A Fabulous Paradox: The Developmental Reflux

Brij Mohan

Social development emerged like a Phenix in the post-war reconstruction. In the wake of global traumas, development movement manifested itself across the nations, especially those devastated by the horrors and terror of the world war. The Third World, better construed as the Global South, is now rising from the shadows of a dubious duality—advanced and developing—of panorama of nations bedeviled by the persistence of tribal nationalism. Fissures and antagonisms—old and new—have surfaced anew. The dynamics of this development are the foci of a new conceptualization that might liberate the human family from its own nemesis.

Keywords: *developmental reflux, Global South, radical inequality, territorial tribalism, international terrorism*

> "Having failed to find am explanation in knowledge, I began to seek it in life itself, hoping to find it in the men who surrounded me; and I began to watch men like myself, to observe how they lived, and how they practically treated the question which had brought me to despair."
>
> (Tolstoy, 1995, p. 35)

Developmental Reflux (DR) is embedded in the heresies of the Golden Paradox, an outcome of post-Enlightenment hubris. A perpetual hydraulic system of war and peace, caste and class, equality and injustice creates an illusion of success without much progress. The Nation-States' inability to eschew latent territoriality breeds malignment pugnacity in a dangerously volatile world. Regression of functional democracies and the rise of extremist authoritarianism thwarts the possibility of a saner world order with a self-executing system of human diversity, which

Brij Mohan, Dean Emeritus, LSU School of Social Work, Los Angeles, CA, USA. He can be contacted at brijmohan128@gmail.com and SWMOHA@lsu.edu.

strengthens the foundation of a civil society. Contemporary developmental reflux in an unequal, violent, and polarized culture has diminished basic human proclivities such as empathy, mutual trust, and the inevitability of coexistence. What new social development (NSD) needs is a planetary wisdom—vision of a "bioglobal" universe—beyond the nihilism of modern tribalism.

Any attempt to examine *Social Development* as a transformative process is fraught with critical platitudes at a time when humans continue to misbehave and Artificial Intelligence (AI) threatens species extinction. The meaning and drama of social developmental issues have been a concurrent theme of my work that spans genres from books, Conference papers, Reviews, and Letters to the Editors. Like Mona Lisa smile, borrowing the expression from Shanti Khinduka, Social Development has been seen from different lenses as evident from a few texts published during the nineties and twenties.[1] A study found that the very concept and its contents call for reexamination of the whole field:

> "The concept of development has evolved over the past two centuries. The main idea of economic development expanded from economic growth to poverty alleviation, sustainable development, human development, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). ... However, the findings in these works remain inconsistent to what constitutes social development, they lack consensus and clear definition of social development, they focus on the physical dimension of social development and, they emphasize on the physical dimension of social development frameworks. This study aims critically to examine the shortcomings and limitations of existing social development, along with its features, definitions, and dimensions."[2] (Mohamed, Mohammed, Bin Barom, 2020)

Any critical discussion about social development (SD) and social work (SW) partakes of certain dimensions that help comprehend the nature of dilemmas and conundrums that muffle a clearer view. Shanti Khinduka's prescient contribution to unravel these issues is submitted below:

> "Instead of following the Western model of professional social work, social workers in the third world should pursue a developmental and institutional orientation in which rapid structural change and socioeconomic improvement are assigned central significance. A broadly and humbly define notion of development is proposed as the organizing framework for both social work practice and social work education in the third world." (1971, pp. 62–73)

The words cited above were written half a century ago. The world has changed but tiger's stripes have not. A decade ago, Sheela Kolhatkar, wrote about *Arrested*

---

[2]See Mohamed, Mohammed, & Bin Barom (2020).

Development: "India's miserable record on women's right threatens to stunt its economic growth," Kolhatkar (2013) wrote. Threats of AI have morphed into a hydra-headed movement that goes beyond women's rights.

In the due context of *Social Development Issues,* I shall focus on the concept as institutionally defined by *International Consortium of Social Development* (ICSD):

> "Social development processes aim to bring about social, economic and environmental improvement in the lives of people and their communities through capacity building."[3]

Global Human Needs seems to be the focus of what Social Developmentalism seeks to achieve through "capacity building." Many versions of this conceptualization awash mainstream knowledge accessible through texts and a few journals inclusive of *Social Development Issues* that I edit. With due deference to ICSD's framework, I intend to analyze some aspects of Social Development processes (SDP) that call for critical appraisal on the cusp of AI Revolution as it impacts humanity.

In his recent Presidential Welcome address to the 23rd ICSD Biennial International Conference—Social Development in Times of Crisis: Challenges and Responses, Gavle, Sweden, 23–25 August 2023—Manohar Pawar emphasized certain "bold social development questions."[4] Let us get back to the mission:

> "The mission of the ICSD is to build and spread knowledge of social development to eradicate poverty, improve standards of living, and promote human equality and ecological sustainability. We want to be a leading association of international scholars and practitioners devoted to the study and advancement of knowledge and practice about social development" (ICSD, 2021)."[5]

A simple algorithm begs these concerns, that is, "bold, and big questions": *What does it mean to be human in a violent world?* This may be the Third Rail of our deliberative inquiry for the future. The Elephant in the Room is: How to revitalize and humanize this failed civilization? My take on this meta-front is: First, and foremost, one must understand what our "global needs" are. Later, elemental examination of the "lives of people and their communities" and "capacity building" will conclude this section.

An attempt that validates my search for a fundamental "180-Uturn" on the subject is premised on the assumption that social sciences and allied disciplines have unfaithfully reinforced strands of knowledge that are grounded inbuilt

---

[3]https://www.google.com/search?q=icsd+social+development+jour   (September   30, 2023).
[4]cf. *Social Development Issues,* 46(2), 2024, iii–xi.
[5]cf. SDI, 46.1, 2024.

obsolescence and inanity. Alvin Schorr, a senior social scientist who I respect, wrote about the phony "egalitarians":

"I merely observe that their ideas were assimilated into and fostered developments that would promote inequality. Ronald Reagan did not entirely *lead* the country to radical inequality; he rode a tide in the affairs of men that led on to fortune for the fortunate" (1997, p. 111). Elvin M. Burns, the godmother of social policy, said: "America has become mean."[6] The impact of these reactionary currents began to shape all social transformations. One of the most authentic books, *Unfaithful Angeles,* Harry Specht and Mark Courtney, bluntly elaborated *How Social Work Has Abandoned Its Mission* (1994).

"Over the course of this century, people have become less and less tied to their immediate neighborhood. Yet the geographic neighborhood continues to be significant for the vast majority of young children to build community-based systems of social care would be a major step forward in developing family policy in the United States." (Specht & Courtney, 1994, p. 152)

Social Development's interdisciplinary roots can only be ignored at our own peril. As an aspect of the international public–social policy paradigm, SD emerged as a movement to help "improve" communities and "developing nations" in *The Third World*—a colonial notion that undergirds much of SD models and practices. About theories, one remains puzzled as to why colossal lack of imagination continues to plague the *Unfaithful Angels.*[7] Jose Ortega Gasset wrote: "To live is to be continually deciding what we are going to be. Do you see the fabulous paradox that this holds?" (1969, p. 43; emphasis mine).

Shanti Khinduka, nearly quarter century ago, said:

"While it is regrettable that social work is neglected by many of our most prestigious research universities... it is no less embarrassing that social work schools themselves have been rather delinquent in their tasks of systematically building a usable knowledge base of their interventions... .It is unfortunate that despite its lofty rhetoric that exhalts human interdependence and international cooperation, social work in the United Sates has largely remained an America-centered profession. Social work education,

---

[6]Lecture delivered to the faculty and students at the School of Social Work, Louisiana State University, 1981.
[7]No other professional discipline than Social Work has betrayed its primordial mission. *See* my book, *The Future of Social Work: Seven Pillars of Practice* (2018).

too, has failed to make serious strides to learn or teach about the rest of the world (Khinduka, 2001, pp. 3 & 6).

I have *discussed* social work's inanity at length (2018). In a modest attempt to signify the need for a new social development, I observed: "It is simplistic to theorize about social development with in age-old individualistic-collective frameworks of analysis" (Pawar & Cox, 2010, p. 206).

From raging inequalities and poverty to post-pandemic stressors, humans confront threats and challenges that *outdate* existing knowledge and social practices. Against the currents—trends, views, and politics—I posit three conceptual plateaus that will help us analyze social structures and institutional trappings in light of what transpires the way we live, think about, and interact with each other as individuals, communities, and nations. This is a step forward to recapture the essence of SD. I find three foci of relevance to the context which will serve as *a priori* postulates for reconceptualization:

(1) Rebirth of Inequality
(2) Death of the Superman and Return of the Promethean Man
(3) The *Second Coming* of a god whom Nietzsche declared "dead."

From Frederich Nietzsche's *Übermensch* to Martin Scorsese's *Killers of the Flower Moon,* one inescapably encounters the *last temptation* of man—*becoming* Superman—who has become the new Christ in an unchristian world. This dialectic paradox, as I see it, is an excellent opportunity to refresh us—the manufacturers of self-destructive modalities of life.

It is not enough to talk about Climatic Crises(CC); it's time to think about Climate Responses (CR). *Green Dragon's* environmental activism in Germany and its variants elsewhere will energize the *Social Development Movement* (SDM). While economically advanced nations have resources to mitigate this catastrophe, "the others" confront life and death issues caused by greenhouse gases. A lake in Iran disappeared; at places temperature hit 152°F, uninhabitability forces people to leave the country as destitute refugees. The famed lake in Salt Lake City turned white with salt. From Maui to Libya to Morocco, to Philly, to Florida and to Pakistan are incomprehensible realties of the *Climate Change* (CC)–*Climate Response* (CR) disconnect.

AI and its *Deepfake* impact on human life is an epochal monstrosity. AI Apocalypse and its ravages have begun to unravel: Artificial Intelligence threatens human extinction. "Musk worried that these chatbots and AI systems , especially in the hands of Microsoft and Google, could become, even infected by what he called the woke-mind virus. He also feared that self-learning AI systems might turn hostile to the human species... [T]he ability to deploy thousands of weaponized chatbots would make the problem two or three orders of magnitude worse," recalls Walter Isaacson (2023, pp. 31–32).
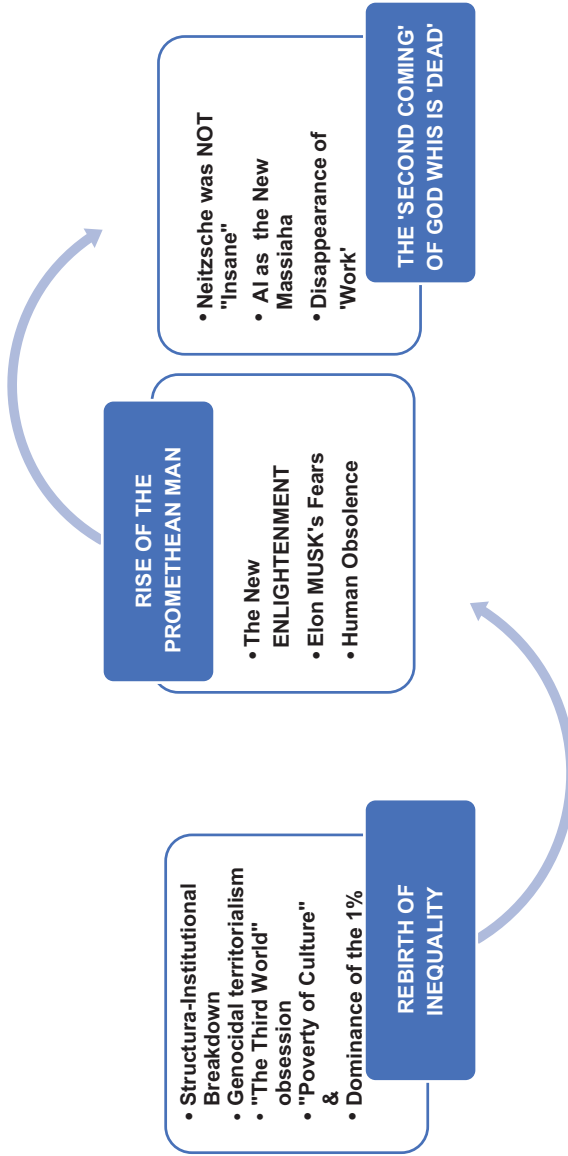
THE 'SECOND COMING' OF GOD WHIS IS 'DEAD'

- Neitzsche was NOT "Insane"
- AI as the New Massiaha
- Disappearance of 'Work'

RISE OF THE PROMETHEAN MAN

- The New ENLIGHTENMENT
- Elon MUSK's Fears
- Human Obsolence

REBIRTH OF INEQUALITY

- Structura-Institutional Breakdown
- Genocidal territorialism
- "The Third World" obsession
- "Poverty of Culture" &
- Dominance of the 1%

Exhibit 1   Return of the New Leviathan.

What about the common person and woman whose misfortunes are never become news? The impervious role of China's fake news industry will not help African lives; its global influence might annihilate the *human will* to survive. The sprouts of democracy in Africa are dying as Soth Africa descends in decay. "Why are Africans losing faith in democracy? The alternatives will undoubtedly be worse" Sub-Saharan suffrage (The Economist, October 5, 2023).[8,9] Education, further, is a passport to overcome inequality.[8] From the shores of Latin America to the trans-Atlantic foreshore, a tide of authoritarianism is rising unabated. India's "arrested development" is bailed out by a majoritarian theocracy. The death of civility and secularism is a severe blow to all forms of *Social Development*. The so-called "third world" embodies complex issues that thwart much progress beyond areas of limited uplift. Afghanistan is in ruins; South and East Asia is embroiled in regional rivalries; and the Middle East is in throes of agony, fear, and ruins of the Israel–Palestinian war. The tremors of this genocidal conflict will eclipse agendas for any developmental work including professional interventions.

The Western paradigm continues to conflict with the notion and nature of the Third World which, consequentially, leaves the burning issues unresolved. The Chinese new SilkRoad and ambitious expansion in Afro-Asian affairs goes beyond Pakistan. The cruel geo-political realties today—from Ukraine to Gaza—call for unorthodox analysis. China's claim for the leadership of the Global South is challenged by India. African nations have been unanimously welcomed to join the G20 group. While debates and ideological skirmishes continue, a reign of terror and genocidal siege muffle a saner world view of realities.

Elon Musk's fears and anxieties embody a human concern for survival. As a species, the human family might survive. However, AI's hallucinating robots are potentially capable of replacing humanity. The whole notion of professional knowledge and skills might soon become darkly irrelevant.

The *Social Development Movement* (SDM) ought to redirect its transformational arsenal toward these scourges of human ingenuity. The *fabulous paradox* of this evolutionary epoch has some didactic insights. Exhibit Two is a predictive anatomy of SD's continued crisis.

The holy grail of development—human, social, and political—is not yet found. A dualist conundrum partakes of two suppositions: The impossibility of a universal framework; and the unthinkable magnitude of, I call, Elon *Musk's Fears*. Our collective consciousness undergirds a viable way out of this dire situation. Much has been written in the texts, in general. I venture to reflect on Musk's "specism": *Human consciousness is at the edge of an abyss; we must stop and regulate self-educating AI systems to become Super Humans.* As the surrealist

---

[8]https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/10/education-inequality-economic-opportunities-college/675536/?utm_campaign=atlantic-daily-newsletter&utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=20231004&utm_term=The+Atlantic+Daily (October 5, 2023).
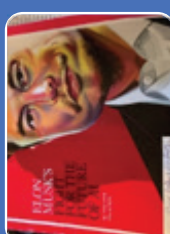
OLD HABITS
- THOUGHTS & ACTIONS; LOSS OF "INNOCENCE'
- END OF IMAGINATION: POST PANDEMIC PAROXYSM
- CONTINUED APARTHEID, WAR & MAYHEM
- RACISM, CASTEISM, ETHNOCENTRICISM, TRIUMPH OF TRIBALISM, & HISTORIC CATACLYSMS
- Racism, Casteism, Hate Crimes
- Polarization; Falsifican of Facts; Colonial Oppression, Ukrain War, Disintegartion of Russia; Specter of the Third World War,

NEW INEQUALITIES
- COMMODIFICATION OF ELEMENTS OF LIFE
- RISE & FALL OF IDEOLOGIES: IDEOLOGICAL DEVOLUTION
- PLATEAUS OF POVERTY
- CORPORATE DESPOTISM

SUPER-INTELLIEGENCE
- END OF CIVILIZATION (Live robots have taken over human race)
- AI Apocalypse, Singularity, HUMAN EXTINCTION, & Colonizing Mars
- Search for a New Civilization

Exhibit 2   The Fabulous Paradox: SD's Endemic Crisis.

techno-industrial-digital-complex strides are unfolding a specter of a cataclysmic future, AI's amoral delusions ought to be seriously considered (Isaacson, 2023, p. 31 & 32).

I contend that AI should be renamed *Super intelligence* (SI). It is a new odyssey in search of essence and substance in the evolutionary process. SI is an intuitive devolution, a dreaded reality that must concern all inhabitants on the planet. Nietzsche's "insane moon" was not an illusion; it portended global insanity that threatens us all. We confront a problem with Nietzschean *Will to Power* which implies inner strength as a motivation. Fear, humiliation, and guilt are strong drivers of creative strength. The fads of "strength/capacity-based" modalities cannot ameliorate the roots of structural evils which dehumanize powerless, marginalized people.

Old Habits of Thought and Action: The "Human Animal"

The war in Ukraine is raising hell. Hamas shocked the world when it attacked Israel. Defense Minister Yoav Gallant has ordered a "full siege" of the blockaded Gaza Strip. "No power, no food, no gas, everything is closed. We are fighting human animals and we act accordingly."[9] Israel is at war. Variants of this carnage and its manifestations go back to mythical antiquity. Remember, Homer's Iliad? Yossi Klein Halevi writes in *The Atlantic* about "The Reckoning: The Reckoning: Israel must grapple first with its enemies, and then with the failures of its own government." He comments:

> "Israel is hardly blameless. Understandably but disastrously, many Israelis have conflated security fears, which justify a military presence in the West Bank, with historical and religious longings for the biblical land we call Judea and Samaria. Those longings are the basis for the settlement enterprise, whose political goal is to preclude any solution to the Palestinian tragedy. And in recent months we have seen an outrageous rise in settler violence against innocent Palestinians. Even as we protect ourselves from Hamas, we need to oppose those among us who would emulate Hamas."[10]

> "**Brian Ward** writes about the Dakota's resistance to US settler colonialism and its parallels with the current situation in Gaza."[11]

---

[9]NBC Morning Rundown:
https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?tab=rm&ogbl#inbox/WhctKKZGhLNCqVXBqwvVsht
SWktPfWRRFHZzDlgxXlsNMdPmSCTBgZdhGwqXGfNJghKHDSg (October 09, 2023)
[10]https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/10/israel-gaza-netanya-hu675597/?utm_campaign=atlantic-daily-newsletter&utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=20231010&utm_term=The+Atlantic+Daily   (October   10, 2023).
[11]"As much as modern liberals like to think, resistance to these types of conditions is often violent because of the violence that an oppressed group faces every day. Little Crow's band attacked the Lower Sioux Agency and then attacked settlers throughout the area in an

A war cannot be won if bombs, terror, and genocide continue to settle scores against each other. It is a sad commentary on the nature of the nation states, which fail to resolve territorial disputes and ideological issues within the rules of civilization. *Vengeful pathologies,* Adam Shatz opines, call for political solutions:

> "Israel cannot extinguish Palestinian resistance by violence, any more than the Palestinians can win an Algerian-style liberation war: Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs are stuck with each other, unless Israel, the far stronger party, drives the Palestinians into exile for good.
>
> The only thing that can save the people of Israel and Palestine—and prevent another Nakba, a real possibility, while another Holocaust remains a traumatic hallucination—is a political solution that recognises both as equal citizens."[12]

Humans are animals. Socializing this complex species calls for a world without predatory-territorial impulses and the dogmas that sustain a corrupt and unequal world.

New Inequality

If people act like "human animals," they do so because their captors have treated them like animals. Colonial domination and imperial oppression thrived on their dehumanizing lust for greed, power, and control. Slavery was crucial for the settlers' colonies, which nurtured the seeds of capitalism. The British Empire could not have prevailed without treating Indians as "barbarians." Today India and Pakistan might kill off each other if geo-political trappings of the emerging superpowers persist. The New Inequalities far exceed the Index of differential GDPs. Nation states' failure to eschew their animal instincts continue to cause mayhem, genocide, and poverty. It is this polymorphous perversity that hampers human-social development. The collapse of Social Contract and institutional meltdown pose imminent dangers for common survival.

A new world order is in the offing. The two wars in Ukraine and Gaza are imploding the Global North. The Global South, an asymmetrical construct, is

---

effort to drive the colonizers out of their territory. This went on for 5 weeks and resulted in the killing of over 350 white settlers, over 100 soldiers, and 150 Dakota including the taking of white settlers as hostages. This is the right to fight your oppressor. Following the uprising the Dakota were forced into a concentration camp at Fort Snelling. After all was said and done Abraham Lincoln ordered the hanging of 38 Dakota men in Mankato, Minnesota on December 26, 1862, this is the largest mass execution in the US history. The following year the Dakota were removed to what is modern-day South Dakota at the Crow Creek reservation." https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?tab=rm&ogbl#inbox/WhctKKZPBNLnvLhpFJdrLGRlDfQLhwVLltTlPWgQkWGS (October 30, 2023)

assuming a new meaning as Andrés Serbin, in his article "The elusive Global South," comments:

> "The recent rise of the Global South—reflected so far in events such as the 15th BRICS Summit in Johannesburg, the 22nd Meeting of Heads of the State of Shanghai Cooperation Organization in New Delhi, and the G77 and China Summit in Havana—reflects not only a renewed prominence of emerging economies and rising powers but also of the non-Western world, in general, in global affairs. Beyond the ambiguity of the term "Global South"—heir to the notion of the Third World anddeveloping countries during the Cold War—the concept,constructed, deconstructed, criticized, and reclaimed in the realm of policymakers, academia, and media, reflects the emergence of new actors on the international stage but also imposes a series of political and conceptual challenges." (Quoted from Global South Caucus ISA Newsletter, 2023).

Musk's Fear: The *Super Inlelligence*

AI is *SI* (Super Intelligence) with implications of a hubristic future. Musk's intent and plans for colonizing Mars appears to be scientific fiction. A self-driven car was my childhood fantasy. Today, fantasies do become reality. Since robots can communicate and develop their own language—delusional it may seem—human consciousness is seriously endangered. The perils of *SI* are indeed unbelievable. This fact partakes of urgent "alerts," which emanate from international terrorism under the misrule of *Pirates and Emperors, Old and New* (Chomsky, 2010).

Nietzsche was passionate about the possibility of human evolution. His idea of the *Übermensch* seems to have been utopian. However, his view of "life-stultifying" passions was prescient: *"Not every passion is desirable."* The culture of guns, gloom and greed has not yet matured. Our civilization mirrors who we are; what has become of us! This colossal moral failure is a monumental challenge to step back from an abyss.

References

Chomsky, N. (2002). *Pirates and emperors, old and new: International terrorism in the real World.* Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

Gasset, Y. J. O. (1969). *Some lessons in metaphysics.* New York: W.W. Norton.

Isaacson, W. (2023): The control key: Inside Elon Musk's fight—and fears—for the future of artificial intelligence. *Time,* October 9, 28–33.

Khinduka, S. K. (1971). Social work in the third world. *The Social Service Review,* 45(1), 62–73. https://doi.org/10.1086/642647

Khinduka, S. K. (2001). *Musings on social work education.* St Louise: Washington University in St Louise, Learning and Discovery Occasional Paper No. 4 (April 12, 2001, pp. 1–12. Quoted from Brij Mohan, 2002: 124).

Kolhatkar, S. (2013). Arrested development. Bloomberg Businessweek, February 4–10.

Mohamed, I. A., Mohammed, M. O., Bin Barom, M. N. (2020). A critical analysis of social development: Features, definitions, dimensions and frameworks. *Asian Social Science, 16*(1). (Published by Canadian Center of Science and Education). https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v16n1p14

Mohan, B. (2002). New direction for doctoral education: Lessons from the Asian experience. *New Global Development: Journal of International and Comparative Social Welfare, XVIII*(2), 123–135. https://doi.org/10.1080/17486830208412634

Mohan, B. (2010). Toward a new social development. In M. S. Pawar & D. Cox (Eds.), *Social development: Critical themes and perspectives* (pp. 205–223). New York: Routledge.

Mohan, B. (2018). *The future of social work: Seven pillars of practice*. New Delhi: Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9789353280727

Pawar, M. S., & Cox, D. R. (2010). *Social development: Critical themes and perspectives.* New York: Routledge (T &F Group).

Schorr, A. L. (1997). *Passion and policy.* Cleveland, OH: David Press.

Serbin, A. (2023). *The illusive Global South*. Global South Caucus ISA Newsletter.

Specht, H., & Courtney, M. (1994). *Unfaithful angels: How social work has abandoned its mission.* New York: The Free Press.

Tolstoy, L. (1995). *My confession.* London: Fount Classics.