The Understanding of Social Work Education in the Indian Context

Payal Poddar[1], Professor Ushvinder Kaur Popli[2]

[1]SRF & PhD. Scholar, Dept. of Social Work, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi-110025

[2]Professor & Former Head, Dept. of Social Work, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi-110025

Abstract - **Social Work Education contributes to addressing the country's various social issues. While social work engages with multiple layers of social reality, it also tries to create academic rigour and develop new models. This article aims to provide an understanding and overview of the various issues and concerns that face the field of social work education in India. It first talks about the historical development of the profession in the country, the second part explores the multiple debates in the field, and the third part discusses the future challenges and opportunities that will affect the field.**

Index Terms - **Social Work, Social Work Education, Challenges, Opportunities.**

SOCIAL WORK BEGINNING IN INDIA

The professional journey of social work started with establishing TISS in 1936. However, social work is not novel to Indian culture because it existed long before formal social work. Social work has its genesis in the Indian culture and Indian roots in the form of selfless service and voluntarism. The Servant of India Society was founded in 1905 by Gopal Krishna Gokhale. It was regarded as the foremost organization for social welfare and development. They study social problems with a sense of scientific understanding. (Gore,1965). Another forerunner organization for professional social work was the Social Service League in Bombay. Their main aim is to train the voluntary natives for societal development. They presented a series of lectures on social subjects and wide verities of social activities at the field level (Manshardt, 1967). The training provided by Servants of India Society could not address various social problems the marginalized and poor faced. Instead of training individuals, they must undergo professional training to address the various issues related to Indian society.

According to Dr Manshardt, in India, social work should be categorized into three fields: academic, practical, and social research, which led to the establishment of various schools and departments in the country. In 1948, the Delhi School of Social Work and the J.K. Institute for Human Ecology and Human Relations were established. Then, in 1952, the Social Work department was established in Madras.

Early in the professional development of social workers, the curriculum was taken from western sources because the Indian ethos and religion were commonly followed. However, it soon became apparent that the ideological basis of social work differed from western views. The Indian ideologies are based on multiple social and religious beliefs. Family and community are essential factors shaping the country's social and political landscape. Whereas, in the west, more focus is on individualism. The Indian religion highlights the importance of duties but in the west, freedom, and liberalism got more emphasis. Holistic and wise, oriented ideology provides the basis of Indian social work; in the western context, it is analytical and scientism. Family values, community structure, and social co-living combined with individualism and freedom of expression evolved the ideological basis of Indian social work.

Social work, which was seen as a form of social service, has evolved as a profession in due course of time with systematic development of course work, curriculum development, and fieldwork. Social work scientifically solves societal problems with its proactive, preventive, and rehabilitative measures. In India, a short-term training program for social workers was established, then raised to graduate, postgraduate, and research levels. Under the supervision of Professor Sanjay Bhatt, various stages of social work were developed. These included initiation/inception,

experimentation, expansion, moderation/stagnation, and explosion (1987).

The concept of social work has undergone many radical changes over the years. Originally a charity-based approach, it has evolved into a more systematic and objective approach. After attaining independence, the government started addressing the various issues the underprivileged and oppressed people faced. It shifted its focus to welfare-oriented social work, which later moved towards a development-oriented approach with the impact of globalization and liberalization. In today's time, it has reoriented its dimension towards more inclusion and sustainability and exclusively focused on justice and empowerment. Due to the increasing demand for social workers in India, there has been a rise in the number of schools offering professional social work education. However, the quality of these schools has raised concerns. In addition to the quality of education, various questions are asked to ensure that the profession has the necessary skills and knowledge. to perform its duties and develop a high standard of practice in the field. These include the establishment of a code of practice, the recruitment of social workers, and the establishment of effective and efficient infrastructure. Over seventy-five years have passed since the establishment of social work as a discipline in India. Many issues still demand the development of the necessary infrastructure and programs for the country's social work students.

NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Due to the increasing number of universities in India adopting the western model of higher education, the traditional curriculum for social work education has been shifted to a more local setting. The establishment of a more efficient and effective social work education system has been one of the factors that have contributed to the country's progress. Despite the relatively young nature of the field, social work has been trying to create new models to improve its programs' academic rigour. This study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the various challenges that face developing the discipline of social work.

SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES AND MULTIFACETED CONCERNS

The discipline and curriculum of social work face many challenges. Therefore, the profession must continue to develop effective fieldwork practices, and the job opportunities, inbreeding multiple institutions, and combining identity with sociology are also significant concerns. To reorient social work approaches with changes in the current time. Siddiqui (2001) pointed out that social work currently has a professional identity crisis. It needs to focus on specific skills imparted to students to accomplish specific professional tasks.

Various studies have shown that due to socio-economic, geographical, and cultural changes, different institutions, colleges, and departments of different states of the region follow their unique standards. The various aspects of a social work program are often compared with those offered by other universities. However, there are additionally common ground elements that can help improve the quality of this education. These include establishing an identity for social work, the teaching quality, the assessment, and the multiple success models of teaching methodology.

GROWTH AND CONCERNS OF SOCIAL WORK

According to Oommen, T.K, the origin of social work in the USA and U.K. arises due to the gap created by the rapid industrialization, urbanization, and developmental activities to fill this institutional gap and address the emerging socio-economic problems. Whereas, in India, a different trajectory was followed. Gore (1985) Indigenized problems were solved through a western outlook in Indian social work education. This method of solving these problems did not involve the people. Western-oriented social work training did not focus on the issues of marginalized and vulnerable sections (Srivastava, 1999; Ramaiah, 1998). In the 1990s, with the process of Globalisation, Liberalisation, and privatization, social work institutions saw exponential growth across the country. In the primary urban centre, there was mushrooming of social work institutions. In 2000, a panel of experts of the University Grants Commission (UGC) noted that the greatest number of institutions of social work in India are located in the western and southern regions of the country. They also noted that only a few institutions exist in the northeastern, eastern, and northern regions. Due to the increasing

number of colleges and universities in urban regions, the need for more ethical standards and training has become more prevalent.

PUBLIC RECOGNITION OF SOCIAL WORK

The concept of selflessness and voluntarism is the central idea of social work, and people tend to perceive it as a profession that requires no remuneration. However, due to the lack of public recognition, the social work profession has been looked down. According to a network of schools of social work in India, the lack of awareness about the profession is the main reason for the low recognition.

INDIGENIZED LITERATURE

In social work education, universities have adopted the western approach without examining its suitability in the local context, which is why many fail to indigenize their literature. The western education model for social work education assumes that the various concepts of counselling, group work, individual casework, and community welfare apply to the local context. Unfortunately, these concepts were not appropriately addressed. To ensure that the indigenization of the literature is carried out correctly, the practitioners and academicians must create a conducive environment for the indigenization of the literature. (Thomas: 2010).

Through its School of Social Work, IGNOU has been able to develop indigenous materials for social work. These materials are suitable from Indian philosophies and are aimed at people-centred development.

ABSENCE OF FUNDAMENTAL FEATURE

The core of social work is the deeply rooted values of equality, empathy, human dignity, and the worthiness of all people. It is motivated by the aspirations of the people for social justice. Even then, it holds no dominant place in social policy formulation and administration of social welfare organizations. It was noted that there was no formal development of a social code in the profession, which was accepted and practised by the social workers. It is well known that foreign influences in the social work profession hinder its cultural amalgamation with society. The prominent fundamental feature requires a professional code of

ethics in professional settings of social work practice. Even after more than seventy-five years of this glorious profession, there was still no common platform for discussing various issues and expressing broad concerns. Social work as a change agent lacks innovation, intellectual interest, and creativity to increase the research on emerging issues. Only a few institutions offer courses in Social Action, Social Planning, and Social Administration, even knowing that these courses need time with increasing complexities in the governance process.

STRUCTURE OF PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION

The first Indian director of TISS, J.M Kumarappa, mooted the idea of establishing professional associations. Though there are national and regional associations for the trained social worker, the absence of effective functioning of these professional associations crippled the discipline. It was noted that the various social work associations in the country need to be revived to make them more effective.

These two organizations, IATSW and ASWI, respectively, played significant roles in representing social work in India during the early 1960s to various central and state pay commissions for increasing higher salary scales for social workers. However, various factors such as lack of interest, internal conflicts, and management issues lead to these associations' non-existence.

The professionalization of the social work profession has resulted in various organizations and associations. One is the National Association of Professional Social Workers (NAPSWI) in India. These associations also started professional development programs for teachers, students, and academicians. Various seminars and workshops were organized for social workers. However, due to the rapid changes in society's working conditions, professional associations need to restructure themselves to provide a base for social workers

SOCIAL WORK CURRICULUM

In India, various schools of social work follow varying curriculums and training methods. This makes it difficult for the students to evaluate the quality of education in the discipline. There are also no clear

guidelines and practices related to the whole discipline. The various disciplines that social workers follow to respond to the needs of their local communities and society at large. There is a call for social workers to adopt a radical approach and shift their focus from a therapeutic and remedial approach to a more inclusive one.

Changing the curriculum and increasing the voice of marginalized groups are some changes that social work education can make to improve its offerings. The fundamental debates of generic and specialized even continue today. In the globalized and competitive era, there is a need for a more specialized approach to social work education that will allow students to gain a deeper understanding of the social realities of their communities. This approach will also allow them to work more effectively in public health and governance.

AWARENESS REGARDING ONLINE DISTANCE LEARNING

Despite the widespread recognition of the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system in India, the discipline of social work still has a long way to go before fully embracing this new technology. Many academicians and social work practitioners are still not ready to fully embrace it. Studies have shown that distance education can provide a variety of advantages, such as cost-effectiveness and learning outcomes. The government also promotes ODL, allowing students to reach a wider audience and save money.

In many countries, including India, various sections of student associations and institutions have recognized and approved Distance Education Programs (DEPs). These programs are also recognized and approved by international organizations such as the NASW and the IFSW. It is high time that the Indian social work fraternity takes note of the importance of ODL and recognizes its relevance in the country.

DEVELOPMENT OF FIELD ACTION PROJECT

As per the University Grants Commission (UGC) suggestion that the development of field and service projects for social work must be carried out in a way to provide new opportunities to students and improve the quality of education through various reports and also UGC mentioned reports, schools, and departments of social work must effectively focus on Continuous Professional Development Programmes and took an active role in organizing seminars, conferences, workshops, study tours for students projects based on national and international funding, conducting the survey, establishing fieldwork lab in the department, doing field action projects, Through these initiatives, students can gain the necessary skills and opportunities to become successful in their chosen field. It also helps improve the image of the profession.

SALARIES TO SOCIAL WORK TEACHERS

Increases in the administrative task, escalating work pressure, job stagnation, low salaries, and easy burnout are significant issues hindering social work discipline. To contribute to social work, the rules must be standardized and should be portrayed as a desirable and advantageous profession to the people (Ranjana:2009)

Low salaries and increasing administrative tasks lead to poor quality of teaching and practice; educators get less time to devote to research and analysis and critical appraisal of their work which further stop them from adopting best practices in research and practices.

PLACEMENT

The recruitment and placement of social workers are the most critical issues professionals face. Due to the increasing number of students pursuing master's level programs in the discipline, it is the universities' considerable responsibility to ensure that students get the best possible education. Most social work graduates work on government projects such as NRHM and NRLM. Some fewer students are working in non-profit organizations and grassroots groups. Many social work graduates earn a minimal amount of money. They often leave their jobs due to dissatisfaction. (Riamei, 2014)

CONCLUSION

The social work profession is regarded as a ray of hope for society, as it has achieved many milestones and developed various interventions and approaches. However, it has also faced various challenges and is still in the process of addressing these issues. This

paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the various aspects of the profession in India. The social work profession is a vital part of society, as it brings social transformation and improves people's lives. It is also responsible for addressing various issues of management, governance, and inclusiveness. To effectively carry out its work, the profession should reorient itself toward addressing these issues. Therefore, the social work profession must focus on developing indigenous literature inspired by the various social movements in India, which can be done through establishing fieldwork services and publications.

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