

Denial of Justice: Labyrinths of Social Injustice and Social Development

Brij Mohan

“We descendants of the incomplete puzzle, know a good deal about dwelling in rough, negotiated spaces.”

Imani Perry¹

Denial of justice breeds oppressive systems of inequality and injustice. Examined abstractly in the evolutionary context of “social contract” (Mohan, 2022), it may be dialectically posited that *freedom precedes unfreedom*.

“Eye for an eye will make the whole world blind,” Mahatma K. Gandhi famously said. It’s no surprise that he was assassinated by a Hindu bigot. A hate map indicated 838 active hate groups in the United States.² Racism—DNA of many societies—is a pervasive evil. It’s denial weaponized by extremists is sabotaging, with vengeance, every democratic institution and value that build the three pillars of social development: *Economic equity, social justice, and human diversity*.

The “culture wars,” so detrimental to civil discourse, are more dangerous than California forest fires. Heat is burning up physical and social structures. What is most worrisome is that many state governments are banning books and criminalizing teaching of racism. The Critical Race Theory (CRT) has triggered a new frontier in reactionary politics that muffles truth, education, and knowledge.

¹Author of *South to America* (2022; quoted by *Time* February 14/21, 2022, p. 50). Perry’s words have special and metaphorical significance here. “The Way Home: I searched for answers about my enslaved ancestors. What I found was more questions” (*Time*, February 14/21, 2022, pp. 46–50). I often identify myself with people who must negotiate for their given spaces as a “descendant of the incomplete puzzle.”

²www.splcenter.org/hatemap

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A professor has been fired for using the Ta-Nehisi Coates book. It has happened; it is happening.³

I wonder what might have happened to me if I had not retired 10 years ago. I could novelize a “campus novel.” It’s interesting to see: “How did a loose set of radical ideas leap from campus to American life”? (*The Economist*, September 4th, 2021, pp. 15–17).⁴ The *Economist*’s “Briefing” accounts for three factors: “[A] dissatisfied student body; an academic theory that was malleable enough to be shaped into a handbook for political activism, and a pliant university administration” (Ibid., 2021, p. 15). The *wokeness* became a call for Social Justice against discriminatory exclusions and oppressive forces that were embedded in the whole unjust, racist system.

Resentment against CRT has crossed the Atlantic in the otherwise liberal pastures of liberalism. The French Prime Minister, Emanuel Macron, lately lashed out against social science theories that originated in the United States.⁵ Marx’s *Haters* blame him for this “Awakening.” Intellectual Left has nearly disappeared. In a review of Mark Levin’s *American Marxism* (2022), Michael Kazin concludes: “American Marxism may set out to tell us about the left, but it tells us more about the right” (*The Nation*, January 10/17, 2022, p. 41). It’s interesting to note the duality of illiberalism on the two sides of the ideological spectrum.

Unfortunately, *race and gender* have become anti-free speech weapons in the arsenal of the “diversity industrial complex” as Bruce Gilley asserted at Portland State University.⁶ Jean-Michel Blanquer, the French Education Minister, contends that “woke” theories “led to the rise of Donald Trump” (Quoted by McAuley, 2021, p. 22).

Demise of dissent is an older chapter. The new versions of disenfranchisement are frightening. Communalism is one of India’s race wars. A priest recently addressed a *Religious Parliament*: “All Hindus must pick up weapons and conduct a cleanliness drive.” Another of his ilk instigated the crowd: “If a hundred of us become soldiers and kill two million of them, we will be victorious” (*The Economist*, January 15th, 2022, p. 12). Decline of democracy extends from the United States to India. Some critics have likened the two pernicious agendas of Trumpism and Hindutva.

It’s ironic that the anti-mask-vaccine should unify the anti-democratic movement in the United States. The ordeal of democracy has led to the demise of a

³In this brief essay, I offer some musings and lessons that I have experienced during the course of six decades across the Atlantic.

⁴*The Economist*, Briefing: The illiberal left, September 4th, 2021.

⁵“American inspired anti-racism and ‘wokeness’, is blamed by E. Macros himself. “I see certain social science theories entirely imported from the United States.”; quoted by James McAuley (*The Nation*, December 13/20, 2021, p. 22).

⁶See, “A professor’s resignation highlights pressures to conform,” *The Economist*, September 25, 2021, p. 24.

critical–historical mindset amongst the intellectual elites. It’s profitable to be anti-Marxist. George Packer, a venerated journalist, writes:

Inequality in the United States has crossed a threshold that fatally compromises the public trust and comity needed to inspire and achieve effective and robust government. (2021; quoted by Singh, 2021, p. 33)

Modernity’s triumph over diseases caused by human–animal contact since the invention of agriculture is a remarkable success. However, development has not been balanced. Decline of mortality, elimination of many diseases that plagued humanity during the last 100,000 years, and the resultant good health have extended the life span of humans. Now, it’s the rise of mental and brain-related disorders that is worrisome. Andrew Doig’s conclusion is rather worrisome: “We seem to be heading for a world of elderly people with functioning bodies, but demented minds” (2022; quoted by *The Economist*, February 5, 2022, p. 75).

Life need not be a zero-sum parable. In the *Squid Game*, a nasty gangster employs hundreds of people in a self-eliminating game symbolizing the inhumanity of a capitalist global do-or-die marketplace. The lesson of this Netflix flick is not that subtle: In a dog-eat-dog world, ideologies have morphed into self-enriching manifestos of predatory power.

How do we formulate and implement a blueprint for *Social Development*, globally and locally, in a painfully divided world? I believe innate human proclivities that fire up the quest for survival and triumph get wired in a cultural setting. This instinctual struggle has continued ever since humans invented “property” and “agriculture.” This Genie cannot be rebottled. This is Social Development’s mission impossible. What do we—students, professors, institutions, citizens, and governments—do? Answering this question impels wise and unwise strategies of *transformational change*. Economic, political, cultural, and social domains of existence call for change that is neither atavistic nor regressive. Having survived the Covid 19, Delta, and Omicron, and their successive variants—the plagues of 2021 and “2022—society as a whole has nearly experienced extinction. A pandemic is close to becoming endemic. We have seen institutional meltdown and a breakdown of Social Contract” (Mohan, 2022). I submit that three sets of forces merit the attention of world leaders, scientists, and peoples: (1) Our Faustian bargain to control nature; (2) culturally ingrained human acquisitiveness and pugnacity; and (3) subconscious loyalty to the “old habits of thought”.⁷

Anytime when the drums of war echo in the skies, humanity takes a few steps backward. Lately, Russia and the United States have been involved in “war games” over Ukraine, “the most dangerous problem in the world” (*The Nation*, Nov. 29/ Dec. 6, 2021). All *developmental processes, principles, and practices* leading to

⁷This expression is owed to the famed British philosopher Bertrand Russell (personal communication with the author. See Mohan, B. (1972, p. 69).

progress remain on the back burners so long as our desublimation, border conflicts, and climatic cataclysms continue to ravage. Gandhi was right: “If you cannot change yourself, how will you change the world.” What has become of us, the humans?

De Toro’s *Nightmare Alley* has a compelling insight. “Justice,” it seems, is an outcome of one’s own *Karma*, which may be awarded in a diverse way. This “idea of justice” (Sen, 2009) is inherently flawed.⁸ “Social” is an important quality of “justice.” One could also hyphenate both “social” and “economic.” The ideas that signify the duality of these two concepts simply implies a dialectical relationship between *freedom* (Justice) and *oppression* (Injustice) as I had formulated more than quarter of a century ago (Mohan, 1986, 2022). Since primitive society did not practice “Chattel slavery,” one can assume that *justice preceded injustice*. Sen’s refutation of the existing theories of social justice (SJ) is overrated. His belief in “social diagnosis of injustice” and certain behavioral elements morally sounds like beating around the bush without a measure of unqualified originality. Edward O. Wilson’s words signify my basic postulates:

Human beings are not wicked by nature. We have enough intelligence, goodwill, generosity, and enterprise to turn Earth into a paradise both for ourselves and the biosphere that gave us birth. We can accomplish that goal, at least be well on the way, by the end of the present century. The problem holding everything up thus far is that *Homo sapiens* is an innately dysfunctional species. We are hampered by the Paleolithic Curse: genetic adaptations that worked very well for millions of years of hunter-gatherer existence but are increasingly a hindrance in a globally urban and technoscientific society. (Wilson, 2014, p. 174)

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⁸“Justice is ultimately connected with the way people’s lives go, and not merely with the nature of the institutions surrounding them” (Sen, 2009, p. x). His emphasis on “*diagnoses of injustice*” employs a poor choice of words. What social work calls the “capacity” (or “strength”) perspective is essentially an Aristotelian idea adopted by Sen (2009, p. xxiv). Furthermore, undue emphasis on behavioral aspects at the expense of structural–institutional causes sounds both unrealistic and ephemeral (See Mohan, 2022). To paraphrase an expression of one of Sen’s admirers: Noble Laureate Amartya Sen is a master at building ideal “Castles in the air” (G.A. Cohen on the back cover; Sen, 2009).

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