns. The downfall of Soviet Union has not been followed by perpetual peace and global prosperity as anticipated by many liberalists. Instead, the end of the Cold War brought a period of chaos, conflicts and wars. The 9/11 attack, war on Afghanistan, Iraq invasion, *Islamophobia*, civilian unrests in Egypt, Syria, Yemen, and NATO's strike in Libya—among other things—illustrated this turbulent period. The book houses twelve essays that depict political theory reactions to this pandemic. The arguments put forward by scholars from various fields of social sciences and humanities are engaging, stimulating and thought-provoking. The scholars focus on critical theories (e.g., Marxism, Feminism, Post-Structuralism) rather than traditional or classical theories. Not only the book provides current and relevant theoretical debates, it also imparts an enriching discourse to address the scenario of the world. Hence, this book is an excellent reference source for researchers, students and anyone who wish to comprehend how and why things are the way they are via the lens of critical approaches.

THE CONTENT OF THE VOLUME

The twelve essays in the book are organised according to four themes. The first theme zooms in the theoretical debates on "fundamentalism," "globalisations" and "democracy." The first three essays fall under the first theme. Jayant Lele in his essay discusses the challenges brought by two fundamentalisms that plagued the post-Cold War era: cultural fundamentalism and economic fundamentalism. He utilises the political theories of three thinkers: John Rawls, Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida. Despite differences in addressing the challenges brought by economic fundamentalism, the three great thinkers concurred with the idea that religion plays a crucial role in cultural

fundamentalism. To forestall cultural fundamentalism willingness to resort to violence in order to enforce a parochial interpretation of the past, Lele argues that political theories broached by the three thinkers legitimised the hegemony of the United States. One could understand the disappointment of this revelation. However, his essay certainly reflects that political theory and political practice are related and have been affecting each other.

Rohini Hensman on the other hand centred her essay on the politics of globalisation. The negative connotation of globalisation is partly due to the failure of definition and its common association with related concepts of imperialism and neo-liberalism. She argues that globalisation does not necessarily signify a detrimental thing. It opens up many emancipatory possibilities. As long as democracy becomes the prime principle of governance, globalisation allows supranational bodies to function effectively. Globalisation too provides new resources for struggle against militarism and war. It channels, coordinates and mobilises the subaltern's voice to popular movements. She adds that these emancipatory possibilities would not have been possible without the advancements of Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

The third essay by Prakash Sarangi too falls under the first theme category. He proffers an overview of how political choice theory could help to explain various aspects of political life. He elaborates that one needs to go beyond economic explanation to envisage the reasons for stability in individuals' decisions. While political choice theory can explain the democratic choices made by individuals pertaining to political participation, election, coalitions and collective action, political choice theorists fail to offer reasons for the occurrence of a revolution in a country. It is the assumption that state and society are comprised of rational individuals that actually traps this theory with vigorous critics.

The second set of essays is grouped under the second theme. The theme focuses on broad theoretical inquiries of "just citizenship," "group rights" and "civil society." Lajwanti Shatani in her essay tackles two interrelated fractures that are situated in the discourse on justice and citizenship. She employs Feminist approach, particularly on the works of Chantal Mouffe and Nancy Fraser. She refers "Fracture 1" to the conception of citizen-self and "Fracture 2" to the legitimate concern of justice. Integrative approaches of redistribution and recognition, she insists, would assure inclusive and just citizenship for all.

Arpita Anant in her essay asks the readers to think beyond the nation-state parameter, i.e., the domestic-international divide, to better apprehend the issues of group identities and rights. She explores the influence of transnational

factors on the construction of Indian Muslim identity and rights in India. Her words on page ninety nine, "*In constructing a post-colonial identity for themselves, Indian Muslims have looked to the external environment in some instances not only for restructuring their relation with the Indian state, but also for internal reform related to the community*" signal her strong emphasis on the importance of international context in specifying the handling of minorities in India.

The last essay that falls under the second theme of the book highlights the loopholes of Western political theory in addressing civil society. Sanjay Palshikar in his essay exposes how the notion of civil society has been construed differently by theorists in India from the original Western conception. If Shatani calls for integrative approaches to ensure just citizenship, and Anant asks for thinking beyond the nation-state border to grasp the issues of group identities and rights, Palshikar on the other hand, urges the readers to continuously seek for alternative views rather than clinging to the "*Western modes of theorising the present.*" He asserts that this is a way to respond to the Western intellectual hegemony.

The book classifies the next batch of three essays under the third theme: "solidarity," "emancipation" and "communicative action." Mangesh Kulkarni features the work of a prominent Algerian French writer, Albert Camus in his essay. He charts out Camus' conceptions of absurdity, rebellion and love. He links Camus' thought on love with friendship and further suggests that these concepts could heal genocide, terrorism, religious conflicts and ethnic clashes. Unlike Kulkarni, Syed A. Sayeed in his attempt to conceptualise the "political" via a hybrid mode of analysis suggests that the pyramids of power-play need to be deconstructed and exposed so that human freedom could be ensured. Deepthi Gangavane in her essay critically ponders on Jurgen Habermas' "discourse ethics." The outburst of fascism, racism and other kinds of conflict compel critiques to view that "reason" which had been placed at the heart of Enlightenment is indeed deficient and inadequate. Gangavane points out that the challenge for Habermas is to construct the conception of "reason" that preserves critical normative discourse in a universalistic manner without being transcendental and totalitarian at the same time.

The last three essays captured the fourth theme of the book: "traditional knowledge," "biopolitics" and "torture." Kannamma Raman in her essay highlights that according to the United Nations, the developing countries lost at least USD5 billion annually in unpaid royalties to multinational corporations (MNCs) that appropriate traditional knowledge. However, she reveals that MNCs are not the only culprits. States, universities and scientists are equally

guilty as MNCs in exploiting traditional knowledge. She also contends that apart from biodiversity conservation and sustainability, the urgency to protect traditional knowledge is crucial for a majority of the world's poorest people. They depend upon their traditional knowledge for cultural and physical survival. She suggests that the categories of rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are pushed further to incorporate the new forms of injustices associated with traditional knowledge.

In the second last essay, Shardool Thakur scrutinises the work of Italian philosopher, Giorgio Agamben. Thakur contests that by linking biopolitics and human rights, Agamben's hypothesis could offer significant insights into the political turmoil in the North East India. He claims that the implementation of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) converts the entire North East India into a modern day camp. The unrestricted and unaccounted powers are granted to all security forces including non-commissioned officers. He argues that the abuse of AFSPA resembles the degree of abuses faced by detainees in the Nazi concentration camp and Guantanamo Bay.

Lastly, Justin Clemens and Russell Grigg assert that torture is an international crime under all circumstances. Psychoanalysis has shown that information and evidence generated by torture are unreliable and unjust. Therefore, the alleged torture in places like Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib for security reasons is intolerable. Clemens and Grigg insist that torture can never be part of democracy. It has to be resisted by all means.

This book synergises a wide array of knowledge contributed by scholars from various fields of social sciences and humanities. The theoretical debates, arguments and suggested solutions put forth in these twelve essays have addressed relevant, current and pivotal issues in the post-Cold War period. The readers would certainly benefit from the captured knowledge that is viewed from the angle of critical approaches.

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