

SOCIAL WELFARE IN SRI LANKA

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Laksiri Jayasuriya, *Welfarism and Politics in Sri Lanka, Experience of a third world welfare state*. The School of Social Work and Social Policy, University of Western Australia, Perth. 2000.

Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya a former professor of Sociology at the University of Colombo, recently retired from the Chair of Social Workers and Social Policies at the University of Western Australia where he continues as Professor Emeritus and Honorary Senior Fellow. Professor Jayasuriya's work is an exposition of his many faceted contributions to social science over a long period of time beginning in the heyday of scholarship at Peradeniya, then as Foundation Professor of Sociology and Social Welfare at Colombo and over nearly three decades 'down under.'

Professor Jayasuriya, who has kept in continuous touch with social policies in Sri Lanka, has brought together in this volume several essays he has written on the theme of social welfare. His approach to welfarism is multi-disciplinary. It is an assessment of Sri Lanka's social welfare policies within a political and social framework. The scope of the book is however more extensive than what its title suggests. It covers various theories of social welfare and social policy.

The book is a synopsis of several important threads of Sri Lanka's political history. It is a valuable synthesis of social welfare concepts. The book discusses the evolution of the concept of development incorporating the quality of life indicators. It gives a summary of the new ideas arising out of, and after the Copenhagen Social Summit. Jayasuriya analyses Sri Lanka's welfare policies in detail. Its final chapter suggests "A third Way" for the future of economic and social policy for Sri Lanka. One of its chapters deals with "Diversity and Social Justice in the Asian Region."

The author's approach is heavily influenced by the thinking and conceptualization of Amartya Sen, the winner of the Nobel Prize for economics in 1998. A seminal idea of Sen is that economic policies are a means to achieving human ends and that aggregate

economic growth does not necessarily guarantee human welfare, if a significant proportion of people do not have access or "entitlements" to basic goods and services. Jayasuriya quotes Sen frequently to advance his approach to social welfare.

This book provides an easy way to access some of the key concepts and perspectives of Amartya Sen. In fact Jayasuriya devotes a section of his Fifth Chapter to expound Sen's ideas on equality, entitlements and development as a process, which enhances human capabilities. In this line of argument, Jayasuriya stresses that "if we are to take social development seriously, it is imperative that we should pay greater attention to exploring the 'ethic of development' in re-conceptualizing development theory and generating morally defensible and realistic policy strategies." (Page 163).

Sen, who has himself studied the Sri Lankan experience of social development, and been an important contributor to the debate on economic growth versus welfare, has often cited the example of Sri Lanka as a country which has attained higher levels of human development than many other countries with higher per capita incomes. Sen's point is that economic growth is a means to the achievement of human capabilities and that economic growth could never be an end in itself. Jayasuriya relies heavily on Sen's conceptual framework and normative approach in arguing his case for a new welfarism for developing Asian countries. He argues the need to develop a social policy, which "effectively links social welfare and the market." Jayasuriya hopes that Sri Lanka would take a lead in evolving a new policy agenda. He concludes his book by expressing this expectation: "In forging this linkage between capitalism and welfarism, and charting a new political agenda for social democracy, Sri Lanka may once again acquire a path-finding role as a model social democratic state for the rapidly transforming market economies of developing countries." Many Sri Lankans would find this book a useful recapitulation of the country's social and political history. It will also provoke their thinking on the needed new directions of economic and social policy in the context of the changing economic situation and market-oriented policies. ■

Welfarism and Politics in Sri Lanka

Experience of a Third World Welfare State

Laksiri Jayasuriya

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