



BOOK REVIEW

Reimagining Social Justice: Law, Society, and the Quest for Inclusive Justice in India

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Reimagining Social Justice by Dr. A. Subhashini, D. Chandrasehar, and Jerom Steward J is a timely and comprehensive contribution to socio-legal scholarship in India. Situated at the intersection of law, society, and constitutionalism, the book offers in six parts and twenty-three chapters a structured and accessible critique of how legal institutions engage with entrenched inequalities amidst growing importance of constitutional law and evolving notions of inclusive justice. At a time when ideas of social justice are being actively re-examined—shaped by evolving constitutional interpretations, shifting identity claims, judicial activism, and expanding rights-based movements—this book offers a thoughtful blend of conceptual clarity and real-world relevance, helping readers connect legal principles with the lived experiences they are meant to address.

The book is carefully structured into six interconnected parts, each flowing naturally into the next, to show social justice not just as an ideal written into the Constitution, but as something that is continuously negotiated, challenged, and experienced in everyday social life.

Part I, *Foundations of Law and Society*, contains four chapters. Chapter 1 gently introduces readers to the sociology of law by tracing how thinkers over time have tried to understand law not just as a set of rules, but as a social practice shaped by history and ideas. Building on this, Chapter 2 explores the close and often complex relationship between law, tradition, and culture, showing how legal norms grow out of cultural practices even as they work to reshape them. Chapter 3 turns to questions of punishment and social control, unpacking both classical and modern perspectives to explain how legal sanctions are used to maintain order and influence behaviour in society. Chapter 4 brings these ideas into everyday life by presenting law as a living social institution, deeply woven into familiar structures such as family, kinship, religion, and the economy, rather than something distant or abstract. Through discussions on the connections between law, culture, tradition, punishment, and social control, this section shows how legal rules do not operate in isolation but are deeply shaped by everyday institutions like the family, religion, and the economy. This section is especially useful for students and early-career researchers, as it makes complex legal ideas easier to grasp by clearly linking theory to real social contexts and everyday experiences.

Part II, focusing on *Constitutional Vision and Social Change* in four chapters, is one of the book's strongest sections. The authors offer a clear exposition of the Preamble, Directive Principles of State Policy, and Fundamental Rights as instruments of transformative constitutionalism. Chapter 5 opens with a clear and engaging discussion of the Indian Constitution's commitment to social justice, drawing attention to the ideals of justice, equality, liberty, and fraternity enshrined in the Preamble and explaining how they shape India's larger journey toward social transformation. Chapter 6 then turns to the Directive Principles of State

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Policy, showing how they act as a moral and policy compass for building a welfare state and encouraging the government to prioritize community well-being in lawmaking and governance. Chapter 7 looks closely at the role of the judiciary, illustrating how courts have creatively interpreted and expanded fundamental rights to respond to social inequalities and protect vulnerable groups. Chapter 8 concludes this section by tracing the growth of Public Interest Litigation, highlighting how it has opened the doors of justice to ordinary citizens and strengthened human rights jurisprudence, while also thoughtfully acknowledging the debates and limitations surrounding its use. The discussion on judicial activism and Public Interest Litigation (PIL) is nuanced, acknowledging both their emancipatory role in expanding access to justice and the critiques surrounding judicial overreach. By situating constitutional interpretation within broader social objectives, the authors reinforce the idea of the Indian Constitution as a living document oriented toward social transformation.

The book gains further depth in Part III, which critically addresses *Inequality, Exclusion, and Justice*. Chapters 9 to 12 engage directly with some of the most deeply rooted forms of inequality in Indian society and the law's response to them. Chapter 9 examines the long shadow of caste, tracing its historical entrenchment and explaining how constitutional safeguards have sought to confront and dismantle caste-based discrimination. Chapter 10 continues this discussion by unpacking the policy of reservations, the evolving creamy layer debate, and their implications for social mobility, presenting these issues as complex and often contested tools of social justice rather than simple legal formulas. Chapter 11 shifts focus to the rights of minorities, exploring how the law navigates religious, linguistic, and regional identities while balancing unity with diversity. Chapter 12 brings attention to tribal rights and indigenous communities, highlighting both the legal protections designed to preserve their land, culture, and autonomy and the persistent challenges they face in the context of development, displacement, and governance.

The chapters in Part III, dealing with caste, reservations, minority rights, and tribal communities, speak directly to some of the deepest and most enduring inequalities in Indian society. The discussion around the creamy layer debate and social mobility is handled with care and balance, steering clear of rigid positions while staying grounded in constitutional principles and lived realities. The analysis of tribal and indigenous rights is particularly striking, especially in the context of development-led displacement and resource extraction, as it brings into sharp focus the ongoing struggle to balance economic growth with the demands of justice, dignity, and inclusion.

Part IV, dealing with *Family, Gender, and Empowerment*, examines the law's engagement with gender justice across private and public spheres in four lovely chapters. Chapters 13 to 16 shift the focus to family life and gender relations, showing how law operates within some of the most intimate and everyday spaces of society. Chapter 13 explores the family as a social institution, explaining how changing social values, relationships, and expectations have influenced legal reforms over time. Chapter 14 brings women's experiences to the forefront, tracing the long history of gender inequality while also engaging with the realities and pressures women face in present-day India. Chapter 15 examines laws relating to crimes against women, highlighting how legal protections have evolved in response to social struggles, public debate, and growing awareness. Chapter 16 widens the lens from protection to empowerment, discussing

women's roles in politics, society, and the economy, and emphasizing that gender justice is an ongoing journey shaped by both law and social change. The authors thoughtfully chart how family law and women's rights have developed over time, paying careful attention to the growth of legal protections against gender-based violence. Importantly, women are not portrayed simply as passive recipients of legal change; instead, the book recognizes them as active participants who shape and drive empowerment across political, social, and economic spheres.

Part V, *Rights of Vulnerable Groups*, is more or less self-explanatory. It contains four chapters on children, persons with disabilities, the elderly, and the LGBTQIA+ community. Chapters 17 to 20 broaden the discussion of social justice by focusing on groups whose voices are often overlooked in legal and policy debates. Chapter 17 addresses child rights, emphasizing the law's role in protecting children from exploitation while ensuring access to education and welfare as foundations for a dignified future. Chapter 18 traces the shift in the legal approach to persons with disabilities, moving from a narrow welfare mindset to one that prioritizes rights, autonomy, and empowerment. Chapter 19 turns to the rights of the elderly, examining how legal and policy frameworks seek to safeguard dignity, security, and care in later life. Chapter 20 concludes this section with a thoughtful discussion on LGBTQIA+ rights, exploring the journey toward legal recognition and the continuing struggle for genuine social acceptance and inclusion beyond formal legal reforms. This section captures the book's inclusive understanding of social justice by moving beyond conventional legal categories and engaging with newer and evolving rights conversations. The chapter on LGBTQIA+ rights stands out in particular, as it places recent legal developments within the wider and ongoing struggle for social acceptance, dignity, and equal belonging in everyday life.

The concluding Part VI, *Reforms and Future Directions*, in three chapters focuses on how social justice can be strengthened in India in practice. Chapter 21 examines the need for judicial reforms, stressing the importance of a justice system that is accessible, efficient, and responsive to the needs of ordinary people. Chapter 22 highlights the crucial role played by civil society organizations and NGOs, showing how grassroots action, advocacy, and community engagement often bridge the gap between law and lived reality. Chapter 23 brings the discussion together by reflecting on what it means to reimagine social justice in twenty-first-century India, thoughtfully addressing contemporary challenges while also pointing to new opportunities for building a more inclusive, equitable, and humane legal order. In perspective, the concluding part is forward-looking by addressing judicial reforms, the role of civil society and NGOs, and the challenges of reimagining social justice in 21st-century India. Instead of relying on abstract or idealistic solutions, the authors focus on practical ways institutions can become more responsive, encourage meaningful public participation, and work in partnership with civil society to advance social justice in everyday governance.

Overall, *Reimagining Social Justice* effectively brings together legal doctrine, social theory, and policy discussion in a way that feels coherent and accessible. One of its greatest strengths is the clear and structured manner in which complex ideas are presented alongside a wide range of themes, making the book useful for undergraduate and postgraduate students, researchers, judicial aspirants, and legal practitioners alike. Although the inclusion of more detailed empirical case studies or comparative international examples could have added further

depth, the book nonetheless stands as a strong and well-rounded foundation for understanding social justice through a socio-legal lens.

The authors of *Reimagining Social Justice* have produced a thoughtful and well-structured work that reaffirms social justice as the moral and constitutional core of Indian law. The book *Reimagining Social Justice* stands as a useful reference and a meaningful contribution to ongoing debates on law's role in creating a more equitable and inclusive society. I agree with the publisher's claim: "This book examines themes such as equality, dignity, affirmative action, access to justice, gender justice, social inclusion, and institutional accountability, while also questioning traditional approaches to justice and proposing progressive frameworks for reform."

In fact, *Reimagining Social Justice* speaks to a broad and diverse audience. The book will be particularly useful for law students and researchers who want to see how legal principles play out in everyday social life, as well as for academicians and social science scholars exploring issues of inequality, culture, and justice. Policy makers and governance professionals can draw on its insights to better understand the real-world effects of laws and welfare initiatives, while civil services and judiciary aspirants will find it helpful for developing a deeper, more thoughtful grasp of constitutional values beyond memorisation. At the same time, the book speaks to a wider audience too anyone interested in the Constitution, social reform, and the continuing pursuit of a fairer and more inclusive society will find it engaging and approachable, even without a specialist background in law.