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COLONIAL LEGACY AND PROFESSIONAL IMPERIALISM IN SOCIAL WORK: CALLS FOR BHARATIYAKARAN / INDIANISATION OF SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Overreliance on linear theories of social change particularly and denial of autonomy to indigenous fundamental social institutions are major tentacles of colonial legacy which has created obstacles for developing independent perspectives on social work in India. It has also critically examined the adverse impacts of colonial legacy on indigenous social institutions and traditional practices in India related to health, family welfare and women empowerment, environment conservation and village development besides making recommendations for revival of the social work discipline in India with a vision to place it on right track for meaningful national and global contributions. The paper has recommended for adopting the Bharatiyakaran/Indianisation of social work education in India.

KEY TERMS: Social Change, Professional Imperialism, colonial legacy, Bharatiyakaran/Indianisation of Social Work Education, Afro-centric Social Work

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INTRODUCTION

Knowledge is the most influential instrument of imperialism. Social Work is one amongst the social science disciplines developed by USA & UK which is implemented in most of the developing countries of the world. This process of neo-colonialism in academics is termed as professional imperialism or Euro-American approach (Khinduka, 1971; Mandal, 1989 and Dash, 2018) in social work. With the establishment of University of Calcutta in 1857 during British colonial rule, the education system of Indian subcontinent entered in the age of state controlled education or license age. The scientific world view and perceptibility to change were projected as unique selling points of the licensed education system by the colonial government in the Indian subcontinent. During the British rule in India, social work education was introduced in the Indian subcontinent in the year 1936 with the establishment of Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. Despite the criticism and suggestions for improvement (Mandal, 1989; Khinduka, 1971 and Howard, 1971) the social work curriculum in Indian universities continues to maintain its Euro-American perspective. After eight decades of social work education in India, movement for Bharatiyakaran/ Indianisation of social work curriculum is gaining prominence and fortunately the Bharatiyakaran of Social work curriculum is also getting acceptance by various universities which has given the new direction and new perspective to Indian social work education. However, the dominance of Eurocentric academicians still continues to resist the Bharatiyakaran/indianisation of social work education in India.

The paper critically examines the disastrous impact of imperialism on Indian indigenous social institutions and traditional practices related to health, family welfare environmental conservation and village development. The paper has made an attempt to identify both the theoretical and practical knowledge instilled in potential social workers that turns them against entire indigenous knowledge system besides providing recommendations for corrective measures. The paper has recommended for revival of the social work discipline in India with a vision to place it on right track for meaningful national and global contributions. Besides that it suggests for adopting the Bharatiyakaran/Indianisation of social work education in India.

PROFESSIONAL IMPERIALISM IN SOCIAL WORK IN INDIA

This potential crisis was visualized by Indian sages thousands of years ago and they had provided a mechanism to the society but under the influence of Euro-American approach of education system, India has almost forgotten this treasure of knowledge that includes unique models to save the indigenous knowledge systems, methods, appropriate development approaches, culture and traditions. The Bharatiya or India's indigenous model to counter professional imperialism has been described in the form of three debts – Devrin, Rishirin, and Piturin; that may be presented in the form of three corners of an equilateral triangle. In this system, the Rishirin or the debt of academicians bestows upon us the responsibility to study the knowledge created by predecessor academicians and adding in it, if possible, for making it suitable to the changing circumstances. This simple model worked so excellently in the Indian Subcontinent for thousands of years that the education system operated from hermitage and Gurukuls without any direct support or control from the State. But With the establishment of University of Calcutta in 1857 during British colonial rule, the education system of Indian subcontinent became state controlled and the colonial imperialism started in India. Since then, basic elements of colonial legacy in social work education in Indian institutions continued. However, post 2018 the Indian social work has witnessed significant changes in indigenizing the social work curriculum and practices.

India conserves ancient most records of social service and social reforms. Buddha (600 B.C.E.), the founder of Buddhist Philosophy could be considered the greatest social reformer of his age. There is long tradition of social service and social reforms in India that was led by social reformers like Buddha (600 B.C.E.) Chankya (300 B.C.E.), Shankaracharya, Guru Nanak, Samarth Guru Ramdas, Guru Govind Singh, Saint Tukaram, Kabir, Narayan Guru, Jyotiba Phule, Dr. Bhimrao Ramjirao Ambedkar to Nanaji Deshmukh. Although, the concept of social service and social reform exist in Sanskrit and regional literature of Indian Subcontinent but it was never a means of livelihood.

As a means of livelihood and professional course, the social work education in India was started in 1936 with the establishment of first institute of social work in Bombay by Sir Dorabji Tata Trust in 1936 which is now popular as Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS). The brain behind this institute was an American missionary, Clifford Manshardt, who had worked in America and India as social worker. He served as the founder – director of the school. Since then, the social work education in India has spread by leaps and bounds in both campus and distance learning (Dash, 2018 b). However, the curriculum was remained almost the same (Dash, 2018a) till 1947. After independence, the overreliance of India on foreign funding particularly for social development projects ensured an edge for social work models and approaches created by American and European academicians and social workers. Furthermore, the expert exchange programmes wherein Indian social work academicians and professionals were invited in USA, UK and projects of United Nations Organisations (UNO) that were dominated by Euro American wisdom created an intellectual tradition to implement those models in India without having a

second thought (Mandal, 1989). This led to dominance of Euro American trained social workers in Indian academics and intellectual discourse in this discipline of study. These academicians and professionals largely acted as brain children of their Euro-American counterparts in India. Furthermore, the failure of Indian indigenous academia, whatever the reasons may be, to deliver successful models for social development made the country almost intellectual parasite to the Euro – American knowledge system. This reliance of American knowledge system also replicated in literature and research, as the books and research papers from USA continue to remain as reference material for social work students in India. Mandal has also presented a detailed account of ‘Americanisation’ of social work education in India wherein even specializations in social work were also introduced on the pattern of social work education in America, not in accordance to the requirements of Indian society. As everything was being imported, all those indigenous systems were being discarded simultaneously. Mandal has declared social work education in India irrelevant to Indian society (ibid, p. 3).

However, some enlightened social workers argued against the trend but they were unheard by the dominant class in social work who were operating as knowledge carriers of Euro-American intellectuals and market forces. Gore and Gore (1977) found social work education in the US ‘leaned heavily’ on curative approach through social case work that made Indian social work more concerned for methods and techniques. Nagpaul (1986) was direct in his observations and proclaimed that the dominance of the American model is detrimental to the development of social work in the developing countries. He points out that although the United Nations and its allied agencies and some other inter-national organisations of social work education stressed on development of indigenous approaches to social work, their fundamental assumptions remained within the general framework of American social work education. This is partly because most of the personnel responsible for drafting of UN reports and research notes had their social work training in the United States or they were influenced by it directly or indirectly. As a matter of fact, most of the UN documents as well as UN representatives tacitly assume that the American model is not only superior but also appropriate for developing countries (Mandal, 1989, p. 2). The curriculum and specializations of some of the elite schools of social work are largely followed and replicated in other social work institutions of the country but the fact is that the specializations in these institutions were either introduced by American social workers for Indian social workers trained in USA and Europe. The specialization in medical and psychiatric social work, family and child welfare, criminology and correctional administration, social group work and community organization, urban and rural community development, labour welfare and industrial administration etc. were either introduced by American social workers or their Indian brain children (ibid, p.2). Since then, social work education in India predominantly remains Euro American.

THEORIES OF SOCIAL CHANGE

The curricula of Social Work education in Indian universities predominantly follow the linear theories of Social Change in general and Karl Marx’s theory of Economic Determinism (McLellan, 2012) in particular that emphasizes on economy being the engine for the social development. The Linear Theory of Social Development is based on the presumption that the society always moves from inferior to superior level which means the next generation is always better than her previous generations. The Linear Theories of Social Change may be true for technological development but over reliance on such theories for social change could be a major cause on ignorance of traditional knowledge system, disrespect of youths to their parents, inferiority complex in for village dwellers, ignorance to the views of parents and ancestors. In this curriculum, the teachers and trainers themselves make their pupils realize that whatever is old and traditional; deserves to be ignored in the light of modernity that is necessarily imported from Europe and America. This imported modernity is established as superior in the minds of students than indigenous theories, approaches and behaviours. This type of indoctrination in the campuses through classroom and as well as practical learning delineates the budding social workers from their indigenous knowledge system and makes them agents of Euro-American approach.

This theory of social change gives first message to a budding social worker that he is superior to his parents and grand-parents because he/she is educated, belongs to modern society, therefore, should ignore their concerns on traditional matters. Furthermore, emphasis to build a modern society is based on the treatise that whatever is indigenous is worthless and we should implement in our society whatever is supplied from the west; without a second thought. This is the first stage to instill the idea of hate in young minds about their roots – which is referred as culture. There are several examples that use this concept in various forms like you should not mind the views of old people, villagers are inferiors to those living in cities, a dhoti wearing person is fool or joke material while another in shirt and tie is progressive.

In the Linear Theories of Social Change; we move from Ancient – Medieval – Modern – Post Modern – Beyond Post Modernity – and now Beyond the Truth. Here the next stage is always superior. The colonial system introduced modernity in India with the help of macro theories and discarded the knowledge of our ancestors on medical science, environment conservation, animal husbandry, crop science, social system and way of life to live in harmony with the nature. In the concluding decades of the 20th century, the Europe and USA proclaimed the

death of modernity and propagated the idea of Post-Modern Society (Harvey, 1989 & Jameson, 1991) which depends on micro theories, emphasizes on plurality of the culture. India has the maximum cultural plurality in terms of language, cultures, folks, festivals living together since centuries but our academicians neither could protect them from the road roller of modernity nor could put forward any universal theory/ approach for Post Modernity. There has been tremendous technological change in India since the arrival of the British East India Company in 17th century but as far as socio-cultural change is concerned India hardly went through stages of modernity and post-modernity like Europe and America. India was comprised of the most pluralistic society before modernity and maintains her position even in the age of Post-Modernity that is expected to continue for centuries.

The Indian model of Social Change is cyclic in nature wherein universal knowledge and behaviour is carried in the next age. Therefore, there is respect for the knowledge created by predecessor academicians and also scope for scientific research as well. In the shastrath approach there had been enough scope to reject any previous treatise partially or completely if it does not hold true on the parameters of logic and reasoning. As per Indian theory of social change, the society revolves between four eras -- Satyug, Dwapar, Treta and Kaliyug. The true knowledge of every era is carried forward and followed in the era on the principles of universality while irrelevant ideas were discarded. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya argues that the historical circumstances which are in accordance with the Chiti (Soul) of the Nation are included in the national culture. The Chiti is supreme for a nation and it decides the direction in which the nation moves forward. Like a person working against his self-suffers in the life, a nation also suffers if she works against her Chiti (Upadhyaya, 1965). The challenge before social work researchers is to develop theories of social change as per our indigenous requirements with an aim to develop a universal theory of social change.

SOCIAL WORK AND HEALTH

The Euro-American perspective of social work is curative in its approach (Mandal, 1989) which also dominates in social work practices for individual and public health while Indian approach of health emphasizes on preventive measures. Therefore, social work professionals trained in the university system land in the hospitals which are no less than workshop for humans. The centuries old Ayurveda system of medical sciences that includes knowledge of both medicine and surgery; emphasizes on preventive approach particularly healthy food habits, physical workouts and habitat ecology for individual and public health.

Around seven decades after independence, India presented an indigenous model of healthy life to the world – International Day for Yoga in 2015. This could be a case study on how the western intellectuals and their brain children in India did their best to hijack centuries old knowledge system of Yoga scripted by Maharishi Patanjali and introduced in India in the form of Physical Training during colonial period. The fight for getting back this contribution of an Indian sage to the humans across the globe was limited at the individual level due to dominance of Euro American supporters in the government system. It was only in 2014, the incumbent government made a sincere effort to claim this knowledge system. Presenting the idea of International Day for Yoga in the General Assembly of United Nations Organization (UNO) on September 27, 2014, the Prime Minister of India, Mr. Narendra Modi said, “Yoga is an invaluable gift of India's ancient tradition. It embodies unity of mind and body; thought and action; restraint and fulfillment; harmony between man and nature; a holistic approach to health and well-being. It is not about exercise but to discover the sense of oneness with you, the world and the nature. By changing our lifestyle and creating consciousness, it can help in well-being. Let us work towards adopting an International Yoga Day,” (BBC, 2014). In Sanskrit literature, the original literature of scholars in ancient India, God Shiva has been recognized as the father of Yoga while sage Patanjali is the man who documented the practice with detailed descriptions for humans to practice. Following this initial proposal, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) held informal consultations on the draft resolution entitled “International Day of Yoga”, on 14 October 2014. The consultations were convened by the delegation of India. The draft text received broad support from 177 Member States who sponsored the text, which was adopted without a vote. This initiative found support from many global leaders. A total of 177 nations co-sponsored the resolution, which is the highest number of co-sponsors ever for any UNGA resolution of such nature. The International Day for Yoga is now celebrated throughout the world in most of the countries. In 2015 Reserve Bank of India issued a ten rupees’ commemorative coin to mark the International Day of Yoga.

However, Yoga is still not the part of curriculum in social work programmes in Indian universities. The Euro-American intellectuals (Science Daily, 2018) are now lobbying against the Yoga through intellectual conspiracies. Besides, conducting researches to counter their intellectual conspiracies, there is also great need to rediscover more such models and approaches on the basis of Indian knowledge system and include them in the curriculum of social work for the betterment of humans throughout the globe.

SOCIAL WORK IN FAMILY WELFARE AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Indian Social Workers religiously work for social legislation to pursue their crusade for so called reforms in Hindu Marriage Act 1956 and Special Marriage Act (applicable primarily on inter caste Hindu couples) on the name of providing rights to women but never ever could show the courage to push for similar reforms in Muslim Marriage Act and Christian Marriage Act. There is hardly any voice for the girls and women born in the Hindu, Sikh, Jain and Buddhist women who marry Muslim youths or men. Such women are governed under Muslim marriage rules based on the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat Act). In a historic decision, the Supreme Court of India had provided a relief to Muslims women in Shahbano case but the decision was overruled by the then Prime Minister in Lok Sabha. (Indian Express, 2017). Even there are also different provisions for dowry, legal rights to properties, number of spouses for different religions in India. But for such injustice, social movement never initiated by social workers in India probably due to their different ideological orientations.

The family is one of the most ancient and fundamental social institution in Indian social system but it has not been provided institutional autonomy under the existing legal system. As per the existing guidelines, the modern institutions like corporate offices, government offices, universities etc can form committees that are empowered to look into the cases of sexual harassment complaints of women employees (WCD, 2013). However, the indigenous social institutions like family, village, and Panchayats are always looked at with suspicion and never provided the rights of mediation. This is only because of the Euro American influence in social work practices in India. The decisions of sexual harassment committees in corporate sector (Somvanshi, 2015) and universities (Sebastian, 2016) are highly controversial but it's due to the colonial legacy these modern institutions are considered sacrosanct but the same rights are never granted to indigenous social institutions. There is dearth of original research from social work fraternity from Indian perspective to improve the performance of those systems and make them relevant in the changing circumstances.

VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

The age old adage 'India lives in the villages' continues to be popular quote to glorify villages and villagers in India. However, there is hardly any model of village development that strives to conserve indigenous knowledge of villages practiced in the form of rituals, festivals and customs. The traditional practices of Indian villages particularly those related to crop science, animal husbandry, medicine, and social system are not dogmatic in nature. These traditions are actually manifestations of knowledge disseminated by educational institutions existed before the Europeans landed in the Indian Subcontinent for colonial rule. In absence of provisions for their conservation in Eurocentric rural development models implemented after independence, the villages are gradually losing their traditional knowledge and identity (Garg, 1993). In Delhi alone hundreds of water bodies have dried up (Thakur, 2017), the figure will turn in million if such data is compiled across the country. These water bodies were protected for centuries by the villagers due to their traditional knowledge for water conservation disseminated practices in the form of various customs. There are several such instances to establish that the imported models of village development destroyed the traditional practices of villages. In the second age the curative approaches were also imported from the West to address various problems caused by imported models of rural development.

The government systems lack a proper mechanism to assess and document the loss to the traditional practices of villages due to various rural and urban development projects. In the urbanized areas particularly in Delhi, Noida, Greater Noida, Gurugram most of the villages have converted into slums. In the existing models of development, the villages are not developed as per the requirements of villagers but are urbanized as per the requirements of the urban population and corporate houses.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The social work academicians and professionals in India have a golden opportunity to lead the society towards post-modernity. The Bharatiyakaran of social curriculum is a positive development in this direction in Indian context. The Indic Philosophy 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (the whole world is our family), and 'Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah' (let all be happy) were the guiding principle when designing the Bharatiyakaran of social work curriculum (Dash, 2019). The curriculum has not only expanded the philosophical bases, but also includes the Indic spiritual practices essential for human welfare and happiness. It aims to create dharmic social workers as champions of volunteerism, social service, social welfare due to its emphasis on the Indic social work values such as dharma, satya, nishtha, upeksha and ahimsha. The Indic practices of yoga, vipassana, meditation, naturopathy, hydrotherapy, Ayurveda as well as Indic practices of community development, case work and group work has been included in the social work curriculum. There is great need to introduce the indigenous principles, models, approaches and experiences in social work curriculum. On the basis of the above discussions, the major recommendations are listed as follows to revive the social work discipline in India.

1. The existing social work practices of India could be reviewed from scientific world view and cautiously included in the social work curriculum if it appropriate, suitable and applicable in Indian context. Emphasis should be on developing Indic world view to understand the Indian society and its problems. So there is the need to follow and adopt the curriculum developed by the proponents of the Bharatiyakaran of social work curriculum.
2. This can't be done overnight but a long term sustained effort is required from the social work academicians, researchers, teachers, professionals and practitioners. The provisions of San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA, 2013) particularly including original references could be useful for development of indigenous social work in India.
3. However, the research in social work should not be confined to indigenous models only. The efforts should also be made to provide global perspective as well. We should not close our doors of knowledge but the concepts, ideas, and curricula of the Euro-American origin should not be followed blindly. They must be evaluated for Indian conditions and shall be rejected if not suitable.
4. The Indian social work should not be Eurocentric but the successful practices of Afrocentric social work, Sino centric social work and other experiences of Asian and Pacific region should also be taken up for study through research projects and doctoral theses.
5. There is also need to include successful models of 20th and 21st century in social work curriculum. The creation of national level organization for promotion of quality research in social work would also enrich social work discipline in India.

The developing countries relying on western paradigms and models of social work should make necessary initiatives to decolonize social work education in the lines of Bharatiyakaran of Social work education.

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