

## Are the gains of social work profession reaching out to people in India effectively?

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### Abstract

It is a matter of pride that social work education in our country has grown over the years appreciably. Today we have a large number of institutions and Universities scattered across the country, which offer social work programmes at different levels as well as involve in a plethora of research pursuit. But has the profession like any other one, been able to deliver substantial outcomes? If not, why?

The fact of the matter is that there is no reason to believe that the gains of the profession are reaching out to the masses to the extent as claimed by Social work pundits. Social work profession is now undeniably at the cross roads. Flaws in the standardization of social work education, lack of awareness about the profession, absence of a strong national association which can take up the causes of social work competently, want of legal immunity to safeguard the professional interests, etc are some of the factors sully social work practice.

The article makes an attempt to look into the factors which plague social work practice in our country.

**Keywords:** standardization, legal immunity, sully

### Introduction

Social work education in our country has grown over the years appreciably. Today we have a large number of institutions and Universities scattered across the country, which offer social work programmes at different levels as well as involve in a plethora of research pursuit. Furthermore, social work education has become popularized in a big way with the advent of ODL, Open and Distance Learning system, instituted by IGNOU, India Gandhi National Open University. It is indeed a matter of pride that our Universities have been able to bring out a surfeit of graduates, post graduates and still higher Degree holders specialized in various areas of social work. Nevertheless it deserves to ask a question. Has the profession like any other one, been able to deliver substantial outcomes, too indispensable to overlook? If not, why? What has gone wrong?

“In the Indian context there is a long way to go to see people addressing issues related with social work employment, its conditions and regulation. At present social work profession is seen struggling at various fronts, for instance, to blend international perspectives on social work practices with the indigenous knowledge and to get a professional status”. (Siddiqui, 2001) [14]. A Literature Review of the availability of Knowledge Base for Social Work Education in India shows that “For any knowledge to be valuable in social work, it has to be relevant to the issues regularly encountered in practice. On the other hand, practice also needs to inform knowledge so that existing theories can be revised where they are at odds with the experiences of practice to make the knowledge rich and contextual for indigenous practice.” (Siddiqui 1984, T.K.Nair 1985, Desai 1997, Narayan 2001) [15, 17, 4, 10].

We have enough and more professional’s practitioner’s academics, but, yes, not visionaries to take out the benefits of social work practice to the common man through and through. Neither promoting social work education nor practicing social

work profession in the way as pursued now is going to make a difference. Only if people feel the indispensability of the services they receive, can professional social work triumph over the overwhelming odds. Notwithstanding the enormous growth of social work education in India, little do the Politicians, Administrators and even Non-Governmental Organizations for that matter, realize the prospects, possibilities and potentialities of social work as a profession. As long as the Government machinery is not convinced and taken into confidence, social work would find it difficult to reach out to people resourcefully. “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”. (Gaurav Tripathi, 2013) [6] “We also need more varied and accurate representations of social work, positive storylines in the soaps with characters that are compassionate and capable. The profession needs to promote its success stories, but social workers are not forthcoming about sharing examples of good practice. (Lucie Heyes, 2014) [8]”.

The article makes an attempt to look into the factors which plague social work practice from catering genuine services for the welfare of mankind.

### Factors sully social work education

Professional education gains relevance only if it pursues an ontological and epistemological logic, particularly with regard to the branch of knowledge which deals with human relationship. It obviously indicates that conceptualizations,

processes, practices, perceptions, theories and visions taught, should not become stereotyped worldwide. Instead, the learning process should provide adequate space for socio-economic realities valid in respective areas. "Professions based on human relationship such as social work must have its knowledge base truly reflecting values, culture, problems of society in which it has to be taught and practiced" (Desai, Narayan 2004) [5]. May be a quick solution to make social work education more pertinent and perfect is to think in terms of indigenization. But then indigenization has a lot of limitations. Hence indigenization need not necessarily bring out the desired results. "Instead of emphasizing social work as a western invention and trying to indigenize it, it seems more appropriate for social workers in developing countries, along with social workers in western and other countries, to emphasize social work as an achievement of human civilization and improve social work practice, education and research". (Huang Yunong and Zhang Xiong, 2008) [7].

How to make social work profession adaptable and adjustable to suit Indian contexts by trying to blend western and indigenous knowledge with local factors? Let that be the debatable point. Ultimately interventions should yield proven results such that social work education reaches the roof and crown of professional standards. "Social work, which is dominated by western world views, concepts, theories, methodologies and so on, should be modified or redefined to respond to diverse social and cultural perspectives in non-western countries" (Huang Yunong and Zhang Xiong, 2008) [7]. Equally unwarranted is trying to internationalize social work education with a view to making it impeccable. It can only help alienate the profession from realities.

Quite often efforts to translate theory into practice do not turn out to be sincere or successful. Case work as a primary method may be cited as an example. "There is a huge gap between theory and practice in social work and there are far more pressing concerns confronting the profession than generating global definitions and standards which further distance us from those whom we seek to serve" (Mel Gray & Jan Fook, 2004) [9]. Social work pundits have hardly applied their minds to finding a way out to the said apprehensions.

It is a fact that dearth of sufficient indigenous study materials is severely crippling the effectiveness of the profession. We have to publish a lot of literature which throws light into the unique socio-cultural characteristics of people and pragmatic knowledge about local issues. Methods and techniques should reflect such academic insights so that interventions designed, will be able to deliver tangible results. It is good to find that almost all social work institutions in our country organize as many seminars/workshops, national as well as international, off and on. How far these activities do justice to social work education? Theoretical deliberations, electrifying debates, rhetorical discussions revolving around technical jargons and enthusiastic interactions are of no use as long as these exercises do not enable social work practitioners to make a worthy change in society. At the end of the day the participants should be able to take along with them resourceful inputs, too simple to put them into virtual practice. Every time a good seminar winds up, an excellent work of literature should come out, which is the wisest way of covering the deficit of indigenous literature.

True that social work education has witnessed quantitative growth, but certainly not in terms of qualitative progress. A

major factor which weakens the cause of social work education is the compromise on field work practicum. Absence of specific methodology, flaws in selection of right Agencies, guidance from unqualified Agency Supervisors, inappropriate evaluation, no uniformity in report preparation, improper presentation of reports, dilution of weekly conferences with Faculty Supervisors, non adherence to a strict code of conduct etc debilitate the very spirit of field work. "Barring, perhaps IGNOU, all distance education programmes treat field work as picnics to welfare organizations; indeed there is no field work, but only four or five field visits" (T.K.Nair.). "In the field work practice, Schools of social work in India face many problems relating to placement of students and end with the evaluation of their performance (Bijayalaxmi Panda and Lalit Mohan Nayak, 2012)" [3].

"Agency based field work utterly lacks in holistic, development, critical and reflective perspective. Community based field work with commitment and proper perspective has to be promoted by Department/Schools of social work in India. Partnership between voluntary organizations and Departments/Schools of social work in India has been thoroughly inadequate. (ibid)".

Documentation is another area which has not yet received the requisite sophistication. Digital revolution is equally applicable to Social workers, who too should become the beneficiaries of digital technology. Unfortunately that is not taking place. "Electronic documentation for diagnosis and coding has become a requirement that takes many professionals out of their comfort zone". (University of New England)

### **Want of due recognition from the Government**

It is an unacknowledged fact that Social Work hitherto has not been able to excel as a profession. "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" (Rambabu Botcha, 2012) [12]. Strangely social work Degree holders prefer to find out a regular Government job irrespective of its nature, rather than opting for a genuine social work career. Why does it take place? The simple reason that the Government has failed to give due recognition to social work as a profession, drives qualified youngsters to accept an employment that comes in their way. May be it is due to the Government's laxity or ignorance or both. No different is the job scenario in non-government sector. After all it is the combination of motivation and academic knowledge which makes a de facto social work practitioner. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are often instrumental in building up social work practitioners. But is that taking place in our country? It is a question to be examined by the researchers. The problem with Social Work even today in India is that it sticks to people's mind as an activity oriented to philanthropy and not as an academic discipline. The reluctance of the Government to reserve jobs exclusively for qualified social workers in areas of social

welfare is the reflection of such a perception. Quite often Government organizations, and even many Non-Governmental Organizations, view social work as some kind of a social service. It is this misconception which has inflicted enough damage to the profession, keeping it completely eclipsed.

Few people have understood the explicit difference between 'social work and social service', 'social work and human services' and 'social work and social welfare'. "Social services are a range of public services provided by government, private, and non-profit organizations. These public services aim to create more effective organizations, build stronger communities, and promote equality and opportunity" (Wikipedia). "Human service is a broadly defined field that encompasses the aim of meeting human needs. It is an interdisciplinary field of study that strives to prevent and address problems as well improve the overall quality of life for clients. Someone who works in the human services industry will work to assist individuals and communities in their everyday lives" (Brescia University, 2014) [2]. "Social work is concerned with the effort to empower and enable people. Social justice is a main priority of the social work field, and those who study it are often working with those directly affected by disenfranchisement and other complex social problems" (ibid). "Social welfare and social work are both terms that refer to the development and provision of public or private social services to promote social justice amongst individuals and groups of individuals. While the term social welfare refers more generally to the well-being of groups and individuals as well as the system of social service delivery, the term social work refers more specifically to the professional practice of delivering these social services. The scientific study of social welfare involves the application of physical science, social science, and technology to the goals of informing social work practice and improving human well-being" (Wikipedia). Academics have a responsibility to widely disseminate the clarity of concepts, nature of benefits, and scope of practice and professional leeway such that no one misuses or wrongly interprets social work. In the best interest of the profession it is imperative that social work is made Government licensed and bonded.

It would be desirable that the Government comes up with an accreditation process to recognize the services of qualified and competent social workers in areas like child welfare, counselling, community development and integration of disabled population. Politicians should take the responsibly of legislating to safe guard the professional interests of social workers so that mankind is not deprived of a great service. The need of the moment is to make registration of social work mandatory. Why not the Government think in terms of constituting a central board akin to 'The Social Workers Registration Board' found in New Zealand or in western world? Such a body can take up the accountability of the registration of Social Workers and also address the employment concerns of budding social workers. The enthusiasm shown by the social work fraternity to pressurize the politicians for the enactment of the bill on the National Council of Professional Social Work in India 2007, today stands nowhere. Had the bill been passed by the Parliament it would have become a pronounced milestone in the standardization of professional social work in India.

### **Strong presence of a national body missing**

Formation of NAPSUI, National Association of Professional Social Workers in India, should be regarded as a big step in the endeavour to organize and empower social workers. But NAPSUI is yet to prove its credentials as to how it is going to address the serious concerns of social workers.

As long as social work practice is in a shambles and as long as it is little recognized as a profession, people are being deprived of the proven benefits of a great branch of knowledge. After all it is the hard work of a committed national organization which brings all the professionals upon a platform under an umbrella, which is what keeps that profession moving forward. It is such organizations which should act as regulatory boards. "In the U.S., social workers must receive a degree from a school of social work accredited by the Council on Social Work Education. In Canada, the educational association is the Canadian Association of Social Work Educators. The professional organization for social workers in the U.S. is the National Association of Social Workers and in Canada it is the Canadian Association of Social Workers". (Association of Social work Boards) [1].

Code of ethics is another area which has not received due attention in social work practice in India. Of course, academic education can highlight the need for professional conduct and obligations of social work practice; but eventually that is a role to be taken up by an accredited social work association. The mission and values of social work, laid down in the code of conduct by NASW is worth reading. "The mission of the social work profession is rooted in a set of core values. These core values, embraced by social workers throughout the profession's history, are the foundation of social work's unique purpose and perspective:

- Service
- Social Justice
- Dignity and Worth of the Person
- Importance of Human Relationships
- Integrity
- Competence.

This constellation of core values reflects what is unique to the social work profession". (NASW, 2013) [11].

### **Conclusion**

"Social work education in India is in its eightieth year and yet social work has not been accepted as a profession by the major stakeholders, particularly the government. Social work in India is not a full profession and it is only a semi-profession". (T.K. Nair, 2015) [16]

Social work fails to become a helping profession unless it is solemnly propped up with:

- A standardized social work education,
- Unflinching support from the government,
- Mandatory licensing,
- Sponsorship of socially committed non-government organizations,
- Cooperation of aid agencies and
- A central organization which is competent to take care of the professional needs of social workers

It is not just enough that social work teachers and practitioners make dynamic and hyperbolic talks here and there, extolling the virtues of the profession. What is needed is tangible action for a perceptible change. "How to help social work help itself"

should be the mantra of every social worker.

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