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A study on relevance of social work curriculum in selected social work institutions in India

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ABSTRACT

Since its establishment in 1936 social work professional education has evolved in India and currently there are about 526 social work institutions offering certificate to doctoral degree and post-doctoral degree social work programmes (Mathew, 2020). Unfortunately, social work profession in India could not match the international standards due to the lack of indigenous knowledge and over reliance on western theories, concepts, models which have mostly remained American or Eurocentric. In this paper, attempts have been made to evaluate the Master of Social Work (MSW) curriculum of selected social work institutions in India and its relevance in Indian context. The importance of the indigenization of the social work education is highlighted in this article, and also elaborated how the western influence on literature on social work has limited the reach and development of the indigenous social work profession in India. The study suggested that social workers have an intrinsic professional duty to use indigenous approaches to understand local contexts and to undertake culturally relevant research and practice with appropriate efforts to ensure that the practices align with economic, cultural, and political needs of the country. It also recommends that Indian universities must adopt the Indianisation of Social work curriculum and needs to promote Indian indigenous methods and practices of social work along with integration of Indic values of social work viz Dharma (duty), Nishta (dedication), Satya (truth) and Ahimsa (non-violence) in social work education.

KEY TERMS: Bharatiyakaran, cultural practices, India, indigenization, social work profession, western theories

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INTRODUCTION

Social work is 'a value based, ethical and spiritual practice-based profession that aims at addressing the overall problems and sufferings of individuals, groups and communities to attend a peaceful life' (Dash and Roy, 2019). Social work seeks to transform, emancipate and development society (Yadav, 2018). Social work is not a complete profession in India, and it is only a semi-profession (Nair, 2015). Western theories of social work are created in different contexts, which are philosophically and practically far from Asia. While social work has plenty of opportunities to submerge and involve itself in local contexts, in Asia, social work is too weak to resist the neoliberal policies of the governments (Yadav, 2018). Social work is struggling at different fronts, for instance to blend international perspectives on social work practices with the indigenous knowledge and to get a professional status. In the Indian context, there is a long way to go to see people addressing issues related with social work professional employment, its settings and regulation (Siddiqui and Sukhramani, 2001). The Indian values *dharma* (duty), *Nishta* (dedication), *Satya* (truth) and *Ahimsha* (non-violence) are the eternal values and are timeless universal values that need to be introduced across the globe into the social work curriculum which will definitely improve the quality and competencies of social work professionals. In light of the above, the current study aims to examine the relevance of Master of Social Work (MSW) curriculum in selected social work institutions in India. Authors have also explored the extent of Indic and western theories and concepts in the curriculum.

SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IN INDIA AND ITS EURO-AMERICAN ORIGINS

The establishment of Tata Institute of Social Sciences in 1936, commenced professionalisation of Indian social work education. The main inspiration for its founding came from the United States of America primarily because an American was its founding director. Historically, the essence of social work education in India has been consistent with Eurocentric norms and regulated by incremental community welfare models (Dash, 2019). The key objective of social work education is to encourage the integration of multidisciplinary social work knowledge, attitudes and people-centered skills encompassing realistic approaches and participation in research work. Even after eight decades of social work education in India, still it is not recognized as a profession by the Indian government. The inappropriateness of Euro -American social work in the curriculum taught at various Indian universities has been highlighted by various social work scholars who insist on creative indigenous social work to be taught in Indian schools of social work.

The present pattern of social work education in India has been adopted from USA and Europe. The theories, models and methods of social work are based on western cultures and the validity of these methods, techniques are yet to be tested in Indian context. The quality standards in Social Work education have always been problematized since its inception. The American School of Social Work and its impact on the Indian professional Social Work impose a discourse on indigenous literature (Bodhi, 2011). Various scholars have always highlighted the euro Americanism in Indian social work education and have advocated for Indigenous social work (Desai, 1985; Kumar, 2002; Nagpaul, 1993; Wadia, 1968). With a view to deconstruct Western theories and influences many authors have focused on promoting culturally relevant social work, (Rankopo and Osei- Hwedie, 2011).

In this context, it is important to explore the current social work education scenario and to understand students' opinions and perceptions about it (Amiri, 2018). Diversity in India has a vital role to play in the standardization of education for social work. In the University Grants Commission (2001) (UGC) Model Social Work Curriculum, the multiple socio-cultural and political-economic conditions were highlighted and were given importance for standardized curriculum of social work across all Indian Universities. In its model curriculum, the UGC (2001) sets technical mandates for teaching, studying, and practicing of social work. Since its inception, quality levels of social work education have often been problematic. Since social work course's introduction at Indian Universities The indigenization of social work and Americanization of social work debate in India still persists. The practice of social work should be applicable locally, while social work expertise can be borrowed from another culture (Weaver, 2014). The development of the indigenous literature in social work is limited India by the easy availability of Western literature on social work education.

In India, social work still requires shedding Western and American influences and embed local values and practice approaches that will provide the students with a great knowledge base and a strong collection of practical skills (Howard, 1971), Dash, 2020). During the period of British Colonial India, it opened to modern approaches and started to establish social work schools grounded on the American model under American leadership and followed all its basic values. Gray and Coates (2010) describe indigenization as an area of knowledge creation reliant on people's knowledge, training, and assert that, they are unique ways of life. Indigenization is a method of adaptation from a functional point of view by rising social work approaches practised in non-western settings in an effort to create the imported information applicable or acceptable to the local setting. It focuses on the practice of social work to solve problems of local people, their behaviour, interpreting local people and solving their issues with effective cultural observation.

The activity must be in consideration of the local community's theoretical and ideological foundations that establish the recipients of social work programmes and interventions (Parker, 2015). Social work education encountered multiple realities like social, physical, cultural, spatial, ethnic and linguistic differences and this places education in social work in a strange yet daunting setting in its journey to ensure people's well-being (Adaikalm, 2014). Nagpaul (1988) argued that in any society, if social work has to successfully shift towards professionalism, it must have indigenous foundations integrating dominant cultural values.

'Indigenization' should begin with local culture and support activities usage as the primary sources of information for practice and development, thereby ensuring that practice of social work is 'culturally acceptable and important' (Osei-Hwedie, 1993). Studies conducted in UK, Vietnam, Bhutan shows that, at the cost of various social systems and indigenization, the existing social work models are introduced in a foreign context to consider certain local factors that influence the profession (Crisp, 2017; Parker et al., 2017). In order to comply with the country's problems and desires, the need to restructure social work practice is important because the practice is dominated by western thoughts (Lutz, 2018). Internationally, attempts have been made to decolonize social work education by implementing indigenization and fundamental structured policies that have link between the objective of social work education (Morelli, Mataira and Kaulukukui, 2013).

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) (2004) also notes that "... social workers should understand and value the ethnic and cultural diversity of the societies in which they operate, taking into account differences between individuals, families, groups and communities...". The study is based on content analysis and review of literature. It has primarily attempted to examine the course content of selected social work institutions in India.

METHODOLOGY

The study has used content analysis of MSW curriculum of ten top ranking social work institutes in India (Outlook India, 2019) and examined the extent of indigenization of social work curriculum. The systematic analysis revealed the Western and American impact on core papers and specialization papers on social work offered in Indian universities. The role of social work organizations in promoting the indigenous elements of education in social work has been intensively studied.

FINDINGS

Course pattern

The content analysis of the curriculum offered at top-ranking social work institutes in India (Outlook survey, 2019) reveals course content division into five categories. The first aspect of the curriculum consists of courses capacitating students to have better insight into the scope of Indian society's socio-economic trajectory. The kinds of courses included in the social work syllabus were the history and philosophy of social work. On the basis of our critique these mostly focused on global history and emergence of social work with little emphasis on social work's development in Indian context. India's rich history and rich culture has arguably found little space in the social work curriculum.

The second aspect observed regarding the curriculum is how it is mostly linked to the study of human development which basically deals with basic psychological processes. The third aspect of the curriculum include courses on methods for working with people, such as social casework, social group work, community organisation, social welfare administration, social action and social research. The fourth aspect consists of specialised courses offered during the second year of study to be opted by the students; and the fifth group consists of specialised two-year post graduate course in social work. Across all sampled social work schools, similarities were noted regarding the original pattern of social work curriculum developed in the mid-1950s by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences and the Delhi School of Social Work (Nagpaul, 1980). The top ten schools of social work as per Outlook Survey, 2019 has been included in the sample.

The study found that thirteen specializations are offered in these top-ranking schools of social work. The distribution of number of specializations offered in those institutions is presented in the table no 1.

Table 1: Number of specializations offered by different schools of social work

S. No	Name of the specialization	Number of Institutions
1.	Medical and Psychiatric Social Work	5
2.	Community Development	4
3.	Human Resource Management	3
4.	Family and Child Welfare	2
5.	Development Management	1
6.	Social Development Practice	1
7.	Social Welfare Practice	1
8.	Family, Child and Youth Welfare	1
9.	Rural Reconstruction and Urban Development	1
10.	Industrial Relations and Human Resource Management	1
11.	Welfare of the Disadvantaged Section	1
12.	Human Rights	1
13.	Criminal Behaviour and Correctional Administration	1

The study also found that two schools of social work also offer thirteen advanced two-year postgraduate courses in social work in various fields such as community development, youth, girls, family, criminology, Public Health, Dalit and Tribal Studies, Mental Health, Livelihood and Social Entrepreneurship, Counselling, Rural Development, Women-Centred practice, and Management of Human Capital. Those courses are:

- Master of Social Work (MSW) Clinical and Community Practice
- Master of Social Work (MSW) Human Resource Development and Management
- Master of Arts in Social Work (Dalit & Tribal Studies and Action)
- Master of Arts in Social Work (Children & Families)
- Master of Arts in Social Work (Criminology & Justice)
- Master of Arts in Social Work (Community Organisation & Development Practice)
- Master of Arts in Social Work (Mental Health)
- Master of Arts in Social Work (Public Health)
- Master of Arts in Social Work (Women-Centred Practice)
- Master of Arts in Social Work (Disability Studies & Action)
- Master of Arts in Social Work (Livelihoods and Social Entrepreneurship)
- Master of Arts in Social Work (Counselling)
- Master of Arts (Social Work in Rural Development)

Comparative analysis of Indian and Western outlook curriculum

The study found that techniques and theories taught in Indian social work institutions as social work methods of intervention *vis-a-viz* social case work, social group work, community organization, social action, social welfare administration and social work research largely mirror Euro-American centric curriculum.

Table 2: Social work in India and in the West

<i>Indian social work</i>	<i>Western social work</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues, problems and responses • Policy and legal issues • Programmes • Action and advocacy, • Indigenous approaches and methods • Theories examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Gandhian theory ○ Indigenous ○ Decolonial ○ Developmental 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition, western history of ideologies, contemporary ideologies for social change and Social Work profession • Models, skills, principles, methods, principles, ideological, core competencies • Social case work and therapeutic intervention, social group work; community organization practice and history; concept and evolution of social action, models of social action • Administrative process, in social work • Theories examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ecological systems ○ Marxist ○ Radical social work approaches

The specialized social work courses focused primarily on different social work contexts at the local level and relatively more local concepts were introduced into these specialized courses, namely Community Development in Youth, Girls, Elderly, Rural, Tribal and Urban; Women's status in India; Women's Movements in India; Trade Unionism in India; Industrial Relations; Indian social security schemes; Psychological Social Work; Indian Alternative Health System; various settings of medical social work practice; Indian environmental movements; Environmental Management; different Indian laws on various settings of social work; and Case Studies on social work practice. However, the most scientific Indian models of rural development and social welfare are found missing in the entire curriculum in social work.

The extent of Indian and Western wisdom in social work curriculum vary in the curriculum of contents of the methods of social work and syllabuses of specialisations/electives offered. The analysis of the specialisation/elective courses reveals that, the Indian concepts and theories primarily added in specialized courses whereas methods of social work syllabus, is dominated by Western and American concepts, theories and knowledge.

The study also shows that the reading lists used by those universities are dominated by western authors outlining western perspectives. However, the curriculum of those universities shows that the reading list also includes few Indian writings such as *Social Work: Philosophy and Methods* by P.D. Misra (1994); *Social Work Profession in India: An Uncertain Future* by T. K. Nair (2015); *History and Philosophy of Social Work in India* by Wadia (1961); *Ideologies and Social Work Historical and Contemporary Analyses* by Murli Desai (2010); *Social work education* by M. S. Gore (1965); *Social work: An integrated approach* by Sanjay Bhattacharya (2004); *Methodology of progressive social work education* by Murali Desai, M. (2004); *What is professional social work?* by Payne, M. (2007); *Indian Social Structure* by M. N. Srinivas (1991); *Sociology of Indian society* by C. N. Rao (2004); *An Introduction to Social Case Work* by Grace Mathew (1992); *Group work: Theories and practices* by H Y Siddiqui (2008); *Community organisation in Social Work* by Joseph S. & Dash, B. M. (2013); *Social Work and Social Action* by H.Y. Siddiqui (1984); *Social Work Administration and Development* by Sanjay Bhattacharya (2009); *Rural Appraisal: Rapid, Relaxed and Participatory* by Chambers, R. (1992); *Social work in urban India* by Nagpaul, H. (1996); and *Research Methodology Methods and Techniques* by Kothari C R (2006). Recent contributions of Indian academicians are not included in the reading list. There were more western centric books written by western authors are included in the curriculum which emphasises on western concepts and Indic wisdom and experiences are completely side-lined and even those Indian concepts which are scientifically proved relevant for social work profession in Indian context are also negated. Except very few books, mostly the books are published before 2000. It shows that the reading lists of these universities are not updated regularly.

Very old western authored books were on the list, surprisingly. These included *Social Casework: A Problem-Solving Process* by H.H. Perlman (1957); *Theory and practice and Practice of Social Casework* by G. Hamilton (1964); *Social group work: Principles & practice* by H. B. Trecker (1970); *Social group work a helping process* by Konopka, G. (1983); *Community organizations: theory, principles, and practice* by M. G. Ross (1967); and *Research Design* by Creswell (1994). These were referred by nearly all the social work institutions. The reading list needs to be updated regularly.

The central feature of social work education is fieldwork, and the field work education is the "signature pedagogy" of the profession of social work (Council of Social Work Education, CSWE, 2008). Fieldwork is

essential for social work education and for the training of professional social work practices with objective of helping the students to develop the skills, attitudes and values and personality characteristics essential for a professional social worker. The social work student needed to undergo the concurrent fieldwork training 15 hours (two days) per instructional week. During fieldwork training, students are to be placed in local self-government institutions, welfare agencies, development organisation, community-based organisation. Field work training in social work education emphasises on evidence-based knowledge, field-related abilities and hands-on experience. For future social work practitioners, the concurrent field work preparation and block placement internship to be effective, needs careful planning. Fieldwork supervision considered as a vital part of instructional hours, envisages continuous interaction between the social worker trainee, agency supervisor and the supervisor. During supervised fieldwork, the social work trainee will be assessed for their integration of knowledge (theories) and applications in practice, personal and professional development, skills acquisition, research, documentation, involvement, initiatives undertaken and cooperation with the agency personnel. Unfortunately, many Indian scholars authored field workbooks published through reputable international publishers do not feature on the reading lists of many universities. Even there has been no attempts to revive the field work practicum in Indian Universities. In ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the western model of concurrent mode of field work training has arguably failed and needs redesigning mindful of the Indian situation with the pandemic and how students' needs to be creatively supported with their fieldwork.

However, many schools of social work are updating their curriculum and reference lists and integrating Indic components that specifically deal with needs and challenges of Indian context and has integrated Indic models of social welfare and rural development. Mahatma Gandhi Central University, Bihar, Jagadguru Rambhadracharya Divyanga University, Uttar Pradesh have taken initiatives in Indianising their social work curriculum. *Bharatiyakaran* ("Indianization") of social work education aims to tweak the entire social work curriculum to create a synergy between Indian traditional social services and practices and global standards of social work education (Dash,2020). It has made an attempt to unshackle the curriculum from the dominant Euro- American centric paradigm. *Bharatiyakaran* of social work curriculum has included both Indian experiences of social welfare and rural development as well as global knowledge on social work. Besides that, different philosophical base of social work is also included in the social work curriculum.

To create and use indigenous research materials, Indian social work educators need to realize the value and importance of Indic knowledge, experiences and models of rural development and social welfare. Social work education has remained stagnant in respect to its curriculum, and field work training in India. The social work community needs to recognize that there is a great need for incorporation indigenous social work practices in the social work curriculum (Dash, 2018). Social work education should emphasize and encourage the ancient Indic values, principles in its curriculum and effectively cultivate to improve social institutions such as family, kinship, marriage, religious institutions that encourage the feeling of affection, brotherhood, sympathy, well-being of all to ensure better social fitness in order to avoid such a critical situation for the social work profession. The Indian values of *dharma* (duty), *Nishta* (dedication), *satya* (truth) and *ahimsa* (non-violence) are the eternal values. These Indian values are timeless universal values that need to be introduced across the globe into the social work curriculum (Dash,2019). The social work curriculum should give space for the Indian social reform movements, rural reconstruction experiments and philosophies of Indian great personalities including Guru Nanak Dev, Mahatma Gandhi, B. R. Ambedkar, Jyotiba Phule, E V R Periyar, Swami Vivekananda, Narayana Guru, Rabindranath Tagore, Mother Teresa, and other eminent personalities (Shukla and Dash, 2019).

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK TEACHING AND LEARNING IN INDIA AND OTHER COUNTRIES

The indigenization of social work curriculum is the need of the hour in India because the Euro-American centric social work curriculum has failed in producing efficient social workers who are able to successfully solve the psychosocial problems of individuals. It is being highlighted in several studies that the western theoretical and practice models are irrelevant in Indian context which has been applied in Indian context without testing its suitability and applicability. The study suggests that there is an urgent need to adopt the *Bharatiyakaran*/Indianisation of social work curriculum. This can be definitely more relevant to Indian context. The social work curriculum must be developed along the lines of New Education Policy, 2020 of Government of India which emphasises on integrating ancient Indic wisdom in the curriculum. Secondly there must be a uniform social work curriculum across social work institutions in India. There is an urgent need to establish an Indian social work council entrusted with the responsibility for regulating and monitoring the standards and quality of social work education in India. The reading lists of Indian social Institutions should be regularly updated so that students are provided updated knowledge in the field of social work. Majority of readings must be Indian authored books. While a few books from other parts of the world are essential, old Western published books must not be on the list.

CONCLUSION

The social work profession should be contextualised and based on social realities obtaining on the frontline where social workers apply their skills. So, the curriculum for the social work profession should not be presented in isolation and the curriculum which is not appropriate to Indian context needs to be removed from the syllabuses of Indian Universities. Therefore, Indigenous theories, methods, values, practices as well as literature should not be side-lined because working with people, studying social issues and implementing social welfare programmes calls for indigenous orientation. The claim that social work knowledge is universal, the foreignness of social work education is as inclusive and omnipresent that many social work graduates in India struggle to apply irrelevant methods in practice settings, as a result they are not fully able to utilise their skills and competencies. In addition to that the present pattern of social work training would not allow them to take on leadership positions in the planning, formulation and execution of social welfare programmes at various levels of practice and administration because of over emphasis of western knowledge and perspective. High quality research and investigation based on Indic research mythologies is needed in this direction for creation of indigenous knowledge. Government also needs to promote and emphasise the teaching and practice of indigenous social work education. The teaching and training of Bharatiyakaran modelled social work ensures embracing and popularising indigenous model of social work education in India.

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