

GUEST EDITORIAL

What is the Value of Social Justice in Pakistan's Library and Information Science Professions?

Bharat Mehra

School of Information Sciences, University of Tennessee, USA.



As the coordinating co-chair (with Kendra S. Albright) of the 2015 Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) Annual Conference (<http://www.alise.org/2015-conference-2>) themed "Mirrors and windows: Reflections on social justice and re-imagining LIS education" that took place in Chicago, Illinois, from January 27-30, 2015, I was happy to observe the emergence of the concept of social justice take center stage during ALISE's centennial celebrations. Hundred years of ALISE history did us proud in the present moment while looking back and looking forward at the service and community engagement ethos of the LIS professions and its teaching and research in terms of social justice and social equity concepts, constructs, terminologies, and praxis.

How does social justice reflect in the context of Pakistan's LIS professions with a focus on both its education and practice elements? This brief reflective piece may help begin thinking about what we do in LIS in terms of social justice conceptualizations and operationalization in its relevance and application to Pakistan. The value of such an effort lies in carving out a specific contribution of the LIS professions in Pakistan that showcases its unique and meaningful role in shaping community-wide progressive changes to address the information needs and expectations of all human beings, particularly various minority and underserved populations.

The road looks arduous and long. A significant place to start is to initiate the conversation in considering how the LIS professions in Pakistan can further social justice ideals of fairness, justice, and equality/equity for all people irrespective of their race, ethnicity, national origins, sex, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, education, economic status, and other constructed variables of identity, behavior, and diversity (Mehra, Olson, and Ahmad, 2011). For isn't every person entitled to certain inalienable "human

rights" (Samek, 2007) based on our shared sense of "humanness" (Haslam, Bain, Douge, Lee, and Bastian, 2005), biological origins, and/or spiritual divine source (as variously interpreted and understood)? Irrespective of the individual trajectories in thoughts, feelings, and action about the bond of humanity that binds us, John Rawls "justice-as-fairness" principles (2001, 1971) seem especially relevant to: 1) Ensure extensive and equal liberty; and 2) Promote societal benefits to be arranged in such a way that the least disadvantaged persons obtain the greatest benefits possible. Hence, within a particular political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental climate in Pakistan it becomes important to ask who is "left out" and considered on the margins of society and what can the LIS professions do to improve their life circumstances and experiences (Mehra, Rioux, and Albright, 2010).

As LIS professionals we are in an enviable and privileged position to raise awareness and question the insider-outsider power discourse while considering who is visible and who is invisible, who is excluded and who is included, in the distribution of power, honors, representation, visibility, resources, information, and the like in society and the world at large. Identifying, articulating, describing, and analyzing LIS experiences in Pakistan in terms of action-oriented, socially relevant outcomes achieved via information-related work becomes a key step in this regard (Mehra, 2014). Finding creative and innovative ways to examine LIS work, practice, education, service design, and program implementation in Pakistan in ways that promote progressive changes partnering with, and, on behalf of people on society's margins become another important direction to pursue.

There is yet much to be done and many more miles to go before we sleep. But, this is a beginning. The sooner we further such discussions of LIS work in terms of social justice, social inclusion, diversity, and the needs of disenfranchised users in Pakistan (Mehra, Albright, and Rioux, 2006) the more effective we will be in extending our roles in society and embracing more progressive values and practices relevant in the 21st century.

I want to thank Dr. Nosheen Fatima Warraich, for inviting me to submit a guest editorial on the topic of social justice for this issue. It provides great promise towards future discussions surrounding social justice in the LIS professions in Pakistan and its engagement in research, teaching, and practice while keeping their focus on social impact, community involvement, and community development activities.

References

- Haslam, N., Bain, P., Douge, L., Lee, M., and Bastian, B. (2005). More Human Than You: Attributing Humanness to Self and Others. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 89(6), 937-950.
- Mehra, B. (Editor). (2014). Guest Editor's Introduction [peer-reviewed]. *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries Journal*, Special Issue 2014: Social Justice, Social Inclusion (pp 1-3).
- Mehra, B., Olson, H. A., and Ahmad, S. (2011). Integrating Diversity across the LIS Curriculum: An Exploratory Study of Instructors' Perceptions and Practices Online. *International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Journal*, 37(1), 39-51.
- Mehra, B., Rioux, K., and Albright, K. S. (2010). Social Justice in Library and Information Science. In M. J. Bates and M. N. Maack (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Sciences* (pp. 4820-4836). New York: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Mehra, B., Albright, K. S., & Rioux, K. (2006). A Practical Framework for Social Justice Research in the Information Professions. *Proceedings of the 69th Annual Meeting of the American Society for Information Science & Technology 2006: Information Realities: Shaping the Digital Future For All*. Volume 43. November 3-8, 2006.
- Rawls, J. (2001). *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (2nd edition). Edited by E. Kelly. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.
- Rawls, J. (1971). *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.
- Samek, T. (2007). *Librarianship and Human Rights: A 21st Century Guide* (Chandos Information Professional Series). Atlanta, GA: Neal-Schuman Publishers.