

BOOK REVIEW

Manisha Pathak Shelat and Kiran Vinod Bhatia (2021)
***Raising a Humanist ---Conscious Parenting in an Increasing
Fragmented World***
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The book **-Raising A Humanist ---Conscious Parenting In An Increasing Fragmented World is written by two authors** Dr. Manisha Pathak Shelat (Professor and Chair, Centre for Development Management and Communication, MICA, Ahmedabad) and Kiran Vinod Bhatia (Doctoral candidate in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Wisconsin—Madison

I would like to congratulate the authors for writing this very reflective and thought-provoking book. It is the need of the hour. This book *Raising a Humanist ---Conscious parenting in an increasing fragmented world* is indeed very well written. The book quotes several instances, case studies and real-life experiences encountered by the authors based on which this book has been written. The book provides a much-needed investigation of how adults can guide children to become empathetic, tolerant and critically reflective humans in an ever-changing technological backdrop. The authors have delved deep into some of the most challenging questions of the current times in a laborious and thoughtful yet accessible manner. Concepts are carefully unpacked, exemplified with 'real-world' scenarios and framed in ways that adults and kids can talk about together. This book is of vital importance for parenting in these politically complex and technologically disruptive times. The book also

suggests a few simple practices to refurbish the social fabric, which, if adopted, would ease the process of raising conscientious and empathetic children. Debunking some of the parenting myths with reality-check exercises is a frosting on the cake. The spaces provided for pausing compels one to introspect, which is very crucial for a parent.

The forward of the book is written by **Lina Ashar** Educationist, Entrepreneur, Writer Founder, Kangaroo Kids Preschool, Mumbai, and Billabong High International School, Noida she in her forward urges parents and teachers to read this book and says that “the book puts you in a driver's seat and guides you all along the path to raising happy, confident and humane children in whose hands our beautiful world will remain safe”.

This book is a collection of 9 chapters. The contents and the analysis of each article is as follows:

The first chapter is titled, What Is Your Child's World View? This chapter is written impactfully. The introduction of the chapter begins with a lot of reflective questions for the reader to ponder upon. It is further written under three sub headings Mirroring the Adults ,The Unknown Is Scary, Children. In the first part of the chapter, the authors explain how the children mirror their parents and learn lot of things about the life and society. Parents are the bridges between the home and the outside world. Based on their observations of how adults behave in their lives, children learn to internalize prejudices towards others, practise hate against individuals who have a different lifestyle and design violent ways of punishing, abusing and reprimanding those who challenge their world views, faiths and beliefs. In the second part the authors bring about a valid point that usually strangers are associated with danger and the strangers here are the people from different religions caste class of the society and never encourage proper interactions with interaction with people who are not similar in the aspects of class religion and caste, especially those who are inferior to us. The authors have made a valid point that, for the sake of peace and development in our society, that parents need to raise children who can happily navigate and enjoy a diverse and multicultural society while

acknowledging and respecting their own roots and cultures. The last part of the chapter talks about families, schools and media being the three core dimensions in children's socialization. Lot of examples have been given to explain how the three have an influence on the child and further the author summarizes by putting a thought that by recognizing these three dimensions as crucial sites where children learn most of their social behaviour is the starting point towards designing critical and inclusive experiences for them so that they can thrive in a diverse and multicultural world.

The second chapter Echo Chambers: Our Seemingly Safe Cocoons .The concept of Echo Chambers has been introduced and explained in the chapter. Echo chambers are groups that are formed when people surround themselves with others who think, feel and behave like them. These echo chambers operate around gender, religion, caste and class. These most important identities in a person's life and are at the base of our fears, suspicions, stereotypes and strong beliefs. These are predictors of the kind of treatment and bias a person will encounter in his or her life. The author further explains the four dimensions -Gender, Religion, Caste and Class by giving a lot of examples and how this effects our children. Several live cases have been reported and experiences happening in day-to-day life, related to the discrimination and how this has been affecting the children. The chapter ends with a note that, every form of discrimination and violence can worsen into societal conflicts and disturb the very fabric of our societies. Refusing to step out of our echo chambers may lead to a profound divide between diverse communities, resulting in conflicting exclusions, both physical and ideological. If children are socialized to identify differences as innately evil, they will be unable to thrive in a pluralistic society.

The Third Chapter is Tolerance: Philosophies and Principles, has been divided into five sub headings-Tolerance Is Amicable Coexistence, Living with Differences, Philosophies and Traditions: Lessons on Coexistence from India, Tolerance Has Its Challenges and Exploring the Indian Philosophy of Sahridayas. The chapter is well explained and talks about tolerance, its meaning and now tolerance is considered as a

negative term, it should be acceptance and more over co-existence. The chapter starts with an incredibly positive note related to harmony in the society with examples of people of various religions praying together at the Dargas and Masjids and the Gandhi Ashram and living in harmony. The authors have written that their visits to such places led them to believe that the virtue of tolerance and compassion is woven into the very fabric of our Indian society. Further it is explained that since few decades the cities that emerged as sites of unified national movements have witnessed tragic instances of communal, caste-based, gender-based and other forms of violence. Further the chapter has highlighted the thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi, **Nelson Mandela Tenzin Gyatso, Martin Luther King Jr. Wangari Maathai and Tawakkol Karman** on what peace and tolerance meant to them. The authors further explain that -Conflicts arise when these irrational cultural and religious beliefs clash with progressive civic goals. People will continue to hold some of these irrational beliefs or rituals, but it is important to establish the private–public distinction so that people do not establish their own beliefs as societal standards and force others to adopt and practice them. Tolerance is learning the boundaries of public–private, and while we may continue to perform certain rituals in our homes and in our personal lives, the public should be governed and regulated according to shared civic goals and liberties. This is followed by some examples of coexistence and consensus building in India which is interesting to read. The chapter ends with a note that- new conversations can help people forgive their past traumas and conflicts, thus encouraging them to imagine a better future despite seemingly irresolvable differences in our present. We must hold onto the last ounce of compassion and understanding in us as we create bridges and undo boundaries.

The fourth chapter is Opening our Hearts and Minds. This talks about Opening our hearts and minds to ideas and people that are unfamiliar and push us out of our echo chamber. The authors talk about the socialization process and say that when people try to get out of their echo chambers, they need to be encouraged. The chapter explains a pragmatic four-step approach on how adults can redesign their social environments,

specifically their homes, to be as bias-free as possible. An approach that helps address the emergence of stereotypes and bias and how can they be challenged, how are these prejudices practised (medium and content) and how to enact tolerance? The four steps .1. Re-examining the process of socialization 2. Understanding privilege 3. Embracing the power of ‘why’ question 4. Challenging a single story have been. These four steps have been explained with the help of stories and discussed very well which is really a thought provoking. Certain parenting myths have been discussed and a discussion on reinventing Parenting and few scenarios are discussed. The involved parenting style where children's emotions are validated by listening to them and establishing shared ground rules; instead of punishing, children are encouraged to make amends and dish out responsibility with freedom is explained. The author concludes that, children raised in this manner learn the value of self-discipline and abide by the rules made through deliberation and discussion. It fosters a relationship of equals between parents and children in such a way that children are motivated to practise good behaviour out of care and respect instead of fear. Strategies that can be used to raise children as active participants at homes, schools and in societies have been explained very well in the chapter.

The fifth Chapter, Unlearning Together: Unlearning in this chapter involves re-examining our daily habits, beliefs and practices, our inherited and acquired baggage which is practiced through channels of communication. These channels could be technological, personal, traditional, communal etc. The authors have explained whenever wherever possible challenging stereotypes and initiating dialogues related to irrational beliefs practices. Besides this , strategies to influences communities have been explained The five strategies explained in this chapter are Strategy I. Find Tactful and Innovative Ways to Challenge Stereotypes ,Strategy II. Collaborating to Challenge Discrimination, Strategy III. Practising Care., Strategy IV. Talking Through Our Differences, Strategy V. Practising Tolerance in Our Communities. Further the authors conclude that Unlearning is a slow process and any other strategies that can

contribute towards building a peaceful and tolerant society, and there is no one right way.

The sixth chapter is titled -It is not real, it is photoshopped!

This chapter discusses in depth about how children are influenced by media, the advertisements and how it influences the personality of the children. Children falling trap to beauty creams and products and body shaming due to the ideas that slim is beautiful takes children away from accepting themselves as they are. This leads to a lot of stress and discrimination. There are eight aspects through which this is explained. Media as the 'Looking Glass Self', Debunking Media Myths, Anorexia and Bulimia: When Food Becomes an Enemy, Dark Is Beautiful, Accepting Differences in Body Types, No One Should Apologize for Their Bodies, Periods and the Taboo Culture, Nurturing Your Mind. Many reflective exercises for readers are given in this chapter which makes a positive impact and can bring a change in the thinking process related to how knowingly and unknowingly parents become a party to influencing children to compare with others and make the celebrities a role model. In a nutshell, this chapter focuses on how the media and our social prejudices together contribute to discriminating against people based on their skin colour and body shapes. Several examples have been quoted in this chapter to prove the point that when the media constantly portrays certain communities, classes, religions or castes in a stereotypical way Discrimination also happens. The authors say that this needs to be thought upon seriously and suggest that there are two ways to curb this fact first by producing and consuming more sensitive media against this and second challenge discrimination in our families, schools and communities.

The seventh chapter-Using Technology to connect and learn,

discusses how the new childhood has become technology based. Children are exposed to gadgets and technology at a very young age and how this influences the children. The chapter has tackled the advantages as well as the disadvantages of technology for children and discusses the technological influence on children from all angles under thirteen subheadings. Childhood: Online and Offline, The New Childhood, The Internet and the Everyday

Life ,Children as Citizens of the World, Becoming a Tech-savvy Parent, The Stranger Danger, Connecting beyond Borders and Differences, Understanding Your Place in the World: From Local to Global, Using Social Media Purposively, Echo Chambers on Social Media, Online Strategies to Build Global–Civic Communities, How to be Safe in an Interconnected World?, Designing the Family Media Diet. The chapter talks about the fact that we cannot discourage or refuse children from using technology as it has become indispensable. As parents how they could have an environment at home and how to manage the whole idea of children using the technology and using social media purposively so that it can be used positively to understand the use of technology for building global communities. This will surely make children to understand their standing in the world and have a more broadminded approach towards the world. The Media diet concept is well explained.

Chapter Eight – Art with a Purpose has been explained under three headings , Socially Engaged Art Practice, Listening and Responding to Differences, Working Together amid Differences. This chapter emphasizes on art as a network, a means through which we can change our body's capacity to feel, think and be involved. when young people are equipped with the skills to practise art and make visible an alternative future of inclusive and peaceful societies, they become ‘change agents. They produce a change in the art they create and adopt an ‘active’ role in the change-making process. Introducing change through art is therefore a critical process of thinking about alternative and peaceful futures. Once young people have the skills required to identify and resolve problems through art, they will continue to use artistic forms of expression to imagine and articulate new future possibilities. Finally, artistic sites such as theatre, dance, posters, videos and others are excellent spaces for collaborative work. The authors finally explain that an art-based approach to redesign our homes and classrooms and convert them into safe spaces for our children to imagine, practise and experience an alternative future of care, belongingness and compassion for all. Socially engaged arts practices are useful in making it feasible for children from multiple backgrounds to coexist and work

together towards shared interests and purposes in interesting ways.

The last chapter is As We Say Goodbye is the concluding chapter of the book where the authors have reiterated a few important points that they have been stressing upon throughout the book. The four points that have been explained are -Getting Out of the Box, Understanding Systemic Discrimination, Violence Is Not the Solution, Stepping into the Future Getting out of the box. Every point has been explained by sharing certain anecdotes and experiences that have been shared by parents regarding their children to the authors. Lastly the authors state that they hope that the book will be a conversation starter and help parents and teachers to initiate difficult dialogues and discussions in families, communities and schools. The chapter ends with the following fable,

A monk was standing on a seashore. He would pick up the fish that got thrown on the shore with the high tide and put them back gently in the water. A passer-by saw this and watched for a while, perplexed. When he could not control his curiosity, he asked the monk, 'what are you doing?' 'I am saving these fish from dying by putting them back in the water,' the monk replied. The man scoffed at the response and said, 'There are thousands of them that die on the shore every day. Would a handful you save make any difference?' To this, the monk smiled serenely, picked up one fish from the shore, gently placed it in the water and said, 'Well, it made a difference for THIS fish!'

Conclusion:

Every chapter of the book is written very well with detailed information and all the views that are expressed by the authors are based on exhaustive research. The book is indeed an eye opener for parents and teachers as it very rightly addresses crucial questions and thoughts informing the experiences of parents. It mainstreams the power of opening difficult discussions and thoughts, guided by a strong yet sensitive rationale at its core. A must-read for everyone, academic or non-academic, for we all raise ideas, beliefs and people. The book

will make its readers more self-aware of their personal and social ecosystems and will also outspread itself to being a reference, to negotiate with questions and everyday practices in their journeys of raising tolerant youngsters. It can be a guide for current and future parenting styles where we consciously incorporate universal values of equality, justice, freedom, democracy, Coexistence, love and compassion. As parents and teachers, we need to not just incorporate those values but also have a healthy discussion around it. How can our children manifest these values in their daily life, how can we make love and compassion and coexistence real and working? We cannot afford to just discuss and debate and theorise but start to implement. There is too much of greed, misery, inhumanness across and we all need to heal within. This book is taking the reader in that direction.

