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Changing trends of social work curriculum: a study of selected social work institutions in India

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ABSTRACT

The article critically examines the social work curriculum of few selected social work institutions in India. By using the content analysis method, the article analyses the changing trends of social work curriculum in Indian universities. The study found that few selected institutions have incorporated the Indic indigenous components and theories in social work curriculum in line with New Education Policy (NEP), 2020 of Government of India and fulfillment of sustainable development goal of quality education in comparison to the top-ranking social work institutions which are still following the western concepts, models and theories. The study reveals that prevalence of Euro-American-centric social work curriculum, lack of uniformity in curriculum across universities and non-standardised fieldwork training is hampering the quality of social work education in India. Besides that, it also highlights the importance of Indianisation of social work curriculum towards the fulfillment of sustainable development goals. This article will be very useful for global social work fraternity as it highlights the changing trends of social work curriculum in Indian universities.

KEY TERMS: social work curriculum, New Education Policy, Sustainable Development Goals, Indianisation

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INTRODUCTION

Since the inception of social work education in India in the year 1936, social work curriculum in Indian universities has primarily remained Euro American centric. However, many social work educators in India had emphasized towards Indigenisation of social work education in India. The various earlier academic exercises undertaken by University Grants Commission to make the curriculum relevant, the analysis of the curriculum reflects that still it is Euro American Centric. The philosophy, values, models are primarily western and Indian knowledge system in the field of social work is missing. The students trained in Euro-American methods and techniques find it difficult to apply in Indian field settings and are not very successful in as professional social workers. Social work discipline in Indian is still struggling to get recognition as professional course. Very recently, there is a growing demand for establishment of social work council in India by various social work educators. However, without indigenising the social work curriculum and field work pedagogy as per the needs and demands of the Indian society, the social work discipline will not be able to achieve its recognition as professional subject. The present research paper has attempted in examining the course contents and suggested reading lists of as prescribed in the social work curriculum in select universities in India and has strongly recommended for restructuring and 'Indianising' the social work curriculum.

SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION IN INDIA: STRUGGLING FOR PROFESSIONAL STATUS

Social work education stresses the need for understanding the native social structure and problems, Indic values, ethics as well as Indic cosmology to address the problems of individuals, groups and communities. However, there has been little attempt towards Indigenizing social work curriculum in India. Whatever attempts have been in this regards, it has again tried to fit and refit within the western framework. Nair (2015) argued that social work is a semi-profession not a complete profession in India. Dash (2018) in his article has raised serious concerns about the status of social work profession in India as whether it is a profession or semi profession or evolving to be a profession. It is widely accepted phenomenon that borrowed western theory of social work is irrelevant which is being taught to students in Indian universities. In India, the present design of social work education has been adopted from the American model of social work education and it has been an issue of continuous argument in social work education and practice since its beginning (Desai, 1981; Gore, 1981; Mathew, 1981; Mohan, 1999; Pathak, 1989; Siddiqui, 1989; Subhedar & Lawani, 2005). The educational institutes that offer social work courses from certificate, diploma to doctoral degree is quiet promising to get the attention from different human service professionals but quantitative growth has no sense without quality social work education and training (Desai, 2003; Garain, 2010). The nature of professional social work education and practice greatly varies from one country to another. However, it is possible to identify a few common trends, which partly explain the state of social work practice in local-level communities. As professional social work is taking roots in the traditional societies of many developing countries, by and large, it is extremely difficult and challenging for it to develop an identity and recognition as a profession (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2001; Hugman, 2009).

Social work as a profession has been struggling at various fronts in India like getting a professional status. There has been a long history of social work professionals in India including social work professional's employment, and its setting and regulation (Siddiqui & Sukhramani, 2001). Western theories of social work are created in different contexts, which are philosophically and practically far from Asia and its regional context. 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 CURRICULUM: AN ANALYSIS

The content analysis of Social work curriculum in various public funded universities reveals that the course content is roughly divided into three categories. The first aspect of the curriculum consists of courses to understand social work methods. The kind of courses included in the social work curriculum was the origin, philosophy and direct and indirect methods of social work. The origin of social work has focused on the history that emphasis on the development of social work in global and Indian context. India's history and culture (including social work), being an ancient civilization and a pluralistic society, is rich and varied has found little space in the social work curriculum. The courses on methods on working with people, such as social work with individuals, social work with groups, community organization, social welfare administration, social action and social work research were offered during the first year of study. These courses were compulsory for all the students those who are pursuing MSW but the indigenous concepts and methods is limited. The study revealed that there is more need of introducing indigenous knowledge, approaches and concepts in the curriculum. The second aspect consists of specialized courses offered during the second year of study to be opted by the students. The third aspect consists of concurrent fieldwork, rural, urban and tribal camps and internship. The social work curriculum is quite similar in all selected social work schools, and 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 continues to be followed (Nagpaul, 1980).

The study found that two generic social work and eight specializations are offered in selected social work institutes. The distribution of number of specializations offered in those institutions is presented in the table no one.

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

S. No	Name of the Specialisation	Number of Institutions
1.	Community Development	2
2.	Physical and Mental Health	1
3.	Disaster Management	1
4.	Medical and Psychiatric Social Work	1
5.	Family and Child Welfare	1
6.	Development Management	1
7.	Human Resource Management	2
8.	Child Rights and Child Protection	1

CONCEPTS AND RESOURCE MATERIALS

The study found that in social work method papers viz, social work with individuals, social work with groups, community organization, social action, social welfare administration and social work research papers, concepts, values and techniques and theories taught in Indian social work institutions have incorporated little indigenous concepts and approaches and still more Indic concepts needs to added in order reduce the influence of west at large.

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 Corporate Social Responsibility, Social Entrepreneurship, Welfare of Weaker Sections, Community Development in Youth, women, Elderly, Rural, Tribal and Urban, Technological Interventions for Community Development, Climate Change and Sustainable Development, Poverty Reduction, Micro Finance and Micro Enterprises, Fundamentals of Industrial Relations, Labor Legislation, Wage and Salary Administration, Trade Unionism and Collective Bargaining, Organizational Development, Management Function and Behaviors, Strategic Management, Project Management, International HRM, Contemporary Employment Relations, Human Resource Development, Human Resource Information system, Social Security & Wage Legislation, Social Work Practice in Correctional Setting, Juvenile Justice and Rehabilitation in Correctional Setting, Community Health and Development, Mental Health and Therapeutic Counselling, Introduction to Medical Social Work, Hospital Administration, Psychiatric Social Work Practice, Care and Support Services for Children, Interventions for Child Rights and Child Protection, Interventions for Children in Humanitarian Crisis, Hazards, Risk and Disasters, Standards and Approaches in Disaster Relief and Recovery, Community Care in Physical Health, Mental Health Services in Disaster Management, Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change and there are elective courses which introduce in further level of helping social work professionals for their social work practice in the communities namely Life Skill Education, Tribal Anthropology and Social Work, Media and Social Work, Human Rights and Social Justice, Gender and Development, Social work in the field of disability, Computer Applications in Social Work and Science and Technology Applications for Social Work.

The study materials which are authored by American/Western and Indian scholars as found from the study can be divided into two categories namely Areas of Social Work practice/settings and Methods of Social Work. Few Indian concepts and theories are added in Areas of Social work Practice Books and methods of social work books are mostly dominated by western and American concepts, theories and materials.

In reference list, there is a sharp change in increase of Indian authored books, in that many books were mostly related to social work specialisation and social work methods. The books by Indian authors are as follows; *History and Philosophy of Social Work in India* by Wadia, A. R. (1961); *Social work education* by M.S. Gore (1965); *Social Work: Philosophy and Methods* by P.D. Misra (1994); *Encyclopedia in Social Work*, (1987); *Social work: An integrated approach* by Sanjay Bhattacharya (2004); *Methodology of progressive social work education* by Murali Desai, M. (2004); *Ideologies and Social Work Historical and Contemporary Analyses* by Murli Desai (2010); *Social Work in India* edited by Dash, B.M., Kumar, M. and Shukla, S. (2019); *New Frontiers in Social Work Practice* edited by Dash, B.M., Parshuraman, K.G., Ramesh, B. and Kumar, M. (2019); *Indian Social Work* edited by Dash, B.M., Kumar, M., Singh, D P. and Shukla, S. (2020); *Indian Social Structure* by M.N. Srinivas (1991); *Sociology of Indian society* by CN Shankar Rao (2004); *An Introduction to Social Case Work* by Grace Mathew (1992); *Social Case Work: A therapeutic Approach* by Upadhyay, R. K. (2003); *Social Group*

Work by Gopelwar, Banmala (2010); *Group work: Theories and practices* by H. Y. Siddiqui (2008); *Social Work and Social Action* by H. Y. Siddiqui (1984); *Social Work Administration and Development* by Sanjay Bhattacharya (2009); *Community Organisation in India* by Gangrade, K. D. (1971); *Rural Development in India* by Maheshwari Shivram (1985); *Strategies of Community Organization* by H. Y. Siddiqui (1974); *Working with Communities* by Siddiqui H. Y. (1997); *Social Policy and Social Development in India* by Kulkarni, (1979); *Social Work and Social Welfare Administration, Methods and Practices* by Devi, Rameshwari and Parkash Ravi (1998); *Rural Development Planning-Design and Method* by Misra, S. N. (1984); *Medical Social Work* by Pathak S.H. (1961); *Social Work Perspective on Health* edited by Bajpai, P. K. (1997); *Organizational Effectiveness of NGOs* by Garain, S. (1998); *Voluntary Action and Social Welfare in India* by Ranade, S. N. (2004); *Social work in urban India* by Nagpaul, H. (1996); *Social Work Research and Statistics* by Ramchandran, P. (1968); and *Research Methodology Methods and Techniques* by Kothari C. R. (2006). There were more western-centric books published by non-Indian authors included in the curriculum which explains about the larger western-influenced notions and concepts in social work. This indicates that due to lack of Indian authored social work method books in social work literature it makes the influence of indigenous social work education marginal and the availability of lesser Indian authored books on subjects like Social Work with Individuals, Social Work Research, Social Work with Groups in comparison the way western authored books are marked in the reference list of the social work curriculum, gives a clear picture about the need of adding more indigenous literature in the form of articles, books and other sources of literature on indigenous social work in India.

Recognising the importance of research, many schools of social work have made the project report and dissertation a compulsory part of the master's programme. Students are encouraged to take up intervention research within the area of his/ her specialization in consultation with the supervisor who will offer continuous guidance to acquire the knowledge and application of research steps. The final evaluation and viva-voce will be held at the end of the fourth semester. All the social work institutes are giving importance to research project. This research project is helping the future social work professionals to apply social work methods in their research project. This could be an element of evaluation, which is always threatening, but will bring forth several important issues and findings, which will not only add to the improvement of the project but also add to social work knowledge. A lot of indigenous knowledge, such as stories and folklore will be lost, if it is not documented and disseminated, and also a need to focus on unpublished NGO material which is not printed, but which is very useful for knowledge production (Desai, Jaswal, & Ganapathi, 2004).

The central feature of social work education is fieldwork. Fieldwork practice in social work has got key role in transforming social work trainees from personal self to professional self with the restructuring and enhancement of fieldwork content and quality standards, social growth can be accomplished. For social work profession field work education is the “signature pedagogy” (CSWE, 2008). Concurrent Field Work is an integral component of social work curriculum, as it connects the students to the realities of social issues, marginalization and vulnerabilities of various sections of the society. The fieldwork would enhance the capacity of the students to interact and intervene with clients/ groups/ community. The students have to undergo Field Work Training two days a week/15 hours of fieldwork training in all the semesters. In the first semester, the students are introduced to basic concepts of fieldwork with an orientation about the types of setting where the students can undergo fieldwork. Afterwards the students will be placed in selected setting where they have to try basic methods of social work.

Rural camps play an essential role in transformative learning among social work trainees, helps to inculcate skills, professional attitude and promote to conduct indigenous practice with new strategies and tactics with unique communities. It not only promotes transformative learning happens among Social Work trainees but also certain professional interaction occurred among the Social Work trainees and faculty camp supervisors and also provides opportunities to apply and test professional knowledge, value & ethics through trial and error process takes place during camp. The trainees have to participate in a Rural/Urban/Tribal camp which gives an opportunity to understand the real-life situations in the rural/ tribal settings in the society and it also provides the opportunity to enhance the skills in planning, organizing and implementing programmes/ projects for the marginalized people. The field work paradigms and practice modules also needs to be completely indigenised in the light of changing social structure and education policy of the country.

Indigenization of social work education has been partially adopted in the social work curriculum in few universities. There is a great need for incorporation of Indian approaches, perspectives, principles, and experiences in the social work curriculum through research studies and publications, cataloguing Indian-indigenous books, making students aware of Indian experiences and ideas, popularizing Indian social work terminology, documenting successful Indian experiments in rural reconstruction and effective indigenous models and approaches (Dash, 2018), all of which together constitute an massive repository for the social work professional education. To create and use indigenous social work methods materials, Indian social work educators need to realize the value of indigenous social work of transforming current social work education. So, their research and activities 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; Munro, 2011).

Indian social work educators need to realize the importance of transforming existing social work education to develop and use of indigenous study materials (Dash, 2020) for improving the quality of social work education. Studies reveal that the current western social work models are applied in a foreign context at the expense of different social structures and indigenization to recognize some local factors which impact on the practice (Crisp, 2017; Singh et al., 2011; Parker et al., 2017). Indigenous methods of working with people need to be developed and case studies written for teaching purposes and indigenous philosophical writings need to be included in the teaching materials (Nagpaul, 1988).

Historically, the essence of social work education in India has been consistent with Eurocentric norms and regulated by western community welfare models (Dash, 2019). All social work institutes need to encourage the ancient Indic values, principles in its curriculum and effectively cultivate to improve social institutions in order to avoid such a critical situation for the social work profession. These Indian values are timeless universal values that need to be introduced across the globe into the curriculum of social work. The Indian social reform movements, rural reconstruction experiments, and socio-developmental ideologies of Indian great personalities such as 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 should be included in the social work curriculum (Shukla & Dash, 2019).

INDIGENISATION OF SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION - CRUCIAL FOR PROFESSIONALISING SOCIAL WORK DISCIPLINE IN INDIA

The indigenization of social work education remains the greatest challenge in many countries (Gray, 2005; Gray, Coates & Yellow Bird, 2008; Pawar, 1999; Tsui & Yan, 2010). The debate on Indigenization of social work and western/Americanisation of social work in India since the introduction of social work courses continues in Indian Universities. 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 enforce a discourse on indigenous literature (Bodhi, 2011). Pathare (2014) argued that the impact of Euro-American centric social work implemented by various Indian universities in the curriculum of social work and urged creative indigenous social work curriculum with focus on the relevance of culturally relevant social work, through a view to embark on the influence of Western theories (Michael, 2015; Osei-Hwedie & Rankopo, 2008). Indigenization implies modifying, adopting and incorporating Western social work knowledge and approaches with local knowledge, ideas, problem-solving and services to fit the local context (Hugman, 2010; Kreitzer, 2012; Osei-Hwedie & Rankopo, 2008). Gray and Coates (2010) describes indigenization as an area of knowledge creation that relies on people's knowledge, training, and assets that are unique ways of life.

Gray et al. (2008) distinguish between indigenization, which is predominantly indigenous social work, and importing Western social work, which entails developing culturally relevant social work with and by Indigenous people. Nagpaul (1988) argued that in any society, if social work has to shift towards professionalism and has to become successful, it must have indigenous foundations integrating dominant cultural values. According to studies, current social work models are presented in a foreign setting to address certain local elements that influence the profession at the expense of various social systems and indigenization. (Crisp, 2017; Parker et al., 2017; Singh et al., 2011). Several attempts have been made to decolonize social work education by applying indigenous methods, approaches and fundamental designed policies that have link between the objectives of social work education at international level (Morelli, Mataira & Kaulukukui, 2013).

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). In its model curriculum, the multiple socio-cultural and political-economic conditions were highlighted and placed importance for standardized curriculum of social work across all Indian Universities. 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 by the Western influence on social work education. Indian is a land of diverse social, physical, cultural, spatial, ethnic and linguistic differences and in order to address the country's problems and challenges, the need to restructure social work practice is important because the practice is dominated by western thoughts (Lutz, 2018) which have been often challenged by various social academia as ineffective and irrelevant. India is having a different social fibre which requires indigenous social work to make it culturally relevant and will surely be socially recognised.

CONCLUSION

The goals of the social work profession are formed from social realities, so the social work curriculum should not be kept in isolation. As a value-based profession, social work can only be valid if it is recognized and approved by the local people and communities. Social work education focuses on the development of deeper insight in societal work where students through a critical pedagogy process, become aware of social challenges and problems and are driven to solve them. The importance of indigenous aspects in social work education cannot be

neglected in Indian context in terms of techniques, values, theories, and study materials, because working with people, investigating social issues, and implementing social welfare programmes require indigenous orientation. So, the University Grants Commissions – the organisations that regulates the standards and quality of education need to draft model social work curriculum focusing on Indianising the social work syllabi as well as the teaching learning pedagogy. Social work educators in Indian universities in India must come out to reject the western and American model, and take concrete steps to restructure the curriculum in the line of national education policy towards promoting Indigenisation in the social work curriculum.

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