

Book Review

Identity Politics in India and Europe by Michael Dusche, New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, London, Sage Publications, 2010, pp. 375, ISBN 978-81- 321-0304.

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The question of identity/difference, which was the route to the discourses about identity politics, poses a series of challenges to almost all our contemporary debates on social and democratic theory. Primarily it questions the conceptual network of liberal democracy, its politics of universalizable enlightenment values and modernity along with the ideas of the nation state and citizenship. It also problematizes the process of identification and how political identities are worked out from the search for identities. Religion as world views and social identity are undoubtedly the prime locales of identity politics. Therefore, they always tend to overstretch the zone of the frameworks of democracy and democratic governance. Naturally the dynamics that determines identity politics is painted in a complex mesh involving three planes of conceptual discussions, such as, the 'religion- the secular and the post secular', 'modernity-cultutral/acultural and postmodern', and 'the communitarian and the liberal ideas of rights'.

Michael Dusche's **Identity Politics in India and Europe**, is a remarkable book which presents to the reader a multidimensional study of the phenomenon 'identity politics'. The work is particularly noteworthy as it problematizes identity politics from historical, conceptual, civilizational-religious and geographical-regional perspectives. The author makes it clear how his study captures the causal and historical registry of the question of identity politics as follows, 'Perceptions of self, identity, social order, peace on one hand and fears of instability, loss of self, disorder and violent conflict on the other seem to depend on each other in a dialectical way. Perceptions of 'the other' form an integral part of the dialectic. This was true of the formative years of the West as well as of the Islamic world. It was true of the encounters between the European colonial powers and the non-European world and it is true even today where a divide is supposed to exist between the West and the Islamic world' (p.xi). The study, however, modifies the above said dialectical relation between the dominant self and its other to assume it as a self-critique of the often uncritically projected West.

A praiseworthy important feature of the book is the organization of the matter/data that constitute the work. The book stretches its contents before the reader as a vast itinerary which include segments that discuss the problematique of the work mainly

from an historical perspective and, more interestingly interviews with some of the major interlocutors in the secularism debate and the critique of democracy from a post-secular point of view. The work is divided into three parts. The first part maps the pre-modern roots of identity politics where the different discourses contour the millennial self and other images and along with them the stereotypes. It traces them out 'in the early encounters between the emerging world of Latin Christendom in Europe and the expanding world of Islam'. The discussions in the part show how the Occident and the Orient emerge in a dominant way, supported by the paradigms of the promised lands, ideals of true devotion, constructs of moral values, (proto) cultural bonds and finally by the crusades for religio-political legitimacy.

The second part focuses on both how modernity creates a global condition for perceiving and stereotyping the other and the major critics of the globalized Western principle of reason and rationality, the concepts of progress and the principle of inclusion and exclusion. The major insight that the book shares here is that the construction of the adversary relationship between a stipulated 'us' and a stipulated 'them' for mobilizing political support and collective aims is created through a subtle installation of the 'other', which is mediated through public discourses, mass media and other forms of collective communication. It also addresses one of the crucial issues that crops up in this context, that is, the build-up of the West fixation as minute mutations of Orientalism and its constituent discourse variants such as 'Western science versus Eastern Spirituality', 'Western values versus Asian Values' and 'Western conception of human rights versus African or Islamic conception of human rights', which would act as a supportive dimension of creation of the other. The second part provides the reader a well poised discussion of institution, agency and action, progress and technology, the sources of modern self, scientific rationality, religion, the globalization of liberal system, language and the world polity against the enlightenment conception of modernity as a single receptacle of all cultures. Such a discussion of modernity touches its envisioned target as it extends it to the more historical understanding of identity politics in Europe and India, nuanced with the concrete Indian versions of Ramjanmabhoomi Movement etc.

The third part, as I have mentioned above, is an interesting collection of interviews with major social thinkers and social activists who some way or other studied identity politics either from the post nineteen ninety two secularism debate that took place in India or associated with critical identity movements in contemporary political activity. In one word, a reader from the Indian context would feel that the intellectuals interviewed however strikes a balance of views as there are political thinkers like Imtiaz Ahmed or Rajeev Bhargava on the one side and social scientists like Ashish Nandy on the other. The other major highlights of the book are firstly an academically extremely significant list of 'binary oppositions in counter-hegemonic discourse' given in the form of Appendix and secondly a very specific select bibliography. Finally, the

vast fields of research and discussions from which the book has been moulded as the author's acknowledgements say make the contents of the book to attain the credibility of true, reflective and critical summing up of a major cross-section of the discussions of identity politics world over.