

BOOK REVIEWS



COMBATING AIDS: COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN ACTION

By

Arvind Singhal and Everett M. Rogers

Published by

Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd. M-32 Market, Greater Kailash-I, New Delhi
110048.

Year Of Publication: 2001. No. of pages: 363. Price Rs.295.

Reviewed by

Dr. Shyam Ashtekar, an M.D. in Preventive and Social Medicine, is based in Nashik and working mainly in the area of health workers, health care systems, and rural health services.

Timely and powerful! That is what I think about this book by the authors Singhal and Rogers. It is about the HIV AIDS scourge looming large un India as it has been on Africa and at one time on US. In about 400 pages, the duo has narrated how HIV made inroads in human societies all over the world in a span of less than two decades and how nations dealt with it or did not. The book is about how to communicate to people, state, policy makers, and vulnerable groups about what is HIV and how to fight it. It talks of experiences and actual interviews with its victims and fighters. The telltale first chapter deals with the history of AIDS and how it went places. In this they talk of how national heads stonewalled the question of AIDS epidemic and how they could have actually contained it in time.

For India the most important question is; where are we on the AIDS front? The authors convincingly predict that India will soon have the next and final phase of AIDS epidemic where it will be spreading in the general population. It may be useful for readers to know that HIV-AIDS spreads from at-risk groups (from transnational sources) like sex workers and gay groups to other at risk-groups in distant cities through customers, then to a large number of customers like migrant labour and truckers-drivers, and then to wives (would be mothers) or partners of these customers, and then to others including babies. India is now in the phase of infecting the wives and partners of 'customers'. Soon, that is within a decade we will have the final phase of general spread from these

countless sources. Do we take steps to contain it now is the question.

The book also talks about international experiences of successes and failures. Although there is the lone example of Cuba stopping the epidemic in its track by quarantine measures, no such action can be supported in any nation any more. The best way, they argue, is to accept the patients and make available treatment facilities. A widely available treatment facility, coupled with preventing spread is the best step against epidemic in the current situation. Stigma of AIDS, the book says, is a real enemy to fight with if the war is to be won.

The book has made a special mention of our very own CIPLA's unique contribution to the AIDS war by way of slashing of prices of AIDS medicines, and the great simplification of treatment. Although this trips the TRIPS-WTO regime, the authors rightly justify that most of the inventions have come from national resources rather than MNC (multinational companies) funds. I may add that WHO also supports freeing of important life saving medicines from the TRIPS WTO regime and the CIPLA action is right in the framework of WHO. It is deplorable how MNCs (CIPLA excepted) make profit their only motive even in calamitous situations. Though there can be no general case against TRIPS and the product patent system it upholds (in contrast to the process patent system we have in India), CIPLA is justified in this case of a human catastrophe.

it in so many words, but a point about use of AIDS funds in India must be raised. The authors contrast Maharashtra's poor action to that of Tamil Nadu's vigorous efforts on HIV containment. As multinational funds for AIDS are available, the mushrooming of AIDS-NGOs presents a pathetic scene. This lack of seriousness of NGOs (leave notable exceptions) and government despite huge funds is a political problem indeed.

Is it only a health department problem? No is the clear signal from the book. If Heads of States falter, there is little a health department can do to fight AIDS. The neglect by South African legendary leader like Nelson Mandela was a monumental mistake. Thailand is a success story thanks to the great efforts of a senior policy maker and executive Mechai Viravaidya. Thai names sound Indian, and this *Veervaidya* (literally a hero medico) has stood true to his name for Thailand. It must be remembered that he waved the condom to even a deeply religious and conservative nation like Thailand. Are Indian leaders serious enough? Do they want to break out of conservative mindsets and meet the problem frontally? If Sushma Swaraj (former Union Health Minister) had her way, condom would have been pushed to the periphery of the anti-AIDS campaign. It is high time personal vagaries of politicians do not get the better of important public health problems. The first Union Health Minister Rajkumari Amrit Kaur with her Christian leanings pushed Family Planning out of Indian policy and that has proved a fatal mistake of geometrical proportions.

The book has probably not said

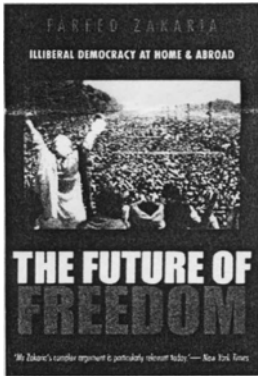
Sushmaji may have just done that for AIDS and lament at leisure when out of power. It shows how we lack a consistent health policy and statesmanship.

The weaknesses of the Indian health care system may be limiting factors in meeting the AIDS challenge. In most Indian states there is nothing like village level health care system. The nurse is given a population of 3000-5000 (about 6-7 villages) and she roams

about giving a few services at homes. This is a pathetic model of health care. The services are so scant that 80% people rely on quacks and other private doctors in the area or nearby town for health care. India wanted the sub-center nurses to offer reproductive health services to women and this did not get going over the last decade. There are several problems - policy, funds, infrastructure, style of work etc. India needs to mend its health services quickly and with local health workers.

That is the key to the problem. Unless this is done, there will be no vehicle to take the AIDS HIV services to hamlets and homes. Airdropping messages may not be enough. How soon we do it is the question.

I would recommend this excellent book to policy makers, doctors, activists and all who are concerned for knowing what HIV AIDS is and what we need to do right away.



THE FUTURE OF FREEDOM
- ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACY AT HOME AND ABROAD BY
Fareed Zakaria

Published by
Viking, Penguin Books India (P) Ltd., Community Centre,
Panchsheel Park, New Delhi 110 007. Year of Publication: 2003. No. of
Pages: 286 Price: Rs.395

Reviewed by
Mr. A. D. Maddie, former civil servant, author and representative
of Industry to Government.

Whatever else, the underlying merit of this book is that it offers a deeper analysis of contemporary politics under the umbrella word 'democracy', trailing subsidiary umbrella words as freedom, liberty, the rule of law and human rights in different cultures of different societies in present times. Its value is in its contemporary global context. Though the primary society examined is America, because it is the dominant democracy as a person of Indian origin, and the son of an Indian ex-Minister, one would have liked Zakaria to give more attention to Indian democracy, not only the largest, more importantly, the most plural democracy in the world, and the largest test case of post colonial societies. And a template for Asia, the most populous continent. The subtitle of the book is a mild reminder of the inadequacies of what passes for democracies, "Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad". One thought ran through the reading of the book. Its contemporary analysis of illiberal democracies makes it necessary supplementary reading to text books on political science, text books which are usually superficial and dated. And

press reports which are even more superficial.

In eight chapters, the book is really in five parts. The first is a general analysis of the Democratic Age of our time, with a central place for America. The second is a mix of the "Brief History of Human Liberty", an interesting historical essay from ancient Greece and Rome to current East Asia: the "Twisted Path" of democracy when democratic elections produce Hitler and Naziism, when Central Europe produced autocratic regimes, and when Sun Yat Sen's democracy-aspiring China produce Mao's autocratic communist regime; together with the "Illiberal Democracy of post-Communist Russia and C. Asia, of S. America and India Pakistan with elected autocrats, with the realities of India's yet feudal democracy. Also that of post-Sukarno Indonesia. In these, hyper nationalism and war mongering were significant characteristics which helped autocrats in power.

In the middle of the book is a frank analysis of, "The Islamic Exception", a region which is "the political basket case of the world". It is an

interesting analysis by a liberal Muslim of the problems of the Islamic world, the cleft stick in which it finds itself at the end of the 20th century, the peculiar social and political milieu of the Arab world "stuck in a time warp"; failed politics, failed economics and failed westernisation; the rise of fundamentalist religion and the problems of democratizing people with unearned: untaxed wealth from oil and gas, and the absence of real hard-working enterprise in the creation of new wealth with taxation. Zakaria seems to have missed the findings of the World Values Survey, 1995-2000, in which the real cultural divide between the democratic West and autocratic Islam lay in the inequalities between the sexes. Sexual liberalisation seems to be the most reliable indicator of tolerance and egalitarianism.

The fourth part is a very interesting inside critique of American democracy in "Too Much of A Good Thing" and "The Death of Authority", both leading to less good governance, less credibility for governments; and the decline of the elite. Although Zakaria makes no comparisons with India, his