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## RECONCEPTUALISING THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORKERS IN VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS IN INDIA

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### Abstract:

*The term Social Worker is used very casually for any person doing any spiritual, political or welfare work for the benefit of society. The role and function of such social workers vary with their personal interest and motives. However, in social work literature we have considerable body of literature which defines the role and responsibilities of a social worker in various contexts. In India the role of a social worker is understood in lines of role of social reformers or political thinkers. The complex nature of Indian society further makes the role of social worker very challenging. The present paper is an attempt to explore the role of social workers in non-government organization. The objective of present paper is to understand the difficulties faced by social workers in delivery of their service and also to identify the areas where the role of professional social workers could be strengthened.*

### KEY WORDS:

Social Worker, Society, Profession, Welfare.

### INTRODUCTION

The concept of social welfare in India had a long history. Voluntarism is an integral part of Indian culture and heritage. The first mention of the concept of charity has been mentioned in Rig Veda, which devote an entire chapter on charity. To encourage charity the Rig Veda says, "May the one who gives shine most". Similarly another relevant ancient text Upanishads declare that it is better not to help at all than to help without showing due respect to the object of charity. It further says that the spiritual and secular knowledge is most precious gift and consider the gifts that satisfy physical needs as least important. During the pre-colonial time the responsibility of welfare activities was jointly shared by state, religion and social organizations. The charitable activities inspired by the religious beliefs and values continued to remain major source of welfare activities in the pre-colonial period. Education, construction of public utility and civil administration were the areas of welfare oriented activities during the period.

The emergence of Buddhism (542 B.C) provided a new orientation to the concept of voluntarism and welfare activities. Buddha founded Sangha or monastic order, consisting of monks and nuns. The spreading spiritual knowledge along with service to needy and poor were the major activities carried out by the members of Sangha. In Jainism (600 B.C) there is a mention of religious organizations engaged in welfare activities. In Jain literature, the services rendered by physician for needy patient and construction of hospitals are freely mentioned.

During the Mughal dynasty, Muslims were ordained by their religious commandments to give fifth of their income to poor members of their community. Similarly Parsis care for the poor through their Panchayats and community services and Sikhs through services rendered by Gurudwaras for the welfare of poor and needy.

The concept of charity and voluntarism in the pre-colonial phase suggest that they were intertwined with several social and religious beliefs and values. During the period it actively played role in uplifting the social and economic development. It operated in the fields of education, medicine, and culture and situations arises such as drought, epidemic, foreign invasion etc. The poor and needy people belong to disadvantaged section of the society were taken care by social institutions viz. joint family, caste groups, guilds and religiously motivated social volunteers.

During the Mughal rule in India, the religious and social life started setting the various rules for the local people, which inspired the different forms of charity and welfare activities viz, Zakat. The main purpose of the Zakat was to help the needy but it also used for promoting education and other civic amenities. The practice of creating Waqfs or trusts had started very early among Muslims and the expenditure of most philanthropic establishments was met out of the income of waqfs.

The emergence of Christianity and colonial rule brought modern notion of Volunteerism and welfare services. The Christianity promoted education and urged men to dedicate themselves to the service of God through service of human beings.

During the Colonial phase the development of non-profit sector was closely associated with social reform and freedom movement. The British colonial administration also supported the various private organizations engaged in social services. The contact with the west brought various new ideas and thoughts based on rationality, liberalism and democracy. The impact of English education with the efforts of Christian missionaries forced man educated Indian to form their associations and collective groups to initiate the process of collective reflection and action for various social problems. This mark the beginning of various Non-profit organizations engaged in social reform and welfare activities in modern India. Simultaneously, the efforts made by Christian missionaries in the field of education and health-care constituted another form of non-profit organization intervention field.

The example of Ramkrishan mission can be cited as illustration of pioneer effort which carried out wide range of activities from social reform to meeting the developmental needs of people. In the year 1828, Raja Rammoham Roy founded Braham Samaj, which initiated the steps to bring social, political and economic transformation in the Indian Society. It promoted human dignity and criticized social evil of Sati.

The process of reform initiated with efforts of Raja Rammoham Roy in Bengal spread all over India. The similar movements of social reform like Prathana Samaj, Srya Samaj, Dev Samaj etc. initiated by Justice Mahadev, Govind Ranade and Dev Atma respectively. All the movement made efforts to oppose the caste system, to introduce widow remarriage, to encourage female education, and to abolish child marriage. Similarly, various regional and caste based movements were also initiated during the period like Kayastha Sabha in the United Provinces and the Sarin Sabha in Punjab. One of the most remarkable social reformer of the 19th century in the region was Mahatma Jyotirao Phule who founded the Satya Shodhak Samaj in 1873. He opened the first school for the untouchables, advocated for the widow remarriage and led a vigorous movement against the barbarous custom of shaving off the heads of widows. During the period such movements were observed in all parts of India working on similar issues and concerns.

In the national politics and pre-gandhian era there was a debate on social reforms and political advancements. However, the debate was soon resolved with the emergence of Gandhiji in the Indian politics. Gandhiji brought a movement of economic betterment and along with social upliftment. Gandhiji took up various social issues like untouchability, education, village development programme etc. He pleaded for equality of women and afforded them a status equal to men in his public as well as private life.

The activities of social welfare and non-profit sector in the colonial period varied due to sharp contrast between Indian values and emergence of colonial state. During the nationalist movement the focus of social welfare was on social progress of society. However after Independence, the formation of Indian Government gave emphasis on economic development. The enactment of Indian constitution in 1950 gave a new shape to the welfare approach through making the state responsible for welfare of all people. During the first planning period the state took active involvement in social and cultural field and many new organization in like Central Social Welfare Board, , Sangeet Natak Akademi (for the performing arts), Lalit Kala Akademi (for plastic arts), National School of Drama, Film and Television Institute etc. The most important of these were the Viswa Bharati University, Shantiniketan established by the Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, and the Jamia Milia Islamia, New Delhi. During the 1980 the Central and State Governments started funding the various non-profit organizations for welfare programmes. This brought the new dimension in the social welfare scenario in India. During 1990 the emergence of new global policies attracted various International welfare organizations and bilateral efforts for funding the social and economic programme of State and non-profit organizations.

### **SOCIAL WORK AS PROFESSION:**

The purpose of social work has always been to help the needy people. The identification of situation in which need for existence exist depends upon knowledge of internal and external environment of Individual that cause him distress or prevent his functioning in a manner conducive to his own betterment of life. In addition to that sometimes the value structure adheres by the society also become instrument in revealing the situation of disability, which requires remedial action.

In traditional societies disability was seen as an expression of divine wrath and object of assistance was primarily to provide relief and mostly motivated by a feeling of pity or compassion through religion. The nature of the activity was simple mainly provision of material aid on ad hoc basis. There was no responsibility on continuous basis. Advice and guidance to people in mental distress was also given by priest and prophets to those who sought them. In all societies the needs of individuals were primarily met through family. The few whose needs could not be met within family for one or other reason become the object of charity. Charity was as duty enjoined b religion. Through charity one could seek salvation. Begging was regarded as a legitimate activity for those who belong to religious order and had voluntarily served family ties.

In the western societies, the wake of industrialization made it necessary to have special provisions for the adversely affected by the socio-economic changes. The nineteenth century saw the expansion of the role of the state especially for the protection and welfare of industrial workers. It also saw an unprecedented growth of philanthropic organizations. It is within these organizations that the new concept of social work took root.

The new concept of social work emphasized proper investigation of the circumstances of person seeking assistance, assessment of their needs and planned programmes of assistance both material and psychological. The goal was to enable the individual as far as possible to stand on his own legs. Through in its early stages, the concept of social work included within its purview social reform, it soon become almost exclusively concerned with the problem of bringing about adjustment and development of individual to given social situation.

### **SOCIAL WORK AS PROFESSION IN INDIA:**

Recently, social work has emerged as vocation in India and it is still struggling to achieve the status of professional status. There are various controversies over nature of social work in India. Some authors recognize it as activity promoted by religious ideologies while other correlates it with working for the backward sections of the society. However, there is no such agreement on the exact nature of social work in India.

Since the establishment of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (founded as Sir Dorabji Tata Graduate School of Social Work) in 1936, there has been proliferation of institutions imparting education and training in social work in the country. Presently, most of the Central Universities in India are having bachelor and master degree courses of social work and also many private institutes and universities have also initiated courses on social work education. However, the number of graduates comprising women in the field of social work constitutes a very small section. Moreover, many of them are not employed. Amongst, the rest at least 50 percent employed in the field of labour welfare, personal management and industrial relations.

In India the Factories Act requires that an industrial establishment must employ a person to look after the welfare of the workers. Outside the field of labour, professional social workers have been employed in medical and psychiatric institutions and in the institutions providing care and correctional services. The employing agencies are both governmental and non-government organizations.

In the recent years, professional social work has shown special interest in family planning and child care programmes. Many seminars and conferences on themes of social work have emphasized the need for major involvement in the thrust areas, also steps have been initiated by international humanitarian organizations in proving funds for manpower development and action research projects.

In India most of the professional social workers are involved in social administration of the welfare programmes because the jobs at the direct service do not have much salary scale. Most of the graduate students of social work opt for labour management as career due to high salary scale and recognition.

### **ROLE AND FUNCTIONS OF SOCIAL WORKERS:**

The roles and functions of social workers vary with services they offer to their client system.



Nowadays social workers are employed in both Government and private sector. In general, the following are the fields in which social work is practised:

- 1.Child Development
- 2.Women Welfare
- 3.Correctional Services
- 4.Rural Development
- 5.Industrial Development
- 6.Health
- 7.Mental Health
- 8.Education
- 9.Social Defence
- 10.Family Planning
- 11.Mental Retardation
- 12.Social Development
- 13.Environment

The roles and functions played by social workers in serving their clients are as follows:

- 1.Care Giver: As a care giver he counsel and support people with problem in a therapeutic way to promote change.
- 2.Consultant: As a consultant he works with individuals and groups to assist in their problem and programmes.
- 3.Broker: As a broker he helps people to reach the services they need and makes the system more useful.
- 4.Mobilizer: As a mobilize he tries to bring new resources to the individuals and groups. He gather and analysis information and programme planning and evaluation working as data manager.
- 5.Evaluator: As a evaluator he evaluate the strength and weaknesses of individuals and groups, their needs and problems.
- 6.Advocate: As a advocate he works for the improvement of policies and laws in order to make system more efficient.
- 7.Referral: As a referral worker he refers the individuals and groups to use the services available in other agencies.

#### **RATIONALE OF THE STUDY:**

The term welfare is concerned with all aspects of human growth and development. Historically, welfare has been recognized as important aspect of all religious and social activities. However, the welfare work has attained the status of professional activity recently in India with the initiation of professional courses on social work practice. Now, many Government universities, private universities and Institutions run courses of social work. The trained social work professionals are employed in Government welfare departments, Non-government organizations, International organizations and also nowadays in corporate sector.

Despite the efforts made by professional bodies of social workers, the term Social Worker is still been used very casually for any person doing any spiritual, political or welfare work for the benefit of society. The role and function of such social workers vary with their personal interest and motives. However, in social work literature we have considerable body of literature which defined the role and responsibilities of a social worker in various field settings. In India the role of a social worker to a large extent is understood in terms of role of social reformer or change agent. The complex nature of Indian society further makes the role of social worker very challenging. The present paper is an attempt to explore the role of social workers in non-government organization. The objective of present paper is to understand the difficulties faced by social workers while working in non-government organizations.

The findings of the study would be useful for both academicians as well as for people working in social work field in reconceptualising the skills, techniques, methods and understanding required for social workers in delivery of their services to meet the requirement of social welfare organizations.

#### **METHODOLOGY:**

The present paper is an exploratory work to gain insights of problems faced by social work professional employed in non-government organizations in delivery of their services. For conducting the

above study, an interview schedule is being used for data collection in 10 NGOs working in Delhi. The findings of the study have been qualitatively analysed.

#### **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:**

In India, the non-government organization have been working as a service provider where the government is unable or sometimes not willing to provide direct support for the welfare programmes. Presently more than 3.3 million registered NGOs and several unregistered NGOs are currently working in India at grass-root level for issues related to poverty, HIV/AIDS, homelessness, livestock development, women empowerment, immunization, child rights etc. The functioning of NGOs is so significant that Government of India and other International organizations encourage them through providing monetary and logistic support for their welfare programmes.

In India, non-governmental sector has become a major source for recruitment of trained social work professionals. However, certain factors that influences social changes in the society like the enactment of various social legislations by the government, social movements by mass, economic change and adoption of privatization and globalization policies in the last two decades have reoriented the non-government sector towards their roles, functions and activities.

The changes that have been observed in the non-government sector had laid an impact on roles and function performed by the social workers. During interaction with social workers in the selected organizations the following roles and function have been identified such as:-

1.Donor relations: Managing the donor relations is an important task in non-government organizations because nowadays most of the NGOs are getting monetary support for running their projects through private funding sources. In such a scenario managing the donor relations becomes a significant function of social workers employed in the NGOs. The social workers are assigned to regularly maintain a formal communication with the donor organizations. They have to take representatives of the donor organizations for field visits as they have the full orientation of different aspects of the projects.

2.Reports preparation: Report writing is an important administrative task in an NGO. The social worker employed in NGOs are assigned task to look-after the documentation process. They prepare various types of reports requested by the private donor organizations as well as from government departments. They also have to prepare reports for promotional purposes of programmes and activities of the organization like annual reports, quarterly report etc.

3.Preparing project proposals: Project proposal is also an important area where no NGOs can compromise. As most of the national, international, governmental and corporate organizations give funds to the NGOs on the basis of project proposal submitted by the organizations. The social workers in NGOs are assigned the task to identify and conceptualize the areas for projects preparation. The work of social worker is not limited to identifying and preparing the project proposals only but some NGOs also insist them to identify and formalise the funding sources from all levels where they can avail funds for running their projects.

4.Fund generation: Fund generation for ongoing as well as for upcoming projects is an important task for NGOs. Social workers also collect funds through searching the government and private sources and by conducting any event or telephonically convincing people to donate for getting tax benefits etc. which is really a tough job like a salesman in a company.

5.Conducting meetings of programme staff: Management of staff at every level is an important activity in administration of NGOs. The social worker are assigned task to conduct meetings with all staff members including field staff for appraisal for their work. The social workers also orient the field staff members about the guidelines of the various programmes and also expected benefits from the programmes.

6.Conducting training of field staff: The training of field staff is an important area for successful implementation of programmes in an NGO so, social workers are assigned task to orient and conduct various training courses for field staff.

7.Conducting monitoring and evaluation of projects: Monitoring and evaluation of ongoing project is an important task for NGOs. The social workers conduct regular monitoring and evaluation visits through conducting meetings with programme functionary staff. The social workers also prepare monitoring and evaluation reports for the donors as well as for the organization to assess the successful performance of the implemented programme.

#### **CHALLENGES FACED BY SOCIAL WORKERS IN NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS:**

The role and functions of social workers in non-government organization are very significant for overall management and success of welfare programmes. In India, most of the non-government

organizations recruit trained and experienced social workers for implementation of welfare programmes. Ironically, the role and functions of professional social work is still a challenging affair. During my interaction with social workers in NGOs they shared their discontent on the following issues:-

1.Lack of knowledge about Culture: The knowledge of culture pertaining to norms, values, customs etc is an important area for planning and execution of welfare programmes for a particular community as in India, we have diversity of culture, languages and customs from one state to another. During my interaction with social workers, most of them shared that they face lot of difficulties due to their limited understanding of Indian culture. Although, they are having some conceptual understanding of the term culture which is based on thoughts of western authors but at the practice level, they feel that the knowledge proves insufficient in understanding the diversified nature of Indian society. Most of them faces problem in understanding how the culturally acceptable practices of one Indian community becomes unacceptable in other Indian communities. Also how culture, values and norms of one community dominates over culture of another Indian communities.

2.Problem in using SW Methods: The social work as a profession is based on application of six methods. The theoretical knowledge and the whole base of skills, techniques and principles of social work are based on these methodological approaches. During my interaction with social workers, they shared that most of the methods and principles of social work practice are very difficult to use at the practical level due to diversified nature of Indian society and also lack of understating at the organization level in using the methods and principles at the programme implementation level.

3.Lack of field exposure: Social Work is a field based profession. All methods of social work practice are based on field work practice. However, most of the social workers shared that in NGOs, most of their time is consumed at the programming, planning and management level and they get very few chances to visit the field level activities.

4.Lack of recognition: Every profession demands recognition for its growth and development. Like other professions viz; engineering, medical, management etc; the social work profession is still striving for recognition in India. In NGOs sector mostly organizations prefer to recruit people from management field for administrative positions. During my interaction with social worker, I found a lot of discontent among them towards their roles and functions because of lack of acceptance and recognition of their work at the organizational level.

5.Lack of authority: Every profession is associated with some specialization that constitutes its recognition and authority. In social work profession there is a debate over issues related to authority of social workers. However, this debate becomes intense when it comes for comparison with other professions at the organizational level. During my interaction with social workers, they shared that they feel disempowered while working with other professionals in the organization because of lack of recognition of their professional roles. They face problems in putting forward their inputs at the programme planning and implementation level. They are sometime considered as supporting staff in the organization.

6.Lack of clarity about the tasks: The social workers have a very wide scope of role and functions in an organization. The trained social workers are employed by NGOs at every level of their programmes and activities depending upon their ability. During my interaction with social workers, they shared that the wide scope of role of social workers sometimes create issues in getting clarity of their tasks at the organizational level. Many of them informed that most of the time clerical jobs are assigned to them. That result in dissatisfaction among them towards their own profession.

7.Lack of training in communication skills: Communication skills play an important role in professional development of an individual. In social work also the communication skills plays an important role while working with client system. During my interaction with social workers they shared that in NGOs ,reporting is assigned to them and most of them have to struggle very hard to meet the standards of the organization. They shared that face problem in language related skills and often face difficulties in report preparation.

8.Lack of knowledge about the legal aspects: The understanding of legal aspect is an important area for any professional activity. In social work education, the social workers are imparted some basic understanding of legal system and concerns. During my interaction, most of the social workers expressed that they face problem due to their limited knowledge and understanding of legal control on various social issues and



problems. Due to that they have to depend upon other legal professional like Law Researcher for taking advice for cases and also for making and implementing any programme that involves legal aspects.

#### CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS:

The non-government sector plays a very important role in identifying the needful and neglected issues of the society and works very hard for their upliftment thereby implementing various programmes concerning the poor, downtrodden and marginalized section of the society. The role of social worker in non-government organization is also very significant in understanding human needs and problems as well as providing humanistic services for making the life of individuals, groups and communities more sustainable.

After the implementation of new economic policies after 1990s, certain factors that influenced the social change in the society like enactment of various legislations, social movement by mass, adoption of privatisation and globalisation policies have brought changes in the orientation of non-government sector. Now, thousands of registered NGOs continuously strive to attain more and more financial support for their projects both from Government, International organizations and corporate organizations. Today we can easily locate the presence of NGOs in every human settlement.

The increase in the funding opportunities has also increased the cut-throat competition between the NGOs for attracting more and more donors for financially supporting their projects. However, this competition to a larger extent has brought changes in the traditional role and functions of social work professionals. Now, due to various technical guidelines of the donor organizations compel the NGOs to recruit trained professionals from social work field but once they recruited in an organization then the scope for practice the social work principles, methods, tools, techniques become very bleak for them because they are mostly assigned the tasks of preparing project proposals, fund generation, managing donor relations etc.

In the present study a lot of concern have been generated towards the role and functions played by the social workers in a voluntary organizations. There is lot of discontent among them towards role, function, authority and recognition of their profession.

In view of the above, there is a need for reconceptualise the role of social workers both at practice level as well as theoretically for making the social work profession more adaptable towards the requirement of the voluntary sector. The following suggestions may be useful:

- 1) Orienting the social workers towards the diversified nature of Indian society.
- 2) Making available more and more literature of social work methods concerning the Indian society to the social work students.
- 3) Provide training to social workers towards various communication and language skills.
- 4) Generate concern towards the recognition of social work profession in India
- 5) Involve some aspect of management studies in social work education.
- 6) Involve the legal aspect of various social issues and problems in social work education and also provide practical exposure of legal system to social workers.

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