
BOOK REVIEW

**Ethics and People's Issues, 2024, Rev. Dr. M. Stephen,
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Ethics and People's Issues is written by Rev. Dr. M. Stephen, he is a well-regarded author and theologian from Kerala, India, with a substantial body of work in both Malayalam and English. His academic credentials include a B.A. and M.A. in English Literature from Kerala University, a B.D. from the United Theological Seminary in Pune, an M.Th. from the United Theological College in Bengaluru, and a Doctorate from Dharmaram Vidyakshetram in Bengaluru. He currently teaches theology and ethics at Faith Theological Seminary in Manakala, Adoor, Kerala.

Overview and Structure

The book provides thought-provoking insights into the ethical challenges faced by marginalized communities, including subaltern populations, ethnic minorities, and individuals with psychological issues, across various social contexts. These contexts encompass development, pseudo-secularism, ethnic crises, the Farmers Bill, the Uniform Civil Code, war, human sexuality, and other pressing ethical concerns in contemporary society.

Through its twelve chapters, the book examines the nature of development that fails to consider the holistic liberation of subaltern communities. It highlights the struggles of ethnic groups and minority communities during crises, such as the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the Israel-Palestinian conflict, and organized protests like the Farmers Bill in India. Additionally, the book explores whether minorities in

India can remain safe or whether secularism will be overshadowed by the rise of Hindutva ideology and pseudo-secularism. The author argues that the concerns of marginalized people are often disregarded in the Hindutva agenda, calling for a deeper reflection on the implications of these issues for the future. The book is presented as an eye-opener, offering profound reflections on the complex challenges facing individuals today and, in the years, to come.

In **Chapter 1**, the author argues that development should foster holistic progress and the welfare of all people, with a particular focus on uplifting marginalized communities such as Dalits, tribes, fisherfolk, slum dwellers, victimized women, children, LGBTIQ+ individuals, the differently-abled, refugees, and migrants. The chapter is divided into three sections - Section 1 defines and explores the concepts of development and the subaltern. Section 2 examines the impact of development programs on vulnerable and disenfranchised groups. Section 3 proposes that the pattern of development should align with the principles outlined in the Nazareth Manifesto of Jesus (Luke 4:16-21), where the marginalized are central to his mission and are to be empowered and emancipated. This framework calls for a development model that prioritizes the needs of the most vulnerable, ensuring their inclusion and upliftment at the heart of societal progress.

Chapter 2 focuses on the praxiological aspects of psychotherapy, emphasizing its role in aiding individuals in crisis. It is divided into four sections: the first examines the relationship between ethics, psychology, and psychotherapy, offering solutions for individuals to overcome challenges. The second discusses ethical frameworks for supporting marginalized groups. The third outlines psychotherapists' ethical responsibilities, referencing principles by Koocher and Keith-Spiegel. The fourth explores ethical dilemmas faced by therapists when working with disadvantaged groups like children, families, and survivors of sexual violence.

Chapter 3 shifts focus to the ethical concerns surrounding the Farmers Bill in India, which sparked widespread protests from farmers that lasted for over a year. The author recounts how the government's actions and manipulations ultimately failed to suppress the farmers' determination, leading to the repeal of the controversial laws.

Chapter 4 explores the ethical implications of war, offering a Christian perspective on the subject. The author argues that war has a dehumanizing effect on humanity, causing fear, insecurity, food crises, death, displacement, loss of property, pollution, disease, and deep

wounds. It breaks relationships and perpetuates hatred and division. The author underscores the importance of coexistence and pro-existence, quoting Martin Heidegger: “We exist to co-exist.”

Chapter 5 discusses the growing threat to democracy and secularism in India, pointing to the rising tide of intolerance, arrogance, exclusivism, and mono-cultural, mono-religious ideologies. The author warns that fascist forces are attempting to rewrite history, textbooks, and even the constitution. The author stresses that undermining the secular and socialistic values enshrined in the Indian constitution would lead to disastrous consequences for the country.

In **Chapter 6**, the author argues that the media plays a prophetic role in society, standing against injustice and acting as a corrective force. However, the freedoms of the press, speech, and media—fundamental rights in the Indian constitution—are under threat today. The author contends that the ideologies of figures like Hitler and the anti-Christ are becoming increasingly apparent in the Indian context.

Chapter 7 explores human sexuality, sexual behavior, and the abuse of human sexuality, linking these issues to sin and violence. The chapter highlights various socially unapproved sexual activities, such as sex tourism, which leads to trafficking, child molestation, rape, gang rape, and sexual harassment. The author references the Bible, emphasizing that sexual relations should occur only within the confines of marriage. He also identifies a troubling nexus between sexual abuse, corruption, alcoholism, and narcotic addiction. The chapter stresses the importance of upholding values related to sexuality, arguing against the fluidity and relativity of these moral standards.

Chapter 8 focuses on the evolution of political systems in India, analyzing the transition from autocratic rule to the so-called civilized system of governance. The author traces the journey from the British Raj to the advent of democracy, reflecting on the impact of different rulers and their policies on the lives of Indians.

In **Chapter 9**, the author critically examines the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) through the lens of the Shah Bano case, highlighting the complexities of religious pluralism in India. Different communities have distinct norms, beliefs, and practices, which the Constitution of India mandates to be respected. The author expresses concern about imposing a uniform civil code without securing the confidence of all religious groups, particularly minorities, fearing this could lead to societal discord.

Chapter 10 presents the author's views on the Manipur crisis, calling it a "black spot" in the history of independent India, a stain on the nation's democratic values.

Finally, **Chapter 11** delves into the concept of *dharma* in the Indian context, critiquing its historical misuse to subjugate Dalits and other marginalized groups. The author urges a re-examination of existing social system, advocating for a social order that prioritizes humanity and the empowerment of the poor.

Strengths:

1. The book covers a wide range of pressing contemporary ethical issues, such as development, war, human sexuality, democracy, and secularism, providing a well-rounded perspective on the challenges faced by marginalized communities.
2. The book draws from various ethical and religious principles, such as the Nazareth Manifesto of Jesus and Christian perspectives on war and democracy, offering a solid moral foundation for the discussions. The references to theology and biblical teachings give the book a unique, thought-provoking angle.

Weaknesses:

1. While the author offers insightful critiques, some readers may perceive the discussions on topics like the rise of Hindutva and secularism as politically charged or biased. This may alienate those with differing viewpoints, limiting the book's appeal to a broader audience.
2. Given that the author's primary perspective is from Christian theology, there is a missed opportunity to engage with non-Christian ethical frameworks, which could have enriched the analysis of ethical issues in a multicultural society like India.

Concluding Remarks

Ethics and People's Issues by Rev. Dr. M. Stephen is a thought-provoking and timely exploration of the ethical challenges facing marginalized communities, particularly in the context of contemporary Indian society. The book successfully highlights critical issues such as development, democracy, secularism, and the misuse of power, offering both theological and ethical insights.