

**Social Change and Social Research:
An Indian Perspective**

By R.S. Mann

271 pp., *Figures, Bibliography, Index. Concept
Publishing Company, New Delhi (1988).*
Rs. 210.00 (Cloth).

The author's purpose is to give a theoretical perspective on social change with a greater emphasis towards planned change in India, especially rural India. The role of social scientists in this regard in both planning and implementation is an important question tackled by him.

The book is basically divided into two parts, the first dealing with theories and concepts of social change in general and the second, which forms the bulk of the book is divided into six major chapters, each dealing with one aspect of social change, specifically with an Indian perspective. The book ends with an Epilogue.

The first part gives an overview of some of the well known theories of social change, which tend to cover most of the theoretical perspectives as one would expect to find in an undergraduate text book. However, one cannot but wonder at the looseness of statements such as "Another major thrust of Marx remained on the argument that substantial changes in social structure occur only after economic development" (p. 37). Where? One wonders did Marx say that! Moreover one also cannot support such value-laden statements that for "social progress or development, the mental development is a very strong prerequisite" (p. 35). Does the author imply that people who are at the so called underdeveloped stage are mentally deficient? In that case as an Indian national (Third World Country) he accepts that he is mentally inferior to an Englishman.

The first part of the book ends abruptly. After reviewing the literature the author stops short.

One would have expected, since the sub-title of the book is 'An Indian Perspective' that the author would attempt to evaluate the validity and applicability of existing theories of change for the Indian situation.

He, however, goes on to the second section, which apparently is devoid of any theoretical perspective. An overall reading clearly establishes that the author is thinking in structural-functional terms. Secondly, his ideas of progress are clear, the one that is given by the Government of India.

The rest of the chapters deal with change as seen in the perspective of lower to higher levels of social inclusion. Starting from the level of the individual to the community and finally to society (social structure) that the change is directed.

At the level of the individual, he talks of concepts such as intellectual attainment and linked morality. Morality, in itself, has to be cross-culturally understood; it is an accepted fact, but to link it with 'intellectual attainment', whatever that implies, seems extremely biased. Correctly the author points towards an understanding of the ideological and psychological aspects of the people. However, the author's ethnocentrism in thinking the traditional way of life as being inferior, comes out in sentences such as "not for better but for the original and traditional ones". He has also some fixed notion of the mental aptitude of the people towards whom the programmes are directed as being inferior to the mentality of the implementators of the programmes. "The primitive communities suffer from the poverty of thinking resources, as is true for other areas of their living" (p. 104). There is a tendency to explain too many things on the basis of abstract qualities such as courage and willingness, rather than clear-cut social and cultural variables. It is evident from the anthropological point of view that not courage or willingness, but socio-political dependence or independence have made the hill tribes choose

their own way of life and the caste groups fall in line with the mainstream (p. 93).

The author is right in pointing out the importance of understanding community structure, resource distribution and caste structure, before embarking on a programme of planned change. One must also understand that the target groups are not homogenous—that there is a tendency to lump together, under the blanket term 'tribe' too many totally different types of societies. Another tendency of planners, rightly criticized by the author, is to extrapolate findings from one village onto a number of other villages.

The author, by and large, shows a basic understanding of the variables such as family, kinship, customary laws, etc., which are often neglected by the planners before introducing a programme of change.

But the most important questions left unanswered by the author and which in the contemporary context would be most valid are like—What are the kind of changes one should propose to introduce? What should be the direction of progress? The author remains in his extremely ethnocentric view that most of the traditions as well as the mental make-up of the people on whom the change is to be applied is inadequate. That

whatever the government thinks fit to impose on the people is right. Nowhere does he mention what exactly he considers the nature of development to be.

In an amazing blindness to the reality of situations he even ventures with sentences such as, "the economic backwardness and poverty can be attributed, among other things, to some of the social customs, ceremonies and practices which the people observe" (p. 183). As an anthropologist he should know that in their pristine conditions, few societies, unless hit by natural calamities, ever had situations of 'poverty'. This is a condition usually brought about by external contact especially through the encroachment of market networks and industrialization.

Lastly, one would like to point to the hurried production quality of the book. The entire text shows a high degree of repetition, along with spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. Sometimes entire sentences have been duplicated, like the ones of p. 29 and p. 37. The quality of the book would have improved a lot with disciplined and closer editing.

Nevertheless the book is important for those who are in planning and developmental programmes.

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