

Book Review

Vinay Rajath

Richard Pais. (2022). *Action Sociology: Contribution of Dr Bindeshwar Pathak*. Jaipur, India: Rawat Publications, 468 p. ISBN-13: 978-81-316-1188-3 (HB).

The book is an outcome of the inspiration drawn from Dr Pathak and his service to the downtrodden through his organization, Sulabh International Social Service Organization. As the author explains, Action Sociology is the core of Dr Bindeshwar Pathak's philosophy. The book clarifies Pathak's concept of Action Sociology and illustrates his actions. Far beyond Applied Sociology and Sociology in Action, it aims at sociological interventions in social change. It is true that the book focuses on Pathak's involvement in the field of sanitation, liberation of manual scavengers, eradication of open defecation, and uplift of the widows. A comparative analysis of these activities with that of Gandhiji and his philosophy makes the reading interesting.

The book comprises independent yet logically connected 12 chapters, with an index at the end. The opening chapter, introduction, traces the nature and understanding of sanitation through history and the rise of the sociology of sanitation, especially in the works of Dr Bindeshwar Pathak focusing on him as "Father of Action Sociology." Believing in Gandhian philosophy for holistic social development, Pathak is relentless in expanding the activities through Sulabh.

With a vision of a philosopher and the undying zeal of a missionary, Pathak is a humanist and a social reformer. His journey of multipronged efforts to uplift the manual scavengers begins from a village in the Vaishali district of Bihar, India. The second chapter of the book narrates the life of Pathak, his early experiences, education, and the origin of Sulabh. The inventory of the awards to his credit, to this day, is noteworthy.

Vinay Rajath, is a Chairman, Department of Sociology, Mangalore University, Karnataka, India. He can be contacted at vinayrajath@gmail.com.

Manual scavenging is a unique but obnoxious occupation imposed on a section of people on caste basis, a feature traced through centuries in civilization in India. With the concept of purity and pollution, scavenging had its impact on Dalits and especially women among these castes. The practices, the life of scavengers, and the relative consequences are described in Chapter 3. The sanitation system in India, its origin and growth through history, variety of sanitation facilities, toilet technology, and sanitation programs are well mapped in Chapter 4.

In the world of inhuman practice of scavenging and open defecation, "Sulabh" is seen as a "road to freedom" in Chapter 5. Sulabh, an organization originated by Pathak is also a Gandhian ideology of the emancipation of scavengers. Millions of scavengers are liberated and rehabilitated through Sulabh. Over 100 companies have joined hands with their CSR in this mission. Other than Sulabh Shauchalay, there are a number of initiatives focused on sanitation are covered in Chapter 6. Sulabh international museum of toilets is unique here.

The core of Pathak's charisma is action unto social reform, Action Sociology, the concept and its scope is presented in Chapter 7. He lived the sociology he understood and was actually involved in ameliorating the problems of the down-trodden. The chapter describes the concept of social action as conceived by Max Weber, Vilfredo Pareto, Talcott Parsons, and Mahatma Gandhi. When it is a systemic analysis in the understanding of Weber and Parsons, Gandhi focuses on the action itself; and not the fruit of the action. Satya, swaraj, and ahimsa become the core of his action in reforming caste, untouchability, attitude toward women, and Hindu-Muslim unity. Inspired by all these intellectual debates, Pathak gives a start to "Action Sociology," a step further from "Applied Sociology" and "Sociology in Action."

In the words of Pathak, "Action Sociology is an innovative field and not a fashionable addition to the horizon of sociology. ... sociology has to extricate itself from the maze of concepts and theories and become action-oriented to be a practical instrument for social change. It emphasizes the reconstruction of society so as to protect it against the forces of stagnation and exploitation" (p. 245). According to Pathak, "action sociologists are those who do not merely give lectures or suggestions on the basis of the findings of others to solve the problem of society and do not remain contended with a preacher's role. They get into the midst of the problems and play the fire-fighter's role" (p. 246). In order to make Action Sociology more relevant in India, Pathak persuaded all to introduce the teaching of Action Sociology at the Post Graduate level in the departments of sociology throughout the country. Pathak entered the field of Action Sociology through "Sulabh" and established Sulabh International Centre for Action Sociology to achieve his objectives. Actions were proved successful through Sulabh public school, vocational training center, slum children welfare program, and especially through his academic thrust with action research. Hence, Pathak not only defined action sociology but also gave it a rational base.

Discussion on the development of sociological theories provides an outline of the theoretical perspectives in sociology in Chapter 8. Research is an important

aspect of any discipline and the features, steps, and designs of scientific methods in research in Action Sociology are described in Chapter 9. The volume features Dr Pathak as an action sociologist, a reformer, an educationist, and also an academician. Chapter 10 illustrates Dr Pathak as a writer reviewing 16 works authored by him; almost all oriented to action focusing on Sulabh Shauchalay and other activities and ideology related to sanitation and liberation of manual scavengers.

Dr Pathak is a staunch believer in Gandhian philosophy. In fact, he was inspired by Gandhi and his mission was to fulfill the dream of Gandhi, the liberation of scavengers. A close look at the profile and vision of Gandhi and of Pathak is presented in Chapter 11. Finally, the last chapter looks at the future of Action Sociology. The author opines that the credit goes to Pathak for conceptualizing Action Sociology in the scope of sociology; which is wider and that goes far beyond the limits of Applied Sociology. Action sociologist is one who plunges into action and shows results. The future of Action Sociology lies in the focus of sanitation in development, making India open-defecation free, litter-free toilets in railways and buses; hygiene awareness and other initiatives for the welfare of marginalized groups, especially Dalits and scavengers. It is also a vision to bring Action Sociology at the academic level and a university of sanitation for this purpose.