Book Review

Community Practice Skills: Local to Global Perspectives. Dorothy N.Gamble and Marie Weil, 2010, New York, Columbia University Press, ISBN 978-0-231-11003-7 (pbk) pp. xiv+482, Price. $42.30.

The community practice of the contemporary era could trace back its origin with Jane Addams' settlement house movement of 1920s. As a generic method of social work, community organization was practised with a set of axiomatic principles and case models with very limited emphasis on the conceptual framework. The conceptualization of community practice began to acquire the necessary momentum with the introduction of the three models of community practice identified by Rothman in 1968, that is, locality development, social planning and social action and these models depict the major areas of community practice intervention. Subsequently alternate models for community practice such as feminist model, policy practices, local economic development, community capacity building and community engagement were experimented by a number of theoreticians and practitioners.

The book is a synthesis of the major community practice models used in mobilizing, empowering and organizing communities for community action in different regions of the world. Eight models of community practice are discussed in the volume with each model is elaborated with specific goals, area of intervention, strategies, tactics and role of the practitioners with examples drawn from the practice field of both developed and developing world. The models are developed into a coherent framework for better comprehension, reflection and action for community practitioners. The volume is in two parts with the first part describing the knowledge base, namely, the values, concepts, approaches, theories and perspectives for community practice. The second part of the book elaborates on the eight models of community practice for the twenty-first century. The theoretical perspectives and practice models are better illustrated with the judicious use of figures and tables. An extensive bibliography and a detailed index are beneficial for advanced learners for a critical analysis of the topic.

The introductory chapter deals with various perspectives on the meaning of community and community practice in the local to global continuum with an emphasis on social justice and human rights which are fundamental to social work where Millennium Development Goals are cited as benchmark for effective community practice. The other three chapters of the first session establish the foundation for understanding and preparing for community practice. The evolutions of values, the history of approaches to community practice, the rationale for selecting the eight models, an overview of the theories, knowledge base, and perspectives that guide community practice are discussed in detail.

The eight models of community practice which the authors have introduced in the nineteenth as well as in the twentieth editions of the Encyclopedia of Social Work are further updated in the second chapter of the present volume. The conceptual framework of the models are presented through the three 'lenses' namely the globalization, increase in multicultural societies and expansion of human rights which will significantly influence the context of contemporary community practice. Five characteristics, namely, the desired outcome, systems targeted for change, primary constituency, scope of concern and social work / community practice roles are identified for each of the model with the social, economic and environmental well-being as the values and the aforesaid three lenses as the contexts for practicing the models in community organization and development. The eight models of community practice with twenty-first century contexts are neighborhood and community organizing, organizing functional communities, social-economic and sustainable development, inclusive programme development, social planning,

coalitions, political and social action and movements for progressive change. The primary roles for social workers designed for these models are advocate, leader, organizer, planner and researcher/assessor with specific definitions for each role and sub-role which could be applied in the aforesaid models. Such a systematic analysis of the practice roles has provided the guidelines for the social workers to enable themselves with necessary competence to engage in the roles demanded by the particular condition and context of their practice.

The ethical value base of social work along with evolution of values and a brief history of approaches to community practice are described in the third chapter. The values shared across major spiritual traditions as well as humanism, renaissance, age of discovery and enlightenment and human rights movements are summated by the authors here, to provide a unified matrix of value foundation to social work with a focus on community practice. The values mentioned in the NASW code of ethics are compared with the particular values and ethical issues which are critical to community practitioners. Interdependence, empowerment practices, reciprocity, partnerships and mutuality in work, citizen and community participation, human rights and social justice and structural analyses and approaches are enlisted as critical for a value based community practice. In the rapidly globalizing world, the purposes of community practices identified are improvement in the quality of life, advocacy, human social and economic development, service and programme planning, service integration, political and social action and social justice.

The theories and perspectives used in explaining the community practice models are described in the fourth chapter to provide a general picture about the importance of theorizing for community practitioners. The theories of political economy, systems and ecosystems, critical feminist and race theories and perspectives of evidence based, social construction, empowerment, realist, strength based practices are analyzed to create a solid foundation for the models discussed in the subsequent sections. The authors have positively acknowledged the contributions of community practitioners in every part of the world who would bring their own culturally specific perspectives, approaches and knowledge which are having local, regional and international relevance in addressing the challenges in community practice. The Gandhian philosophy and practices developed in the Indian context, the conscentization approach of Paulo Freire of Brazil and Nelson Mandela's political process which led South Africa from the terrors of apartheid to a new democracy are global icons of community work for social justice, human rights and progressive change. A thorough understanding about the different theoretical frameworks enables the social worker to adopt the appropriate framework for effective community engagement while working with diverse groups, organizations and communities.

The chapters from five to twelve analyze the eight practice models, presenting the scope of the concern, the basic process, the theoretical underpinnings and conceptual understanding that are important to each model. The primary roles, skills and competence used by the practitioners are also identified for each of the model. The models are helpful to provide a comparative framework for critiquing community practice approaches and to determine which approach seems most appropriate for the given context and to the needs of the community groups.

One major attraction of the presentation is that authors have incorporated examples from a wide range of practitioners in different parts of the world. The peoples' movement against Coca-Cola Company at Plachimada in Kerala is cited while explaining the political and social action model of community practice. The Fair Trade movement which is having universal momentum is taken as an example to narrate and explain the model of movements for progressive change. The extensive citation of development practices from various parts of the world has made the analysis of the models truly global in nature. In the context of emerging and enduring problems of racism, sexism, multicultural conflict, human rights violations, poverty, social exclusion, environmental degradation and violence, the community workers have to acquire detailed understanding and

specific knowledge of the problems and the strategies to address the same in a systematic manner. The various models described in the volume may inspire the social workers to adopt the same in their respective socio-cultural context for facing the challenges of community practice in the twenty-first century.

Joseph.M.K
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