

## BOOK REVIEW

*Adoption: Global Perspectives and Ethical Issues*, edited by J. Pati, 2007, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, Pages 314, Price: Rupees 650.

This book is a collection of work by noteworthy scholars and practitioners in the adoption field and edited by one who has been officially connected with the process of adoption for many years. It gives a clear picture of the scenario of transnational adoption. The pertinent ethical concerns raised, makes it relevant and useful for both—those who are working in the field and those who have adopted a child. The book steers clear of the emotive and focuses on the issues as objectively as possible.

From the beginning, the book locates adoption within the broad framework of child rights. One of the major global trends in the field of adoption is inter-country or transnational adoption. Along with the increase in inter-country adoption; there has also been more recognition and discussion of child rights violation that might happen during the adoption process. A book, therefore, that talks about adoption as a global phenomena and ethical concerns at each step of this process, is important.

The book is divided into three parts: Part I is titled 'Childhood, Attachment Issues and Child Rights'; Part II is titled 'Adoption: Some Global Issues' and Part III as 'Ethical Issues'. The reader thus journeys from the discussion on the concepts of childhood and attachment within the framework of institutional and non-institutional services to adoption procedures and transnational adoption to salient ethical dilemmas and practices in adoption placement.

The ten constructions of childhood given in the first chapter are ten ways in which childhood is conceptualised from the past to present. It offers different perspectives of understanding childhood, and therefore, service provision for child care. The second chapter titled 'Strengthening Family Efforts for Helpless Children' is about the importance and responsibility of the family towards children. However, the conceptualisation of children as 'helpless innocents' and judgmental language without proper referencing diminishes the professional and academic credibility of the chapter. The third chapter has discussed the concept of attachment and the influence of institutionalisation on attachment. The last chapter of the section again highlights the rights of children in the context of United Kingdom. The first part, thus, succeeds in creating a conceptual background to the remaining sections of the book.

Part II on global issues related to adoption opens with a debate on whether the adoption should include disclosure and contact with the birth parents of the adopted child. Different types of 'openness' in adoption have been discussed and studies on open adoption have been considered for reaching a stand on the issue. While giving pros and cons on each option related to open adoption, the authors have highlighted the need to weigh the benefits of open adoption against the risks or negative possibilities of open adoption in case of children with pre-adoptive risks such as poor parenting, parental abuse, previous foster placements, older children and adoptions made as a result of involuntary termination of parental rights. The authors note that in open adoptions, the agency's role will continue long after the adoption procedure is completed. Ultimately, the authors conclude that the thumb rule of 'best interests of the child' needs to prevail.

A country-wise profiling of adoptees to United States has been done in the second chapter of Part II. While talking about the traditional adoptions and modern adoptions in US, the authors provide data about the trends in the adoption scenario in terms of Asian and European sending countries, age and gender of adoptees. The discussion on both within and inter-country adoption revolves around three issues: socio-cultural context in relation to family formation or expansion with adoption, the availability of potential adoptees in the country, and the ease of adopting available children in a particular country in the eco-political context at a particular time.

Chapter 7, *Negotiating Identity: Post-colonial Reflections on Transnational Adoption*, starts with a solemn experience of the author related to his visit to Goree Island, which was a centre of the transatlantic

slave trade, and his account of the African American tourists visiting the island with the wish to “come to terms with the past, a search for an Africa and an identity that only existed in the imagination” (p. 138). The comparison of their search and the search of the transnational adoptees for identity is thought provoking and challenges the comforting notion that a child adopted from another country is “reborn and lives happily ever after in his/her new family”. The chapter succinctly points out complexities while dealing with the issue of identity of the adopted child in transnational adoption in the structurally unequal world.

Part III titled ‘Ethical Issues’ opens with the first chapter on the ethical concerns related to reproductive technology related to privacy of the donor, identity development of the child, desire to keep infertility a secret, and risks involved in controlling and manipulating nature not only for the family, but also for the human species in the long run.

Chapter 9 ‘Ethical Dilemmas in Adoption Counselling’ succinctly outlines the ethical dilemmas while counselling birth parents, adoptive parents and adoptees.

A very relevant and child-centric discussion takes place in chapter 10 on the issue of escorting children in inter-country adoption by persons other than the adoptive parents. While it is recognised that in certain cases, especially, when there is political unrest in the birth country there might not be any other option, a strong case is made for adoptive parents to escort the child. Very useful and practical suggestions are offered that would enhance the emotional wellbeing as well as cultural/contextual knowledge regarding the child’s birth country during this process. In cases where escorting will have to happen, the authors have given a well-framed comprehensive protocol that highlights the principle of ‘in the best interests of the child’.

The next chapter takes the point of the cultural heritage of the adoptee and gives information about heritage camps and tours for Indian children and their adoptive parents. The author, herself, is also one of the persons who takes such groups on heritage camps in India through an organisation called SPICE – Supportive Parents and Indian Children Everywhere.

The last chapter, titled ‘Ethical Practices and Safeguards in Adoption Placement’, concludes the discussion on ethics in adoption by linking the international tools to ensure child rights, like the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Inter-country Adoption (1993) to various

aspects of adoption. The chapter is very comprehensive and gives ethical guidelines on costing by the adoption agencies, pre-adoptive counselling—not only to the adoptive parents, but also to the birth parents as well as adoptees, and post adoptive counselling. It also effectively builds the case for various safeguards put in place by the concerned authorities like the Central Adoption Resource Agency (CARA) to protect rights of the children. The chapter successfully upholds the principle behind adoption—that it is a means to provide families for children, rather than children for families.

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