

Indigenising Social Work Education: An Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The present paper is a review based article written on the needs of social work education in Indian context. The researcher had made an attempt to critically review the research works and articles written by scholars on the topics of social work education in India and the need to make it indigenised and more applicable to Indian communities. The researcher had used the reviews which have been studied while doing his doctoral research review work. The researcher had written this article with the reflections from his own practice and experiences while working as an assistant professor in department of social work. The article focuses on social work education and its need to make it suitable, application and relevant in Indian context. The studies made and reviews written on the particular topic were critically studied during the PhD research work. The research gap thus found out that, there is urgent need to redesign the social work curriculum and develop new theories that can fit the India society. The article had travelled right through the history of social work education in India to the contemporary challenges of social work education in India.

Keywords: *Indigenous Social Work Practice, Social Work Education*

INTRODUCTION

Social work education comprises social work theory and social work practice. A social work educator imparts social work education in the training institute. Social work students are placed in different fieldwork settings so that they can get hand-on experiences and exposure to social work agencies and community realities. Social work students are also placed in different government and non- government organisations. Theory taught in classrooms, methods and procedures learnt in the classrooms are

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then experimented in the closed setting of field work or open settings of field work; this experimentation learning by doing is carried out in guided supervision of a qualified professional social worker.

The field experience is where and when students connect the theoretical concepts learned in the classroom with the practical aspects of service provision while also gaining an appreciation for the breadth and depth of the many roles that a social worker performs. This approach is compatible with John Dewey's philosophy of progressive education in which students learn by doing (Scannell & Simpson, 1996).

CONCEPT OF FIELD WORK IN SOCIAL WORK

The dictionary of sociology and related sciences defines field work as a social survey or process of collecting primary data from a population distributed geographically. In sociological context it is quite true but field work in social work education is quite different. Field work is any kind of practical experience in a social organisation or agency and community if this experience has been deliberately arranged for the education of students who are undertaking courses partly or wholly designed for those who intend to become social workers (Shrinivas, 1979).

Field work in social work education is a guided interaction process between a student and the actual and practical life situation in which social work as a profession has an abiding and deep concern which needs to be remedied and improved for a fuller and complete development of human environmental potential. Field work in social work is carried in and through social welfare agencies and communities where the students learn skills and test out knowledge according to an educational plan. The whole programme is students and field specific. The field work training is supervised under the guidance of trained social work educator or field personnel. It has been defined as an educational sponsored attachment of social work students to an institution agency or a section of community in which they are helped to extend their knowledge and understanding, and experience the impact of human needs. Such an experience is deliberately arranged on a whole or part time basis. Field work implies both training and education. It is functional in nature and technical in process. It involves an educational process that fosters learning in students. It is an integrated approach that goes concurrently with class room instructions (Lorenz, 2001)

SPECIALISATIONS IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION: AN OLD UNANSWERED PUZZLE

Indian social work education is still countering the same puzzle today which was asked more than seven decades ago. The questions are raised to its core cause, practicability, objectives, and aims. In other words, what purpose social work students are trained for? What fields, future the students will have after completion of social work education? What are the professional and knowledge base inputs for social work profession incorporated for the society? Almost every institution of social work prepares students for practice in social services and social welfare service. Some institutions even claim that they prepare students for leadership responsibilities in social policy, social planning, and social administration; and there are no well defined categories of welfare personnel for which social work training is considered essential at the present time even after more than seventy years since the establishment of the first institution. There are however four fields of practice, labelled as Human Resource Management, Urban and Rural Community Development, Family and Child Welfare, and Medical-Psychiatric social work, where social work training is given preference. The present module is borrowed from the American social work education model. The impression one gets in the above discussion is that the Indian social work education is influenced by American social work which is concerned only with curative function. According to Mandal (1989), American social work has remained primarily oriented to a curative model and it is mainly the curative part of American social work, which has influenced the social work in India. This has made it irrelevant to the prime need of Indian society.

EMERGENCE OF SPECIALISATION IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

The introduction of specialisations in social work emerged in the post-independence period primarily under the American influence and partly due to the felt need. Tata Institute has been the pioneer in social work education in India. The specialisation in medical and psychiatric social work was started at the Tata Institute by an American expert from the University of Louisville, Kentucky. She planned the classroom instructions and field work for this specialisation at its initiation. She was at the Tata Institute between the years 1946 to 1948. In the meantime, an alumna of the Tata Institute was sent to the University of Chicago to

undergo training in medical and psychiatric social work. On her return, this alumna was made in charge of the specialisation when the American expert left. Similarly, the preparatory work for family and child welfare specialisation was undertaken by an American expert from Merrill-Palmer Foundation, USA, during 1946-47, when she was at the Tata Institute. The specialisation was actually introduced in 1949 under the headship of an Indian faculty, trained at the University of Michigan. The introduction of criminology and correctional administration specialisation in the Tata Institute was preceded by offering of a six-month programme by two UN experts. The specialisation was formally started in 1953 under the head-ship of an Indian who was deputed for advanced study in that field at the Ohio State University. A specialisation named Group Work and Community Organisation was introduced in the Tata Institute in 1952, headed by an alumnus trained in the US. This ultimately became the specialisation of urban and rural community development specialisation (Mandal, 1989).

The field of community organisation and community development in social work remains marginal partly because it is primarily in rural communities where community development programmes are functioning and partly because separate institutions exist for the training of rural workers and public administrators. Moreover, community organisation in urban areas has not made much headway though some experiments were launched in the early sixties. The contribution of social work in tribal welfare has been fairly active in offering specialised courses in it during the sixties and the seventies and till present.

DIFFUSION OF AMERICANISM: DILEMMAS AND PROBLEMS

After reviewing the article of Mandal (1989), it is seen that the motivation for the founding of college institution in social work in India came from the United States, and Indian institutions borrowed almost the entire framework and pattern of American social work education. Possibly, the single most important factor which led to further Americanisation of Indian social work education was the bilateral agreement of technical assistance and exchange programme in 1956 in which the social work education council of America sent their consultants and faculty members to the selected Indian school of social work and American council brought the Indian social work educators and trainers to selected institutions on social

work education in America. In addition, two or three American social work educators were sent to India to work as social welfare attached in the American Embassy who exerted great influence on the direction of Indian social work education. Most American consultants who went to India had very little knowledge and understanding of India's long historical, religious, and philosophical traditions which continue to dominate Indian social life.

Neither had they any basic informative knowledge about the socio-economic and political goals to which the society had committed itself under its Constitution and the Five Year Plans. Moreover, in terms of their own training and experience, most of them had very little exposure to the cultural-anthropological, sociological, and public administrative literature of America or any other society which could have helped them to understand the major problems and issues confronting the Indian society. Through the efforts of American consultants, however, these schools which had very little or no field work training programme, were assisted to establish some type of field work practice. Some improvements were also carried out in the teaching of courses on social casework and social group work. The most important role which these consultant played relates to the organisation of some seminars where representatives of different social work institutions were brought together to exchange their views which ultimately led to the formation of Association of Schools of Social Work in India. Nagpaul (1986) in an analysis of social work studied materials in use in India in 1972 and 1986. He observes, "The dominance of American publications is so striking that one wonders how students could integrate any concept, theory or technique based upon American cultural ideologies into the practice of social work in Indian welfare settings". This association has survived for more than three decades and has published reports of several seminars organised by it from time to time. However, in recent years, the association has lost its enthusiasm and vigour, and is on its way to becoming an important organisation because many member schools are uncooperative in maintaining and improving the quality of social work education. The overall impact of these developments was substantial which took social work education further towards Americanisation.

EVOLVING APPREHENSIONS OF SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IN INDIA

India has been the economy of agriculture and the shift from the traditional ethos and social fabric of the nation had an international global economy

has had a deep effect on the country. The effects of globalisation has made every individual to respond to its changing nature and put forth the challenges to adapt, adjust, and change according to new identities. The ideas have become global and the individuals are restricted to be more individualistic in nature. The emerging new individualism had forced that communities have had to actively constitute and construct individual identities and capabilities to prove and fit for a changing world. The formation of individual identities has resulted into the tension between the past and future. The tension with traditional cultures in India is to value relative interdependence, group living, and community cohesiveness.

Although we continue to refine standards of social work education, it is important to think about social work education emerging from the contemporary situations. A core question is how to tackle with the changing notions with individual self which is directly or indirectly associated with globalisation. In Indian context traditional cultural is one of communal identity. Indian philosophical questions may arise like ‘who are human beings?’ and ‘what is the duty and responsibilities of human being?’ that need to be revealed more, in order to enrich the value base of the profession and add to the wisdom of social work education.

The result of this modification of identity and individualism is that the indigenous forms of social structure and functions are upset and restructured without democratic manner, political argument, any government decisions, and/or any rebel or revolution from the society. Relatively every individual has been forced to accept the changes in the social structures and to handle a whole range of paradoxes as well as personal and global jeopardies. The modern globalised individual identities then are forced to create their own identities and reflections. The act of individualisation is imposed on the individuals and is compulsory shaped by global forces to adjust to the new social structure and economy.

It can be argued that the discomfort experienced by all marginalised communities is strengthened by the individualism as demands by globalisation. The present situation roots misery for the individualisation by framing structure and functional social problems within a personality and shifting the reasonability for problem solving on the individuals. Specifically, communities are left alone and held responsible for development in the context of structural and functional factors that create poverty and starvation. The social picture of India suggests to interlink the local social problem and social work which must respond to the changing context of Indian society. Social work professional development calls for

a form of local enhancement that is not simply the adoption of the western capitalist competitive culture but addresses local indigenous problems.

THE CONTEXT OF INDIGENOUS

To be a professional social worker, 'knowledge about how the indigenous context exclusively affects the relationship between individuals and their surrounding' is essential (Martinez-Brawley, 1986: 103). Knowledge about physical geography and rural economics is necessary, so that the physical and economic characteristics of the region and their impact on the rural people are understood. Knowledge of the indigenous context is likely to be multi-disciplinary because the Indian environment involves infra and super structural variables (Martinez-Brawley, 1986: 103). A rural social worker, participating in Riebschleger's (2007: 209) study, makes a frank statement regarding this: 'And you cannot have a big ego about what you know because what you need to know is so much more than any one person can possibly know. According to other professionals and their insights, it's just essential.'

Valuing people's right to self-determination is necessary to seek their participation in the process of finding solutions, which makes the development more sustainable. When we talk to people about development they have clarity about their needs and are able to decide priorities. Both of these imply basic respect for the people and their worldviews. In the words of a professional social worker, 'People going into rural practice need... to have a humility and respect for... the people who live there... and their views of the world... You're not just someone who is coming in, improving the culture...' (Riebschleger, 2007: 209), thus working in rural community and in general working in community development field requires different set of skills. Present social work education institutions as training centres for skilled social workers merely understand the need of indigenising the social work practice in India and in Maharashtra. Social work education with inception of philanthropic social work practice has travelled path of professional practice and now more advanced specialised practice of social work. Social work education and community development has a strong bound, thus giving social work students hand on experiences is essential for social work institutions.

PROPOSED MODEL OF INDIGENISING SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

The influence of American social work still exists in the social work practice in India. The present scenario of development of social work education in India shows that though as an education stream, professional social work has failed to establish itself as a professional body of knowledge. Gore and Gore (1977: 265-66) observe that as social work education in the US leaned heavily on curative social work mainly through case work, the American influence made social work education in India more concerned with method and techniques of work. It de-emphasised the needs of social and economic development, promotion of preventive services, and social action-the prime need of the country in the post-independence era.

Table 1: Need of Indigenising Social Work

<i>S. No.</i>	<i>Present Scenario of Professional Social Work</i>	<i>Need of indigenising</i>	<i>Rationale</i>
1.	Students of social work are exposed to field work directly.	Context of Indian community has to be understood with indigenous perspective.	Sustainable development need to participative, people have their own worldviews.
2	Social work methods found to more client centric.	In larger population like India, problems are at mass level thus community reconstruction practices have to be addressed.	Social work methods were designed in USA thus has to reorganised such that they can be applied in Indian context.
3	Social work do not have any own theory, the theoretical base is not indigenous.	To Understand Indian society and the theory, context of Indian culture has to be understood indigenously.	The adopted foreign theory and social work practice method are found to be extraneous.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, it is found out that at the early stage of social work inception, social work education in India was influenced by American ideas; attempts

were made to make it relevant to the Indian society. But post-independence, social work education in India has been casted under close contact with social work education in America. Being moulded in hegemony of a client centric module of social work, social work education in India has become irrelevant to the need of Indian society because what is needed in Indian society is a primarily preventive and macro-based social work. The Indian context with India perspective has been missing in the theory which guides the social work practice. Thus the philosophy, knowledge, values, and methods of social work education are more American and the same set of knowledge is found to be used in the totally different set of value system culture like India. Thus it is leading to mismatch of theory of social work and practice as a professional social work. There is a loophole in what is been taught in the classrooms of schools of social work, nature of field work, and social work practice.

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