Gramsci's Concept Of Hegemony

“The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters.”

? Antonio Gramsci

Coming from a backward region of Italy, Sardinia, Gramsci understood the dynamics of both the third world countries and developed capitalist societies. He was shunned in his society due to his hunchback rendering an understanding the marginalized. He was imprisoned by his government and is work should be read bearing his life and the then political structure of his state. Gramsci was fascinated by the process of modernization and equaled it to the industrialization, flowing in from the USA. He was favorable to the mechanized life of the workers and how the body and the life outside the factory is also disciplined by the rules and rigidity of the industrialization. Even though against Capitalism, he argues that the social relations outside the life of the factory is disorderly and chaotic and the belief that the ‘parasitic sediments’ of the few aristocratic elites of the UK will become non- existent because of the advent of the Americanism. He believed that this introduction of new productive process has greatly influenced and drew on new habits and modes of socialization. He favored Fordism and believed that the increased mechanization of worker and being stripped of the human content does not result in the ‘spiritual death’ of the worker.

By favoring modernism (Mechanization) Gramsci forget to underline the negative aspects of mechanization. This new world order, neoliberalism, a product of the mechanization has pushed the state at the peripheral rendering that the individuals as responsible for their position and lives in the society. The state acts only a middleman between the ‘few haves’ and the ‘others’. His perception on the new mechanized world didn’t include the body and mental harm, the exploitation, the burgeoning gap between the poor and the rich, the widening lines between the deserved and the undeserved.

From this form of modernization and increased mechanization Gramsci talks about the concept of ‘hegemony’. In a nutshell, hegemony is the ‘dominance of on social group over the other’ that is in the society the dominant few organizes the power through consent but in Politics it is through coercion and direct domination. Gramsci’s major shift of focus from Marxism is that the latter philosophy was characterized by economy, but Gramsci focused on 3 important factors of ‘superstructure’ is politics, culture and ideology and how these are interrelated and less schematic and systematic. He goes on to say that it is not a system, or a process of mere opinion or manipulation but a body of practices and expectations ingrained slowly through the institutions to render power not by overpowering competing social view but by disqualifying its authenticity through a few social fractions.

How does the hegemony strive? He explains it through the concept of ‘common sense’. It takes on a countless different form and is not limited to one specific time or space but is dynamic and ambiguous taking on different forms of concept. It is through common sense, a form of ‘everyday thinking’ that makes the oppression and inequality a normalcy to the subjugated group. How can the process of hegemony with the help of common sense be undermined? He explains it with concept ‘intellectuals’ and he says that all human beings are

intellectuals and are active participants in ‘permanent persuader’ which entwines with the core of the social work profession and how the social workers aim at negating the monopoly of service by the ‘few’ and the ideologies aiming to subjugate the ‘other’. He goes on to say that in order to achieve this there should be a rise of ‘organic intellectuals’ arising from their own group and class to usurp the existing oppressive structure as opposed to ‘traditional intellectuals’. And, here social worker acts as a platform for the ‘organic intellectuals’ to grow, organize, choose, educate and to represent themselves and his/her group against the oppressive neoliberal structure. The social worker and the profession act as ‘modern prince’, a collective dynamic process aimed at bringing in and developing an equilibrium across the social and political relations. And how can a social worker achieve this or be the agent for the voices of the oppressed?

Developing on Solon’s wok Know Thyself, Gramsci talks about how social change can be ignited only through developing a clear, coherent conception of the world through an understanding of the daily experiences ‘others’ and being critically reflexive. Gramsci fails to explore the effect of mechanization toward the ‘others’ by the hegemonic ruling class. In the profession of Social Work, the constant monitoring (surveillance) and the process of orientation can and will lead to careful conduct of the social workers favoring the State and its agenda in the interest of saving his/her own interest and freedom. But, with Gramsci’s understanding of ‘Commonsense’ the social work profession can/is questioning the oppressive nature of the State and the ‘few’ through self-reflection and comprehension of the State’s institutions. Gramsci’s understanding of the oppressive nature of the language helps the social workers and the profession to fight and avoid the State’s totality through careful usage and avoidance of the oppressive nature of language.