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## **PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES FOR SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IN INDIA: SOME RECOMMENDATIONS**

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### **1. Introduction**

India is very fortunate to have a good beginning of professional Social Work under the leadership of Sir Clifford Manshardt, the founder director of its first school of Social Work, now popularly known as Tata Institute of Social Sciences at Mumbai. This visionary personality enunciates that professional training in Social Work stands for soundness of essential principles of education, for flexibility of method and for a working relationship with the whole professional field that will give both perspective and depth to its educational program. While the school, as a graduate institution (at the time of inception) sought to maintain high academic standard, it also sought to be eminently practical, applying the best of modern social thought to the solution of the present day social problems. He believed that scholarly activities are not incompatible with simplicity and commonsense, and that the professional Social Worker is to develop his ability to give himself an intelligent, skillful and disinterested service to others. To be eminently practical, Manshardt propounded that the activities of a high grade school of Social Work should fall into three general fields: the Academic Curriculum encompassing adequate knowledge of human nature, appreciation of environmental background, an adequate philosophy and conception of normal human relations and knowledge of all other available sources of relief; practical work or Field Work and Social Research which is both scholarly and accurate while being eminently practical dealing with the everyday problems of social life (Manshardt, 1985, 5).

In India, professional social work owe its origin to a short-term training course on social service organized by the social service league at Bombay. The training course included those men and women who were willing to volunteer them for social service. Till that time social workers did not get any salary of remuneration for their work. It was simply a social service to the needy people guided by the principle of humanity. Later on, the Tata School of Social Sciences was established in the year of 1936 in



Bombay. The institute started a course of professional training in social work. In the year 1947 another school of social work known as Delhi School of Social Work was established. In the same year Kashi Vidyapeeth, Varanasi and Baroda similar schools were started (Bhattacharya, 2011: 85).

Seventy five years of professional Social Work in India has been marked by few triumphs and too many travails that warrant a serious discussion on what the future holds for a 'profession' beleaguered by several internal and external constraints and considerations including Inbreeding in several institutions, lack of indigenous literature, weightage for fieldwork, and the fact that most social work educators are not practitioners unlike the counter parts in several developed countries. Hardly any genuine effort made for Continuous Professional Development (CPD), development of field (service) action projects, non-professionals at education and training, lack of standards in education and training, strengthening of national bodies, and for establishing a 'National Council for Social Work Education and Training in India'.

## **2. Objectives**

To look in to the history and growth of social work education in India

To introspect the problems and challenges

To draws the recommendations in three dimensions to address those problems and challenges both exiting and expected in the futures also.

The University Grants Commissions appointed the First Review Committee for Social Work Education in 1960 and the Second Review Committee in 1975 for the promotion, maintenance of standards of education, coordination of social work education, training, research and practice. The important recommendation of the review committee was to establish National Council in Social Work Education for the promotion and development of social work education in India. The third review committee in 2001 spoke the need of relating social work education to the social realities. It recommended the curriculum to be divided in three sets. These are: 1) Core set includes the philosophy, ideology, values, ethics, theory and concepts. 2) The supportive set deals with knowledge and skills to assist the core set. 3) The interdisciplinary set includes theories, concepts from other disciplines which relates with social work according the students choice (Thomas: 2010).

## **3.Geographical Distribution of Social Work Educational Institutions in India**

There are about 350 schools in India as per the sources gathered from experts



of social work from across the country. The geographical distribution is as shown in the table-1. Among those Karnataka marked with 72 schools/departments, Maharashtra marked with 60 and several south Indian states occupied large number of social work institutions. Jammu & Kashmir, Uttarakand, Himachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur and Bihar only marked with one school/department and there are no schools at all in five of the North-East States.

It is also observed that most of the social work educational institutions are located in urban areas; students practice fieldwork in urban places and prefer jobs in cities and metropolis. However, social work professionals are most needed in rural areas where about 70 percent of the population lives.

Prof. Sanjay Bhatt clearly categorized development of social work education in to various stages such as:

1. Initiation/ Inception (1936-46):

It is denoted by establishment of Sir Dorabji Tata Graduate School of Social work established in 1936 and now called as Tata Institute of Social Science (TISS)

2. Experimentation (1947-56):

In this phase, Delhi School of Social Work, Kashi Vidyapith, Gujarat Vidyapith and similar other institutions were established.

3. Expansion (1957-76):

In this phase, many social work educational institutions in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and other states were established and there was expansion in terms of number of institutions across the length and breadth of the country.

4. Moderation/Stagnation (1977-86):

Unlike expansion phase, in this period not see many new social work education institutions in the country.

5. Explosion (1987)

This phase crossed the 200 mark in terms of social work institutions in India (Thomas: 2010).

It is also observed that most of the social work educational institutions are



located in urban areas; students practice fieldwork in urban places and prefer jobs in cities and metropolis. However, social work professionals are most needed in rural areas as a huge majority of population lives in rural areas.

#### **4. The Problems and Challenges**

Keeping in view of above all the realities, the author has listed out some of the problems and challenges related to professional social work education in India which need to be addressed collectively for improving the standards, enhancing the recognition of the profession and developing literature in consonance with the social context and work force requirements apart from achieving National Council for Social Work.

##### **4.1. Public Recognition of Professional Social Work(er)**

Lack of public recognition of social work as a profession is another critical shortcoming that has a lot to do with its future prospects in India. The notion of the professional social work in the people's mind is in contradiction to an idealized image of conventional social service worker who possess the sterling qualities of heart rather than of mind. The idea of a paid professional social worker is still an anathema to most people in India who even now cling to the notion that doing social work is quintessentially a voluntary activity of a selfless kind. Under Indian conditions 'service' and 'sacrifice', this is selfless and without any remuneration, is looked upon as higher. A paid social worker, however good, efficient and capable, is more likely to be looked down upon by the people whom he/she serves as a professional. With no self-sacrifice to his/her credit, many persons would not regard the professional social worker as a social worker at all. They would regard him/her as an 'officer', a 'para-professional' or a 'mercenary' (Srivatsava: 1999).

##### **4.2. Low Prevailing Level**

The prevailing level of Indian social services and welfare services is extremely low and that most of the voluntary welfare agencies lack the necessary resources to meet some of the basic human needs of common people. Even the Central Social Welfare Board which assists financially more than 12,000 voluntary social welfare agencies has failed to promote the cause of professional social work. Actually, the Board which employs a large number of specialists has not given proper representation to professional social workers. It is true that formal education for social work has taken root and about thirty institutions offering graduate courses at present, besides many other which are imparting training in related fields both at the graduate and undergraduate levels. It is also true that a number of organizations do exist which continue to promote the cause of professional social work. But there is no denying the



fact that both Indian social work education and its professional organizations have been propagating a system of social work which derives its inspiration mainly from American social work philosophy with its ideas, techniques, structure and goals (Ranjana: 2009).

#### **4.3. Lack of Indigenous Materials or Literature:**

The major shortcoming of social work education in India is its inability to sufficiently indigenize its knowledge-base. The basic teaching material with respect to interventionist methods (the holy trinity of social case work, social group work and community organisation) is still primarily American. The challenge, as mentioned before, has not been met and there is often a lingering doubt in the mind of many social work educators and trained social workers whether social work in India can afford to be only concerned with specific individuals, groups and communities when the problems are really the problems of large masses of people (Gore, 1985:151). Many of the problems that are identified as problems of the socially oppressed and economically deprived sections cannot be called adjustmental problems (to use the American phraseology). The social and cultural context of these problems is well beyond the reach of moral-ethical and /or psycho-social paradigm of intervention (Srivatsava: 1999).

Since social work literature, modes of practice, approaches, theories, have been heavily borrowed from western countries, so we need to develop the indigenous approaches too. This requires that the academicians and practitioners must document their experiences so as to facilitate the process of developing indigenous approaches (Thomas: 2010).

At this juncture the authors glad to expresses that School of Social Work (SOSW) at Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) contributed a lot and lot for the social work education by developing social work materials indigenously under the dynamic leadership of Professor Gracious Thomas, with the support of several eminent social work educators, from different central and state level universities of India as well as from several foreign universities.

#### **4.4. Missing of Fundamental Feature:**

The professionals alone have not yet acquired any dominant place to shape and formulate social policies or to administer social welfare organizations. Again, the professional group itself has not developed any social code which the profession also should accept and practice as the fundamental feature of their profession. In view of



the dominance of foreign influence on the existing professional social work in India and its lack of integration with the cultural mores of Indian society, there is as yet no agreement on a professional code of ethics for the practice of social work. The profession has failed to develop consciousness of kind and has not created a common platform to express its point of view on broad issues and problems confronting the society. Moreover, the educational institutions offer very few courses on social administration, social planning and social action, and most of the existing courses do not develop intellectual interest and creativity to promote research orientation. In 1975, one of the leading social work educators wrote that social work had remained almost static for more than 25 years. After a decade this still hold true (Ranjana: 2009).

#### **4.5. Strengthening of Professional Associations**

The absence of effective functioning of professional association of social work practitioners and educators is the most pronounced handicap in professional development in the country. Unless these are revived and made effective, the future of the profession of social work is likely to remain bleak (Nanavathi: 1997).

The history of two national level of Association viz. Indian Association of Trained Social Work (IATSW) and ASWI is a checkered one. In addition to these associations, Regional Associations of trained professional social workers are situated in different states. However only a few of these Regional Associations are active (Gowda: 2010)

In fact, among these national levels associations of the profession, the National Association of Professional Social Worker in India (NAPSWI-2005), Indian Society of Professional Social workers (ISPSW-1970) are doing tremendous work for the professional advancement and for the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of the educators, practitioners as well as learners of social work across the nation by organizing national level seminars and conferences. The Association of Schools of Social Work in India (ASSWI-1959) did lot of work for the profession after its inception for several years, unfortunately now it is not in that much active position.

#### **4.6. National Council for Social Work**

We need to have national level council to maintain the uniform standards of education and give accreditation to institutions as well to practitioners. Efforts have been made to form National Council in the lines of Medical Council of India through discussions between eminent social work educators and practitioners at various fora (Thomas: 2010).



Unless a uniform system of accreditation on all India bases is developed and enforce, the development of social work education and programmes on sound lines is likely to proceed very slowly for a long time. In 1965, one committee recommended the establishment of a national social work council, and then another committee in 1978 supported this recommendation. But no action seems to have been taken in this behalf so far. The second event related to the emergence of a national organization of professional social workers in 1961. Earlier there existed an informal organization of social workers since 1951. This organization, however, had not been effective in attracting a large number of social workers as members (Ranjana: 2009).

#### **4.7. Inbreeding in Several Institutions**

Inbreeding that is appointing their own students within the Departments due to political and other pressures. This is resulting in lack of innovation and very stereotyped disinterested practices in teaching, field work practicum as well as research. By absorbing outside candidates only best practices can be adopted.

#### **4.8. Meager Salaries to Social Work Teachers**

Low salary and job stagnation, high turn-over, easy burnouts are some of the crucial issues that would be resolved if we are able to bring standardization in the social work teaching, and practice and at the same time portray a desirable and advantageous image of social work profession in the country (Ranjana: 2009). Paying Meager Salaries to Social Work Teachers lead to poor quality of teaching, practicum and research and best practices cannot be adopted.

#### **4.9. Social Work Educators are not Practitioners**

When the educators, practitioners and students are talking about social work as a profession like medicine, law, and engineering etc. the professors of medical college or university practice their profession by visiting wards of hospital along with the medical students, professors of engineering college involve in practice and professors of law college also practice their profession and update their knowledge levels, enhance their competencies to deal with the issues.

In social work, the holistic view on teaching, practice and research is missing very much, majority Social Work Educators are found to be comfortable in conventional classroom teaching and rarely found in practice and research domains.

#### **4.10.No activity for Continuous Professional Development (CPD)**

According to UGC there are 250 schools/departments of social work in India.



Most of them not doing anything for the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in the form of conducting Workshops, organizing Seminars, doing research studies, conducting survey, begging field action projects from funding organizations, taking students for study tours to out of the state. Through field action projects/field work labs at the departments/schools lead to the growth opportunity to the staff, learning opportunity to researchers and students.

#### **4.11. Non-Professionals**

The conducted seminar by Association of Schools of Social Work in India (ASSWI) disapproved of the practice of appointing persons who are not trained in social work as members of boards of examiners and board of studies in social work and selection committees for appointing social work teachers by the universities (Nair: 1981). In the same way only social work professionals can teach, guide and train the students of social work like medicine students can only be trained by medical professors, law students only can be capacitated by the law graduates likewise same will be applicable for social work profession, but unfortunately, In some universities and colleges other discipline teachers such as anthropology, psychology, sociology, geography teach the social work students.

#### **4.12. No Uniform Syllabus and Lack of Standards in Education and Training**

We need to standardize the quality of education and training that are provided by numerous schools of social work across the country. These social work educational institutions differ from each other in terms of curricula, generic course vs. specialization offered, activities, focus, duration, training inputs of fieldwork components and so on. There should be minimum standard of education and fieldwork training inputs provided to students in these institutions (Thomas: 2010).

Across the nation no university is following homogeneous syllabus, guidelines and other standards. Several schools/Departments are not giving any importance for practicum; simply the students are being awarded with the degrees. Undoubtedly standard of education in social work is not that much good.

#### **4.14 Lack of Awareness on ODL**

In spite of over thirty years of the existence of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system in the country and over 40 years of the existence of social work education through ODL in several advanced countries, the social work fraternity in India are yet to recognize the need, relevance, scope and feasibility of ODL for social work education in India. The principal tenet in distance education is social inclusion,



justice and equity. In educational management these principles play a crucial role in making available the fruits of development across the different sections of people aiming at fundamental social work principles of social justice and equity.

Distance Education (DE) and Correspondence Education (CE) are not same. DE is based on multimedia approach. In India there is a Distance Education Council which has a mandate to certify the standards and quality of Distance Education Programmes in various disciplines. All the programmes of IGNOU, the largest Open University in the world has the approval of University Grants Commission (UGC), Distance Education Council (DEC) and the Association of Indian Universities (AIU). In fact, National Association of Social Work (NASW), International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) and several councils of social workers in many countries have approved and recognized Distance Education Programmes for several decades now.

#### **4.15. Developing Field (Service) Action Projects**

The University Grants Commission (UGC) clearly mentioned in its major of areas of concern for the development of social work education and training in India that is development of field and field service project to provide learning opportunity to the students, growth opportunity to the staff and service opportunity to the people. But the process of developing projects and executing is missing a lot.

### **5. Recommendations**

Social Work Education is being shaped by University Departments; the quality of University Departments would define the quality of Social Work Education. If the university departments of central and state level have a collective Vision and Mission from three different angles or dimensions then it can lead to a better articulation of the Social Work Education. The three dimensional approach is:

The first dimension is the legacy of the schools/departments in terms of:

- Its Vision and Mission
- Its conviction for value based Social Work Education
- Its conviction to train students as compassionate and competent change agents in the society
- Its ability to provide learning opportunities through class room interaction library and internet resources.
- Provision of positive learning experience through field action projects



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- The departments contribution to the advancement of the profession
  - Its contribution for inter departmental cooperation
  - Its contribution for generation of knowledge in the form of publications
  - Its contribution for organizing events of Continuous Professional Development (CPD)
  - Its contribution in research- both theoretical and applied.
  - Its interface with Governmental Organizations (GOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Corporate Organizations (COs) and the larger civil society
  - Its efforts to promote scholastic performance among staff and students.
  - Its strength of Alumni and Alma matter relationships should be improved and streamlined

The second dimension is Social Work Educators need to maintain:

- Conviction and competency in teaching
- Track record in practice in the form of field action projects or direct practice
- Contribution in the area of research both theoretical and applied
- Educators contribution to the advancement of professional organization
- Educators interface with Governmental Organizations (GOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Corporate Organizations (COs) and the larger civil society
- Educators contribution in the mentoring the young Social Work Learners.

The third dimension is to focus on Community action by Schools of Social Work

- The national and state level professional bodies
- The national and state level regular events for Continuous Professional Development (CPD)
- The national and state level advocacy initiatives
- The national and state level lobbying efforts

To address the problems and challenges in a systematic manner by strengthening social work education in India. By absorbing this three dimensional



approach, Social Work Education can be shaped in more effective manner to overcome the problems and challenges. Finally, The Human Resources needs to be built through training & development, consolidated by practice, harnessed in sustained action and amalgamated into character.

## 6. Conclusion

Seventy five years of professional social work in India has been marked by few triumphs and too many travails that warrant a serious discussion on what the future holds for a 'profession' beleaguered by several internal and external constraints and considerations. During the period of seven and half decades after its inception in India achievements are very few the problems and challenges are very many. In this paper the author tried to consolidate the problems and challenges, reasons for those and recommendations for addressing those problems and challenges. Teachers, practitioners and learners should come together with collective vision and mission to overcome all those problems and challenges to strengthen the social work education and training in India at least by end of the eight decade.

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