



Research Article

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE INDIAN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION MODEL

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to critically analyse, evaluate and summarize the evolution and features of the social work education model in India. Hence, this article hopes to be a guide to academicians in appraising the present focus of their curriculum and charting future pathways in the right direction.

Key words:

social work education, social development

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INTRODUCTION

In most accounts of the history of social work education in India, we find that the beginning of social work education in India has been attributed to the establishment of the first school of social work in Mumbai in 1936 under the leadership of the American missionary Clifford Manshardt, called the Sir Dorabji Institute of Social Sciences and later renamed as Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Gore & Gore, 1977). The social work education model introduced by TISS was emulated by a number of subsequent social work schools in India (Desai, 1985). Eighty years down the lane, the initial social work education model, especially the curricular framework, as introduced in TISS and many other leading schools of social work, underwent numerous reviews and paradigm shifts. Today there are over 300 schools of social work in India, many of whom are not aware of the drastic changes that have happened in the top social work schools in India (Nadkarni & Desai 2012). This article aims to critically analyse, evaluate and summarize the evolution of the social work education model in India. Hence, this article hopes to be a guide to academicians in appraising the present focus of their curriculum and charting future pathways in the right direction.

Historic evolution of the Indian social work education model

The history of social work education in India has been presented by different authors in different ways. Some have adopted chronological descriptions (Gore, 1965: 99-110; Nanavatty, 1952; Pathak, 1975; Gore & Gore, 1977;

Shrivastava, 1999), whereas some have categorized the development of social work education into various evolutionary stages (Mandal, 1995; Bhatt & Pathare, 2004, as cited in Pathare, 2015; Rao, 2011). Adapting some of Rao's (2011) heads of classifications, the researcher identifies four phases of social work education in India.

1905-1936: Political missionaries

Gopala Krishna Gokhale, one of the greatest political and social leaders of India, realized the need to tap the idealism of the youth of the pre-independence era and channel it towards national upliftment. For this purpose, after his retirement, he started the Servants of India Society (SIS). The college of the Servants of India Society was housed at Pune and was designed like an academy with courses, residential training and a well equipped library. The Society's aims were secular and the students, who were graduate men, were recruited after a very rigorous selection process. The training period was for 5 years and the subjects taught included history, economics, public finance, law and journalism. Every inmate had to undergo a probation period under Gokhale before he was allowed to act independently. After the probation, the members of the society were entitled to a modest remuneration. The Servants of India were involved in a variety of political and social activities, which included organizational work for the Indian National Congress, journalism, education, social reform, relief work, advocacy, lobbying, community organization and so on. The society acquired high standing in the country through its work. Gokhale's aim was to enroll at least one Servant of India for the erstwhile 275 districts of the country (Nanda, 1977: 169-176, 461-466). However after the death of Gokhale in 1915, SIS lost its first glory and became a social welfare organization, rather than an academy for training

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professionals (Dhavse, 2002). Two other organizations, which worked in close association with SIS, and which provided training for social workers, mostly voluntary workers, were the Seva Sadan Society, formed in 1908, and the Social Service League, formed in 1911 (Madan, 1967: 76). In Seva Sadan training was provided to women social workers 'who were to exercise their vocation among the poor'; the nature of service offered by them seemed to be visiting the sick, poor, prisoners etc. and provision of relief in the form of food, clothing etc. One of the three objectives of the Social Service League was the training of social workers, and it aimed at making human beings 'capable of self-help in the improvement of their social condition by providing them with opportunities and placing them in favourable surroundings' (Kidambi, 2007: 221-223). Many narratives on the history of social work education, mention the contributions of SIS, Seva Sadan and the Social Service League, but discount their work. The researcher believes that Gokhale's SIS is a legacy lost to social work education in India (Alexander, 2016).

1936-47: Social service administration

Clifford Manshardt, an American missionary who came to India in the 1920s, was the founder of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), the first official school of social work in the country. Manshardt's advocacy for starting a school was the result of the need he felt to train his own staff during his work in the Nagapada Neighbourhood House, which was his experiment in Indian urban development. Invited by the TATAs to offer a proposal to utilize a trust fund at their disposal, Manshardt strongly felt that the establishment of a school of social work was essential for raising the standards of social work in India. Thus, the first school of social work came into being in June 1936, with the institution of a post graduate course (Manshardt, 1967: 82-91, 1985). Manshardt's vision was that trained social workers be employed in every important centre in India. In framing courses at TISS, Manshardt borrowed from the American and British schools, but he recurrently stressed his unbelief in narrow specializations and opted for a generic programme. He chose

3 groups of courses

- First group of pre-professional courses in the social sciences: social origins, sociology, economics and social psychology.
- Second group of courses which disclosed the general field of social work: family and child psychology, the historical backgrounds of social work, Indian social problems, rural-urban interplay, Indian industry, the Indian industrial worker, the state and social work and social legislation.
- The third group of courses which dealt with the practice of social case work: case work, group work, delinquency, the work of the labour officer and social work administration.
- There was requirement for thesis and field work

TISS worked closely with provincial governments, helped in framing a number of social legislations, and its experience was utilized in public welfare administration and training, and the framing of the government departments of welfare and other schools of social work in India. The result of the work done by TISS pre-independence led to the recognition of social work as a profession in India. The Indian Council of Social Work (ICSW) was created in 1947, many of whose

leaders and members were professionally trained social workers from TISS; TISS and ICSW were able to influence social policy and worked very closely with the Government (Jadhav, 1975: 3).

1947-1990: Specialization

Until 1946, TISS was the only school of social work in India, after which a number of schools were established, the first of which were the schools in Baroda, Delhi, Lucknow, Madras and Varanasi. TISS, along with these schools, came to be profoundly influenced by American social work after 1947. This influence was because of the increasing exchanges between United States of America (USA) and India in the field of Social Work, which was furthered by American educated social workers on the faculty of most of these schools and the impact of the Technical Cooperation Mission and the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) programme (Pathak, 1975: 177).

The deepest influences were with regard to the adoption of specializations and a curriculum focused on the individual, curative, clinical or remedial dimensions. While the adoption of specializations was influenced also by the felt need for filling in government posts of labour welfare officers, probation officers, hospital social workers etc. (A. Desai, 1985; M. Desai, 1991), the adoption of a curative-intensive training was purely the result of American influence. These developments had negative influences on the profession. According to Pathak (1975: 178), it led to 'the curtailment of the social sciences content, inadequate emphasis on social action, alienation of the group of trained social workers from the Sarvodaya social workers and neglect of social reform'. The growth of Social work as a profession also seemed to stagnate, if not decline, during this period. In India, since the 1960s, social work education came under severe criticism from many social workers and the UGC review committee reports. Social work education was blamed for abandoning its true mission; the call for abolishing narrow specializations, shedding the curative approach and the adoption of a social development paradigm was very sharp and strong (Gore, 1973; Kulkarni, 1979; Pathak, 1981; Siddique, 1984; A. Desai, 1985; Dasgupta, 1976; Mandal, 1989; UGC, 1965, 1980).

1990 to present: Social Development

During the late 1960s United Nations (UN) and the rest of the world was disillusioned with the 'modernization' model which had failed to achieve equitable development; the gulf between the first and the third world countries were widening and environmental degradation was threatening sustainability. The UN declaration on Social progress and development (1969) renewed its commitment towards social development (Jacob & Dak, 2001). Organized efforts towards social development were started in 1973-74 at the UN division for social development, in which Indian academicians like Pathak and Kulkarni became active deliberators (Kumar, 2005: 59, 60). The UGC established a curriculum development centre (CDC) at TISS in 1986, following its second review report in 1980. The UGC CDC brought out a curriculum report in 1990, which gave emphasis to social development and thus marked a new phase in social work education in India (UGC, 1990). The UGC Model curriculum report was prepared in conjunction with its third review of social work education (UGC, 2001). Both the 1990 and 2001 curriculum marks a shift away from the curative or remedial functions of social

work to the social development orientation. 'Social development' can be treated synonymously with, 'social action', 'structural social work' and 'anti-oppressive social work'; even though it appears that the intensity of a social work involvement in changing social structures may increase with each consequent approach (Siddiqui, 1984; Rao, 2011; Bodhi, 2011). The above discussion is enough proof that the social development discourse is gaining popularity in India, at least among the top schools of social work. However, there is no data on how many institutions of social work in India have complied with the UGC Model curriculum and how far the Social development discourse, among the faculty and in the curriculum, has been translated into action.

Critical examination of the present social work education model

According to Siddiqui (1997) the demand for a new model of social work education has been in existence since the 1940s. Even though Mathew (1981) and Kulkarni (1993) notes that social work education in India seems to have made modest strides, academicians have vehemently criticized the present model of social work education and the profession over the years.

Most of the criticism has been related to five broad areas

1. General criticisms based on analysis of the social work professional and education scenario (UGC, 1965, 1980; Thomas, 1967, 1994; Nanavathy, 1967, 1993; Nagpaul, 1967; Pathak, 1975; Ranade, 1975; A.Desai, 1975, 1981; Gore & Gore, 1977; Adiseshiah, 1981; Nair, 1981a; Siddiqui, 1987, 1989, as cited in 1997, 2001, 2015; Kulkarni, 1994; Chowdhry, 1994; Gokarn, 1994; R.M.Verma, 1994, 2005; Raja, 1994; Pawar, 1999; Srivastava, 1999, 2003, 2005; Lawani, 2002: 1-30; Kurein & Sebastian, 2003; Mukarjee, 2003; Punitha, 2003; R.K.Singh, 2003, 2005; M.M.Verma, 2003; O.P.Singh, 2003; S.Singh, 2005; Mukhopadhyay, 2005; Gangrade, 2005a: 67-68, 2005b; Thankarajan, 2005; A.N.Singh, 2005; Sharma, 2005; Joby, 2005; Nadkarni & Desai, 2012; R.R.Singh, 2014; Pathare, 2015; Andrews, 2015; K.Desai, 2015).
2. Criticisms related to field work (R.R.Singh, 1981, 1994, 2003; Siddiqui, 1994; Banawaraj, 1994; Prasad & Vijaylakshmi, 1997; Katare, 2003; A.N.Singh, 2003; Bharadwaj, 2005; K.Desai, 2013; A.P.Singh, 2015).
3. Criticisms related to social work research (Ramachandran, 1975; Khan, 1994; Prasad, 1994, 2003; R.B.Verma, 2003; S.Singh, 2003; Khan & Kakkar, 2003).
4. Criticisms related to the contributions of social work profession to social development (Nagpaul, 1972; Dasgupta, 1976, 1968, as cited in Siddiqui, 1997; Gore, 1981; Pathak, 1981, 1997; Gangrade & Verma, 1981; Adiseshiah, 1981; DeSousa, 1981; Siddiqui, 1984, 1997; Ramachandran, 1988; Ranade, 1994; Desai & Narayan, 1998; Srivastava & R.K.Singh, 2005; Rao, 2011; Bodhi, 2011; Jainer, 2015).
5. Other areas: western influence (Mandal, 1989), specializations (Marulasiddaiah & Shariff, 1981; Panakkal, 1981; Jacob, 1981; A.Desai, 1985; M.Desai, 1991, 1994), lack of Indigenous knowledge (Mazumdar, 1994; Muzumdar, 1997; M.Desai, 2004), practice (Thachil & Kumar, 1997), professional organization (Nair, 1981b; Nanavathy, 1997), teacher-learner issues (A.Desai & Almanzor, 1971; Mehta, 1981; Saxena, 1994; Siddegowda, 2010; Sebastin & Ashok, 2012), globalization issues (M.Rao, 1993; Sidhva, Palattiyil & Chakrabarti, 2016: 286-294), undergraduate education (Mohsini, 1994; Prasad, 1997; Sinha, 2003).

Some of the major premises of these criticisms have been summarized below

1. Many schools of social work show reluctance to shed the individual/clinical orientation and shift to a social development orientation, in spite of repeated criticism that the curative model is not suitable to a developing country like India.
2. Social work education clings on to western education and practice models even though this trend has been attributed to the cause for disconnection between the theory and practice and the consequent isolation of the profession.
3. Generic and specialization debate continues, while there is increasing evidence that calls for a strong generic base. The dominant and increasing trend towards specialization at the entry level of social work education is not suitable for India.
4. Social work educators have not owned up to the role of meeting the training needs of the social welfare personnel in the country. Social work education is largely confined at the post-graduate level. A ladder programme and expansion of social work education to include multiple entry and exit points and a wide range of social welfare personnel have been suggested from the very beginning.
5. The number of schools of social work has multiplied manifold, which includes correspondence and distance education programmes. The quality of training is deteriorating. There are very few opportunities for faculty development. Standardization efforts in education have not gained momentum.
6. Social work schools are urban-based in their numbers and curricular orientation. Rural and tribal needs are underemphasized.
7. There is a dearth of adequate indigenous literature and teaching materials. Faculty and students still lean heavily on western knowledge. Social work research is very haphazard and there is no regulation or direction in this aspect. The quality of social work research has remained poor.
8. Field work varies from school to school. In field work, weak connection is fostered between theory and practicum. Field work practicum has not diversified or changed much. Schools of social work face a number of issues with regards to field work opportunities, supervision, evaluation, school-agency linkages, etc. There is also apprehension whether field work is leading to the right kind of skill inculcation.
9. India's education is largely teacher-centred and the present models are aimed to "fit-all" the students alike. The peculiarity of Indian students and their needs and the students' attitudes to education and social work,

reading culture, learning skills and styles, background etc. are not considered by teachers in preparing instruction.

10. Assessment of skill requirements, designing of skill training programmes, assessment, evaluation and certification of skills of students and practitioners are not given due priority in Indian social work. In a profession like social work, which banks heavily on skills of practitioners, most of skill acquisition is left to chance.
11. There is no strong national level professional organization for social work in India. The acceptance and ranking of the profession is low among professionals and public. Social work is also facing stiff competitions from other disciplines. The profession has failed to organize, regulate and motivate its professionals.
12. Social work profession has not come to the forefront of the nation building process. The profession's contributions to national development initiatives have been consistently low over the years. It has failed to capture the trust of voluntary and government organizations of welfare.
13. Professional social workers in the country are faced with a number of practice-related issues. Low pay, heavy work load, low supervision and guidance, lack of trainings, high turn-over rates, competition from similar professions, poor motivation and lack of commitment are some issues that severely affect the performance of social workers, and consequently the image of the profession.
14. Issues of international communicability have been voiced. In the present era of globalization and increased political, economic, social and cultural exchange, social work needs to be seen from a global perspective. Very few schools give due recognition to this aspect.

CONCLUSION

From the above analysis it is clear that social work education in India needs to urgently shed its individual or clinical orientation and move towards a social development orientation. The All schools should comply with the UGC Model curriculum 2001, which seeks to bring the social development focus into the curriculum. It is also necessary to strategically translate the theoretical emphasis therein into practice. Imbibing a social development perspective, in theory and practice, will help social workers take conscious steps towards the nation building process. Further, the generalist orientation needs to be stressed; the specialization approach should be adopted with much caution and precautions, failing which, it might produce an imbalanced workforce, unsuited to the specific needs of the country. Also, it's the duty of academicians and researchers to study the practice needs, conditions and problems of professionals. This can not only lead to concerted efforts on the part of academic institutions and their alumni to improve conditions of practitioners; but it will also lead to the incorporation of training needs and practice realities into the curriculum. This will further the process of creating the much needed theory-practice link in the social work curriculum. Fieldwork and research need to be developed and strengthened. Field work training should consciously lead to skill inculcation and include skill

evaluation strategies. Student dissertations, M.Phil., Doctoral studies and research projects by social workers should consciously contribute to the professional knowledge base and evidence based practice. If these major suggestions are taken to task, social work as a profession is sure to gain more visibility and effectiveness.

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