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Decoloniality and Indigenisation of Social Work Education: Experiences from India

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Introduction

- Many developing countries have adopted an American-Eurocentric model due to their colonial past.
- Social work education in India has also been influenced by western thought and pedagogy.
- In field practice, the profession has responded to social issues and social problems of poverty and marginalised people.
- However, the knowledge, methods, values and principles have been structured on social work as taught and practiced in the United States and the UK.



Indianisation or Indigenisation?

- We have focused more on “indianisation” rather than indigenisation of social work theory and practice.
- “There is an absence of a cohesive, integral vision of India and Indianness.” (Ganesh and Thakkar, 2005)
- Our society is characterised by such diversity and divisions along with different levels of modernisation that to talk of indigenisation is to deal with complex interfacing realities.

Outline of my presentation

- In the following sections, I present the context and a brief history of the development of professional social work in India and the attempts made by social work educators to “indianise” or “indigenise” social work education.

Brief History: Prior to Professional Social Work

Prior to Professional Social Work in India

- Social work existed in the form of almsgiving, charity and alleviating the misery of the poor, downtrodden and the suffering sections of society.
- The focus thus was philanthropic, on benevolence to the poor, orphaned, disabled, homeless, hungry and thirsty.



Servants of India Society



The Servants of India Society was formed in Pune, Maharashtra, on June 12, 1905 by **Gopal Krishna Gokhale**.

The Society organized many campaigns to promote education, sanitation, health care and fight the social evils of untouchability and discrimination, alcoholism, poverty, oppression of women and domestic abuse.

It chose to remain away from political activities and organizations like the Indian National Congress.

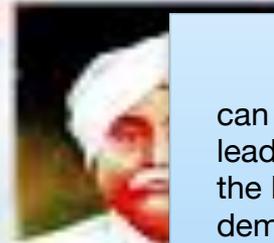
Servants of the People Society

Servants of the People Society (SOPS) (Lok Sevak Mandal) is a non-profit social service organization founded by **Lala Lajpat Rai**, in 1921 in Lahore.

The society is devoted to "enlist and train national missionaries for the service of the motherland".

It was shifted to India, following the partition of India in 1947.

In 1960, after the construction of the new building its shifted to Lajpat Bhawan, Lajpat Nagar, in Delhi.



ENLIVE

can be called a moderate p
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the British government and
demanding self rule)

Beginnings of Professional SWE in India

First School of Social Work in 1936

- Sir Clifford Manshardt, an American missionary, started the Sir Dorabji Tata Graduate School of Social Work (Tata Institute of Social Sciences of today).
- It evolved out of his previous experience in Chicago and 10 years of social work in Mumbai.
- The school was funded by the Dorabji Tata Trust of the industrial house of the Tatas.

Sir Clifford Manshardt and Nagpada Neighbourhood House





Curriculum was based on Ideology and Philosophy from West

- Sir Clifford Manshardt developed the first course based on a combination of subjects from American and British social work curricula: social casework, child welfare, social statistics, public welfare administration, medical social work, social psychiatry, social legislation, organisation of welfare activities, and the history of philanthropy and public welfare.
- The bibliography was prepared by the University of Chicago Library.

Social Work in Post Independence India

- Indian Conference of Social Work set up in 1947 recommended several practice areas namely
 - (i) *Rural reconstruction and welfare*: covering agriculture and village industries, sanitation, health, housing, education, organisation, culture; and
 - (ii) *State and social services*: included a small section on “Harijan uplift” and recommendations on welfare of tribal people (which in contemporary times is interpreted as a “welfarist” response coming from “paternalist nationalist reformist colonial perspectives”).
- Crises interventions during natural disasters and religious tensions due to partition provided the base for training of staff.

prominence

Post-Independence: American Influence gains

Post-independence: American influence gains more prominence

- American influence became more prominent when the faculty returning from the US after training, started teaching at the School of Social Work (which expanded and got renamed as TISS).
- American influence also percolated more systematically through the US government's Technical Co-operation Mission and the Council of Social Work Education Exchange Programme, which supported faculty exchange between the United States and India (1957-1962).

Colonialisation: Western ideas universalised & legitimised without questioning or critiquing

Colonialisation: Western ideas universalised & legitimised without questioning or critiquing

- Most of the “scientific” intervention models were contextualised and premised on western European and American fundamentals such as individualism, rationality, objectivity and internal causality. Implicit in the American model was the idea of the west’s view of “ being the centre of legitimate knowledge, the arbiter of what counts as knowledge and the source of “civilized knowledge”. (Coates et al; Bodhi 2016).
- Specialisations like Medical and Psychiatric Social Work as well as Family and Child Welfare, Group work, Community Organisation and Public / Social Welfare Administration were largely influenced by the American model and the graduates were expected to work for state and non-state institutions.
- The specialisations were later re-organised to cater to national needs. Thus Group work and Community Organisation became reorganised as Urban and Rural Community Development.

Dissenting views about specialisation

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Dissenting views about specialisation

- The 1980 UGC Review Report on Social Work Education in India strongly condemned the “wastage at both the field and teaching”.
- Studies showed that schools offered specialisations but did not teach them for several reasons: they were not of regional relevance or they lacked teachers and job opportunities (Desai, 1991).
- However, despite this, new schools preferred to follow in the footsteps of the older schools that offered specialisations.
- To “specialise” or not to “specialise” continues to be a contentious issue.

education

Pioneering “indianisation” of social work

Pioneering “Indianisation” of SWE

- Social work educators who were pioneers in the field recognised that a more locally relevant social work programme would address the needs of the Indian realities.
- Dr. Gauri Banerjee was the first head of the department of medical and psychiatric social work (from 1948 to 1973).
- With her deep passion for Indian culture and Sanskrit scholarship, Dr. Banerjee laid the grounding for “indianisation” of social work education.



Dr. Gauri Banerjee with a student

- Although she had obtained her social work degree in the west, she tried to bring in concepts from the Bhagavadgita and from the work of Indian social reformers in the teaching and practice of social work in India.
- While analysing concepts such as “dignity and worth of the individual” in her articles, she brought in ideas like “right” and ”dharma” in the practice of social casework.

- Also, while tracing the historical movement from charity to social justice she argued that charity focused mainly on material goods. Thus the intrinsic worth of the “deserving poor” as individual human beings was not recognised, she asserted.
- In the 50s, she demonstrated to the government the importance of employing medical social workers in public and specialised TB hospitals and clinics. She also introduced the idea of education of hospitalised children with chronic ailments.

Dr. Sugata Dasgupta

- Dr. Sugata Dasgupta, another pioneer, organised a historic meeting in 1964 between professional social workers and Gandhian constructive workers. This sparked the realisation that to remedy the roots of social malaise and change the social order constructive workers accepted the need for education and training, while professional social workers on their part recognised that social work needed to move beyond ameliorative work to social action.
- He also attempted to apply the social work method of community organisation to the indigenous experiment of the Department of Rural Reconstruction. Following the early teachings of Rabindranath Tagore in Sriniketan, Bengal, this sought to “create an environment in which a community could perceive its own needs, and be prepared to organise its own resources to achieve their fulfilment”.

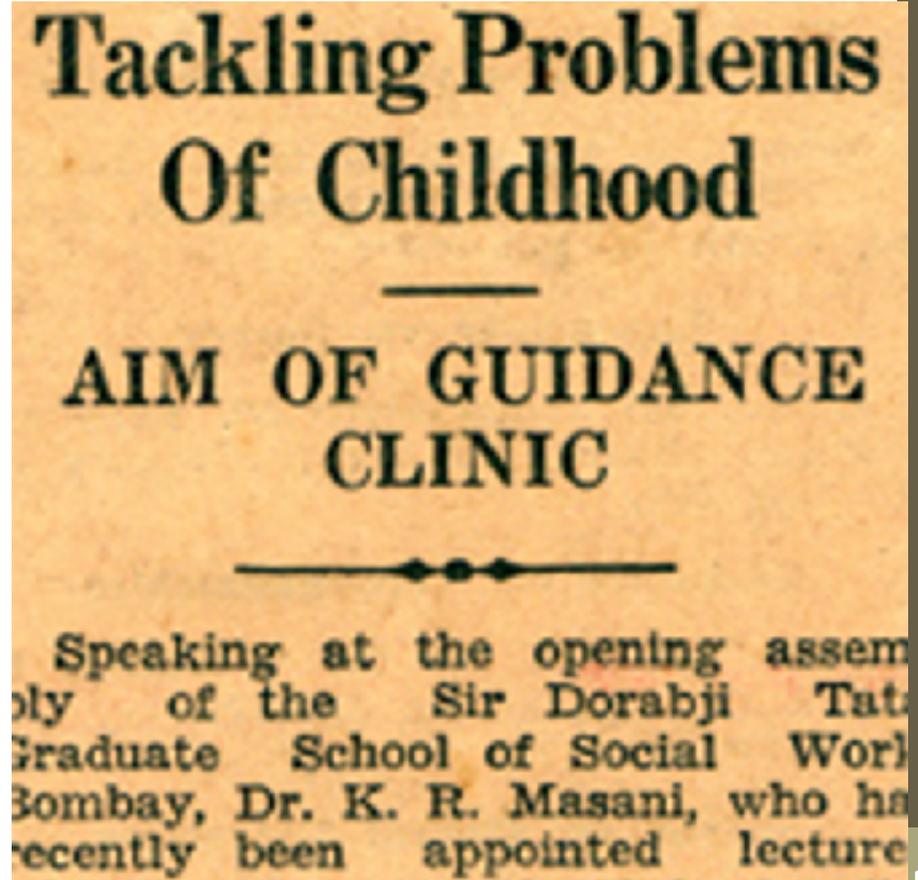
(FAP)

Innovative Strategies: Field Action Projects

Innovative Strategies: Field Action Projects (FAP)

- The FAP is an ongoing, long term sustained intervention in response to a social problem/issue. The concept of the FAP was first introduced in 1982-1983 in the TISS Annual Report of 1983-84 as “Field Demonstration / Experimental Projects”. (Narayan and Pandit, 2017:141). The project is led by faculty (director/s).
- The university is committed to financially supporting the project till the time it is terminated or gets upscaled and is taken over by the government or is registered as an independent NGO.

- The precursor to the FAP was setting up social work agencies with trained social workers to supervise the social work students. The Child Guidance Clinic was thus started in 1937 by an American faculty and later oversight by the Indian faculty who were teaching psychiatric social work.
- Dr. Banerjee took over the development of the CGC in the late 40s and to this day it is a teaching-learning centre for mental health and social work students.



Field Action Projects

- **CHILDLINE India** Foundation started as a FAP of the dept of FCW, a telephone helpline for street children, till the Ministry of Women and Child (GOI) took it over as a national scheme in 1969. It is registered as an independent foundation in India and abroad.



PROMOTING CHILD PROTECTION AND CHILD RIGHTS FOR OUR CHILDREN IS CONSEQUENTLY A CRUCIAL ISSUE, BOTH INTERNATIONALLY AND NATIONALLY.

Development of the TISS Rural Campus at Tuljapur

The Maharashtra Govt donated 10 acres of land in rocky terrain in Tuljapur Taluka in Osmanabad District on a TISS proposal submitted in the Golden Jubilee Year of 1986, to build a rural campus.

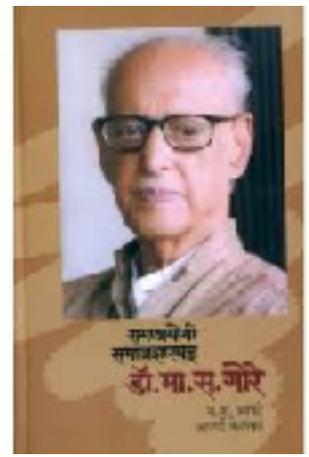
The experiences and relationship with the community people were used to develop the BSW curriculum after 13 years of development of the campus.



The 70s: Need for a more relevant social work for India

- In the 70s, Dr. M.S. Gore, former Director of TISS, a distinguished social work educator and sociologist, observed that casework “de- emphasised the needs of social and economic development, promotion of preventive services and social action - the prime need of the country in the post-independence era”.
- He wrote extensively on social work and social development and on human rights. He viewed the various structural limitations of Indian society as its social maladies.
- He suggested that social work can play a vital role for making economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for the fuller realisation of development in terms of social security, minimum standard of living and the provision of opportunities for all.
- As Director of TISS, he introduced social research units for developing indigenous social work theory. Each unit was linked to a department of social work.
- By the '90s, these became independent research units. Today many of them have evolved into full fledged schools at TISS. This model remains unique to TISS.

1980s: From Remedial to Emancipatory thrust



1980s: From Remedial to Emancipatory thrust



- Armaity Desai the Chair of the UGC Committee on SWE (1980) advocated for promoting change and reducing focus on merely giving service:
 - from remedial to those that confront the cause of poverty,
 - from private concerns to public issues,
 - from research with a problem focus to action research.
 - from institutional to non-institutional programmes.

She reiterated that in the third world country, our emphasis should be on poverty and change and not on remedial and rehabilitative work, which we have borrowed from the first world countries. Later, when she became chair of the UGC, she introduced women's studies centres and advocated strongly for increasing women leadership in higher education.

She was the first to receive the Katherine Kendall Award in 1992.

1990s: People- Centred Development and Human Rights

1990s: People- Centred Development and Human Rights

- The World Summit on *Social Development* in 1995 in Copenhagen led to the United Nations focusing on key social development themes. This influenced social work educators to focus on people-centered development and integrate development concerns and issues in the curriculum.
- In 1998, the TISS held a series of workshops and brought out two volumes on the theme of People- Centred development. This was also an attempt to shift perspectives from an individual remedial orientation to a more developmental one.

perspective

2000: National Curriculum - Developmental

2000: National Curriculum with developmental perspective

- The Third Review Committee set up by the UGC (University Grants Commission) in 2000, enabled the instituting of processes for creating a National Curriculum to be adopted by all social work education programmes since 2001. This curriculum incorporated a greater focus on the social development perspective.
- Interestingly, not all the schools adopted this curriculum!

Integrating Human Rights

- Since the turn of the century, social work educators have been writing and joining hands with human rights groups to protect the rights of children, women, prisoners, activists, tribals, dalits, and other marginalised groups.
- Social work colleges in India too have been incorporating the human rights perspective in their curriculum and also pioneering programmes and policy change.

2000 onwards

2000 onwards

- We Indian social work educators are increasingly discussing the place of critical social work, radical social work, structural social work, feminist social work, social work with a human rights perspective.
- There are more exchanges between developed and developing countries and sharing of online courses.
- So the north is learning from the south and vice versa although the dominance of the west in our theories still continues.

Status of schools of social work in India

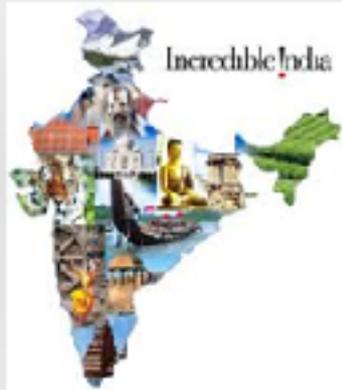
- In the 1950s, other schools of social work were set up in different cities following the same pattern of developing curricula with the help of American visiting faculty.
- Today, we have at least 526 institutions providing undergraduate and graduate degree programmes (Sanjai Bhatt, 2015).
- In most of these urban-based institutions except older ones as in Delhi, the most popular specialisations remain almost the same as the ones started at TISS, namely MPSW, FCW and Labour welfare.

Challenges: Complex

Social Realities

Challenges: Complex Social Realities

India's Diversity



With a population of 1.2 billion, India has more than two thousand ethnic groups all at different levels of integration and mainstreaming.

Complex Social Realities (contd)

- In India, a multiethnic country, extracting a common national identity out of the numerous distinct social identities is a cumbersome task. The derivation of common national identity for Indians hence calls for an interdisciplinary research paradigm. (Ray and Singh, 2015).
- Indianisation became important as the Indian freedom struggle could be successful only if the social, cultural and religious differences were kept at bay. This continued after independence as the idealism of unification remained strong till the mid-sixties.

Complex Social Realities (contd)

- Indigenisation of social work in as vast and diverse a country as India has thus not been easy.
- Ethnicity, tribal, regional, caste- and religion-based schisms greatly influence the cultural-historical and socio-political contexts. This makes it difficult for social workers to develop a ‘one-size-fits-all’ policy for the sub-continental country.
- This is complicated further by the varying pace of industrialisation, urbanisation and modernisation.

Challenge of Indigenisation in India: universal vs unique

- While its been easier for new schools to borrow curricula from recognised schools, there has also been the issue of creating a universal formula rather than looking at regional differences and tailoring curricula according to regional and local needs.
- Thus the experience of professional social workers is somewhat complex and requires a constant dance between different systems and cultural ideologies.” (Kuruvilla, 2005:41-42).

Challenge: Can SW be non-political?

- Kamei (2015:2), an indigenous activist, poses the question about the relevance of professional Social Work in non-urban settings. ..”The issues (in rural and tribal areas) are so different and take on a political angle like ethnic conflict, fight for control over natural resources, armed conflict between the state and non-state actors and among non-state actors.
- If social work is non-political, how would it address these political issues that affect the life and well-being of people?
- When the nature of problem faced by the people is of conflict with the State, can Social Work continue to be traditional in its practices”?

Challenge: Shortfalls in the development of indigenous SWE literature

“Developing indigenous literature requires time and facilitation. In a developing country, teachers' workloads are high, including field action projects. Writing becomes a casualty. Our social work practitioners are not writers, not used to conceptualizing. Therefore, development of indigenous literature takes a back seat.”

- ----- Armaity Desai (in Askeland and Payne, 2017:84).

- Abye Tasse acknowledges that African and Asian perspectives in higher education have not been developed in depth and that western perspectives continue to dominate SWE.

“The development of indigenous perspectives remains very fragile. We have achieved the political integration of indigenous social work into the corpus of international social work; however, we need to work from the other end to make it real.”

(Askeland and Payne, 2017: 214).

Summary of Our Achievements

- The first formulations of a liberatory and emancipatory (critical, progressive and ethically humane) social work were made with emerging perspectives of the Dalits and the Tribals.
- We are giving more importance to people- centred, rights oriented and social development theories and practice.
- Schools have been inviting representatives of the local communities to share their own life experiences and bring their issues into the classroom.
- Similarly with field work, study tours, rural camps, students are in the field for short to extended periods of time to understand and get sensitised to the life of the communities with whom they work.
- We have an increasing number of faculty from the Tribes and Dalit communities teaching in our institutions.

Challenges

Our

New Social Work: Case of TISS as Trendsetter

- Since 2006, there have been attempts by TISS to reorganize the social work curricula to incorporate issues of human rights and social justice with continuing focus on the marginalised and disadvantaged, discriminated and indigenous people.



New Courses (After 2006)

- Dalit and Tribal Social Work
- Disability Studies and Action
- Women Centred Social Work
- Livelihoods and Entrepreneurship
- Conflicts, Peace and Human Security (New Multi disciplinary Centre)
- Disasters and Social Vulnerability (Multidisciplinary School)

New Social Work: Contd.

- Critical social workers view Dalit and Tribal Social Work as the Indian equivalent of Anti-Racist, Black, Feminist, Critical and Structural Social Work that are emerging from Canada and UK.

New journals on Dalit and Tribal Studies/Social Work



Conclusion: the way forward?

- We probably need more indigenous theory and practice tools, more faculty from the indigenous communities to teach in our institutions and bring more of the community into our classrooms and take the classroom into the community.
- Schools have been inviting representatives of the local communities to share their own life experiences and bring their issues into the classroom. Similarly with field work, study tours, rural camps, students are in the field for short to extended periods of time to understand and get sensitised to the life of the communities with whom they are expected to work.

- However, this remains an outsider's perspective (etic) rather than an insider's (emic) perspective.
- Even an anthropologist who lives in the field of study experiences a sense of alienation from the community he or she lives with.
- So is the way forward to turn the time-machine backwards and go back to “our” roots, to the language of the “adivasis” or the natives of India and restart social work education from its beginnings? OR
- Do we accept and reconcile with the varying realities of an educational system which we inherited from the colonists and which has drawn us further away from our cultural roots.

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Namaste

