

Growth and Development of Social Work Profession in India in the 19th and 20th Centuries

S. Kumaravel

Assistant Professor & Head, Department of Social Work,
Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development,
Sriperumbudur – 602 105
Email: drkumar.rgniyd@gmail.com

Abstract

The social work profession is a practice-based profession having its methods, theories, models and approaches. It has a rich history of two centuries worldwide. There are six methods of social work, such as social casework, social group work, community organization, social action, social welfare administration and social work research. It has a deep root in our society and daily lives, as it is the study of human behaviour, needs, and potential to offer expert support to a person or a community in a professional way following its methods, approaches and theories. The social work profession is practiced in Developmental Non-Profit Organizations, International Non- Governmental Organizations, International Schools, and Corporate Hospitals. Medical and psychiatric settings, and rehabilitation settings, to uplift marginalized women, orphan and semi-orphan children, downtrodden communities, physically and mentally challenged citizens, uncared elders, aspirant youth and many more segments of the people in society. The trends in social work are extended to various fields such as the removal of social problems, the solution of individual and family problems, policy-making, environmental issues, and disaster management etc. By its successful intervention on social issues, it is called a profession of noble and global.

Keywords: Social Work, History and Development, Community Organization

Introduction

The social work profession is a practice-based profession having its methods, theories, models and approaches. This profession has its history and origin of over 200 years worldwide and 86 years in the Indian context. Methods such as casework, group work community organization, and social action are widely practiced to address the issues of individuals, groups, and the community as a

whole. This profession has been accepted and recognized worldwide for its successful intervention in addressing all kinds of social issues.

The social work profession is the study and understanding of human behaviour, needs, and potentialities to provide professional assistance to an individual or a community. It is a relatively new profession with profound roots in our culture and life. It is a dynamic profession that focuses on people's distress, poverty, and hardship. Individuals who were inspired by religion in the past engaged in various charitable works as a means of achieving salvation in life. In time, philanthropic efforts undertaken by individuals and voluntary organizations came to be known as social work.

As a result, social work was historically connected with charitable work and voluntary assistance to the poor, and charitable and philanthropic works, and their personnel were identified and designated as social workers. Social work, on the other hand, is meant to help individuals, families, and communities understand and solve their personal and social problems professionally. As a result, social work can be described as an art, a science, and a profession that assists individuals in resolving personal, group, and community issues professionally.

The origins of social work may be traced to Western countries, from which it extended around the world. Now, social work is a prominent profession in India as well, and it is evolving into a full-fledged system with enormous chances and potential. It is, as previously stated, a systematic and scientific profession with various theories and methods. Casework, group work, and community organization are some of the most common methods. As their names suggest, each of these methods addresses people's problems on a different level. Social work proposes interventions at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels to address societal issues. Furthermore, several local and national associations are striving around the world to connect and unite social workers. These associations provide social workers with a standard set of principles and norms to protect their rights while also holding them accountable. The scope of social work is expanding, and new sectors are emerging, which is boosting the profession's attractiveness, and people are redirecting their careers towards social work. Governments are also in urgent need of social workers to serve as liaisons among people. The discipline of social work's growth, development, and future in India is a matter of great debate among professionals, demonstrating the importance of this field.

Social Work in Western Countries

The profession of social work originated in the West, with Europe and America leading the way. The profession of social work is now practiced in many areas and countries across the world, including Asia and Africa¹. Social work emerged as a

¹ Ilango Ponnuswami, Abraham P. Francis, and Nonie Harris, "Social Work Education, Research and Practice in India and Australia: An Introduction," *Social Work Education, Research and Practice: Perspectives from India and Australia* (2020): 1-9.

career in the early twentieth century, and it is currently the profession responsible for ensuring the social well-being and quality of life of people all over the world². The evolution of social work in the United Kingdom and the United States of America dominated the history of social work in Western countries. In the early Christian era in Europe, religion was the most powerful motivator for charitable giving. The church, particularly the monasteries, became charitable centres. Later on, the responsibility was transferred from the church to the government. Nonetheless, the well-being of the people has become the duty of the state.

The renowned Elizabethan Poor Law was enacted in England in 1601 as a result of this transition. The statute divided the destitute into three categories. Sturdy beggars were the poor who could work; the impotent poor were those who couldn't work, and dependent children were orphans and children who had been abandoned by their parents. The Elizabethan and post-Elizabethan Poor Laws were revised by a Parliamentary Commission in 1834. Between 1834 and 1909, the Poor Law underwent significant alterations, the cumulative impact of which pushed the entire system away from the 1834 ideals. The greatest notable shift was the introduction of specialised treatment for specific disadvantaged groups. District schools and foster homes, for example. For dependent children, district schools and foster homes were constructed, as well as specialised institutions for the insane and feeble-minded. The 1909 Poverty Law Report provides a more favourable view of the poor laws.

The chairman of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Social Insurance and Allied Services, Sir William Beveridge, submitted the Committee's findings to the government in 1942. The plan's core social premise, according to Beveridge, was to safeguard the British from hunger and other social problems. Benefits such as maternity, sickness, unemployment, industrial injury, retirement, and a widow's allowance are available to anyone. The services of Family Allowances, National Health Services, and National Assistance are all linked. After being published in 1834, 1909, and 1942, the Beveridge Report is considered one of the most important books in English Poor Law history. In the United Kingdom, the report set the foundation for modern social welfare policies.

The Charity Organization Society (COS) Movement was founded in London by Octavia Hill and Samuel Hill in 1869. They felt that everyone deserved to be treated with respect and decency and that their privacy and independence should be respected. The Toynbee Hall, founded by Samuel Augustus, was the first settlement home, where wealthy Oxford students were settled in an attempt to alleviate living conditions in the slums. The major goal of Settlement houses was to bring educated and disadvantaged people together for mutual benefit. The English Poor Law and its growth laid the foundation for American relief systems. As a result of industrialization, urbanisation, and immigration, the United States

² S. M. Sajid, Rajendra Baikady, Cheng Sheng-Li, and Haruhiko Sakaguchi (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of global social work education*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 311-323.

witnessed an upsurge in social problems. In 1877 in Buffalo, New York, the Charity Organization Movement was started. In 1886 in New York City, the very famous Settlement House Movement was started. These are the two social movements that arose as a result of these difficulties. Finally, the Child Welfare movement arose from several unrelated events, most notably the 'Children's Aid Society' and the 'Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children', these two organizations were established in New York City in 1853 and 1875, respectively.

The Genesis of Social Work in India

Raja Ram Mohan Roy's tenure in the early nineteenth century was marked by social reform and social service. India's culture was founded on generosity and religious devotion in ancient times. The main characteristic was doing or starting welfare and general good for everybody, which may be seen in old literary works, such as Smiritis or Dhramasastras, as well as folk tales and legends. The Rigveda is the earliest mention of philanthropy, which declares, "May the one who contributes the greatest shine." Helping others was previously associated with religion and salvation. In India, this notion underwent significant alterations over the ancient, medieval, and modern periods. The Sultanate dynasty, which dominated the medieval period (1206-1700), was inspired and he was in the same spirit of helping society in the areas of faith and learning. Muslims were obligated by their religion to support the poor by paying Zakat. During this time, societal problems such as the sati system were outlawed, and Akbar took the lead in reforming Indian society by abolishing slavery in 1583. Raja Ram Mohan Roy founded the Brahmo Samaj in 1828, significantly impacting politics, public administration, education, and religion. Renowned for his work to eliminate sati and child marriage, he is often regarded by historians as the "Father of the Bengal Renaissance."

Dr. Clifford Manshard of the American Marathi Mission established the Sir Dorabji Tata Graduate School of Social Work (now Tata Institute of Social Sciences) in Mumbai in 1936 to produce skilled people with the necessary knowledge and abilities to take on various types of duties in the field of social welfare.³ The school was modelled after the School of Social Work in the USA. In collaboration with the Social Service League in Bombay, after independence, Kashi Vidyapeeth, which has been delivering social work education in Ahmedabad since 1947, began its programme. The Delhi School of Social Work was founded in 1948 by the Young Women's Christian Association of India with funding from the American Young Women's Christian Association's Foreign Division, and it was recognised by the University of Delhi in 1949.⁴ Baroda began teaching social work as part of the university system. Lucknow University began offering a Diploma in Social Service, which was later succeeded by a Master of Social

³ Kane Dane, "The History of Social Work Education in India," Owlgen, doi;<https://www.owlgen.in/discuss-the-history-of-social-work-education-in-india/>

⁴ Kieran O'Donoghue and Ming-sum Tsui, "Social work supervision research (1970–2010): The way we were and the way ahead," *The British Journal of Social Work* 45, no. 2 (2015): 616-633.

Technique, and finally a Master of Social Work, at the J.K. Institute of Sociology and Human Relations. Later, a two-year Master in Social Techniques programme replaced this programme (MST). Finally, it received a master's degree in social work in 1954. The Madras School of Social Work was established in 1954 (Dane, n.a.). Finally, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has sponsored the following reports on curriculum development for social work education in India: 1) Report of the Curriculum Development Centre in Social Work Education, in 1990, 2) Model Curriculum for Social Work Education, in 2001, 3) Learning Outcomes based Curriculum Framework (LOCF) for Bachelor of Social Work (BSW), in 2019.⁵

Methods of Social Work

Theoretically, social work is focused on an understanding of human relationships to solve psychosocial problems. It is a profession based on scientific methods and abilities in its practical component. Every societal issue is the result of a combination of external and internal elements. As a result, to solve these issues, Social Workers follow various methods, mainly Case Work, Group Work, Community Organization, Social Action, Social Welfare Administration and Social Work Research. Thus, when dealing with an individual's difficulties, it's critical to consider his experiences and reactions to them. Furthermore, proper individual recognition is necessary for the resolution of an issue. As a result, a social worker's primary goal in the field of social work is to help people achieve self-direction and self-reliance. In social casework, a person, a group, a condition, or a phenomenon is identified as a study unit, and various features of the unit are thoroughly investigated. The principle of human welfare underpins social casework. It assists everyone who is in need or who is disabled. Its ultimate goal is to create a positive association between the client and his society.

Social Case Work

The definition of social casework given by the famous Mary Richmond is "processes that form personality through a purposefully accomplished individual by individual adjustments between man and his social environment."⁶ Casework, according to Richmond, is "A method of assessing a client's ability to cope with an issue in the real world as the worker assists him in defining the problem and allowing him to examine several solutions." In social casework, each client is considered as a unit. Other Internal and external factors are compelled to work together for him to overcome his difficulties. The method used in social casework is essentially psychological, and it addresses the individual part of assistance as such. However, a social worker must also be familiar with various aspects of human behaviour. He'll have to come up with a sensible blend of existing social

⁵ NAPSWE (*Report of the National Curricular Framework for Social Work Education*), (Delhi: National Curriculum Resource Group, 2022).

⁶ Mary Ellen Richmond, *Social Diagnosis*, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2017), 51-56.

services and psychological expertise. Social casework as a method places a strong emphasis on environmental restructuring in an attempt to influence clients' attitudes and behaviours. Through social support, a person does not become completely rid of his or her limitations. Furthermore, under some favourable conditions, social casework can be used to prevent and treat pathological issues.⁷

Social Group Work

Social group work is the second type of social work. It focuses on improving people's ability to form positive relationships through group activities. Konopka⁸ defined group work as “a method of social work which helps individuals to enhance their social functioning through purposeful group experiences and to cope more effectively with their personal, group or community problems.” This method is mostly used in a face-to-face group setting and uses the group as a medium of action. It's a one-of-a-kind, innovative, and dynamic approach to assisting people in making the changes they want in their lives. Today, Groups are an efficient way for social workers to assist individuals of all ages and walks of life to improve their social functioning and deal more effectively with their problems. Social Group workers function in various situations, including family counselling, mental health, disability, child welfare, substance abuse, corrections, and many more.

Community Organization

Another primary method of social work is community organization. It is concerned with community intervention to tackle communal problems. Community organization is a method of social work, which has the potential to address the problems of many individuals within the community by bringing them together. Community development and community organization are two sides of the same coin. The other methods of social work, such as group work and casework, are included in the community organization. In community organizations, identifying the power structure is crucial. To execute the community organization method, which is meant to empower individuals for their growth, social workers must first understand the community power structure.

The Definition of community organization given by Murray G. Rose⁹ “process by which a community identifies its needs or objectives, gives priority to them, develops confidence and will to work at them, finds resources (internal and external) to deal with them, and in doing so, extends and develops cooperative and collaborative attitudes and practices in the community”. It's an intergroup method that strives to help communities comprehend social problems and utilize the

⁷ R. Kumar, *Social Case Work: Methods and Fields of Social Work in India*, (Bhubaneswar: Directorate of Distance & Continuing Education, Utkal University, 2009).

⁸ Gisela Konopka, *Social Group Work: A Helping Process*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963).

⁹ Murray G. Ross, *Community Organization: Theory, Principles and Practice*, 2nd ed. Harper's Social Science Series, (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 88-90.

existing resources of the community to create resolutions that will help in enhancing the community member's lives and also the standard of the community as a whole, even in emergencies like conflict, starvation, earthquakes, and other natural catastrophes. Case and group work also share fundamental notions of community organisation, but many aspects are special to community problems and are applied to them in their own way. As a result, community organizations may serve a large number of clients at the same time and help them solve their socioeconomic problems.¹⁰

Social Welfare Administration

Our country strives for sustainable social development and welfare. The process of organizing and administering public and private services is referred to as social welfare administration. It encompasses activities that are carried out in the context of an individual, a group, or a community. The method of social welfare administration consists of the process of directing a social institution or organisation. During the process, the goals that an agency or organization must attain are determined. Government agencies, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Welfare Boards, Community Based Organizations (CBOs), Corporations, Social Welfare Agencies, Inter-Governmental Organizations (IGOs), and other social welfare and development settings exist in our country. We also have a vast number of welfare and development programs at the national, state, and local levels. In addition, development-oriented Panchayat Raj institutions have also emerged as major institutional frameworks in the effective implementation of the Social Welfare Administration.

Social Action

In the strategies of professional social work, the social action method was added a little later. Social action has been used in a variety of domains, including social transformation and political campaigns. Some observers feel that development and welfare are exclusively dependent on social action to achieve their goals. Of course, they utilise further social work methods, but the most frequently used method is the social action method. In professional social work, welfare and development are two essential principles. The primary strategy they employ, namely, social action, strives to make development and welfare programs more functional for their respective clients than any other method could. The very core of society is touched by social action, and its future is shaped by it. Although social action is a part or phase of social change that can be linked to the social work process, it is still lacking in getting the attention it deserves.

Social Work Research

Lastly, the final method of social work is social work research. Research can be

¹⁰ John Pierson, *Understanding Social Work: History and Context*, (UK: McGraw-Hill Education, 2011).

described as a systematic study that adds to existing knowledge and uncovers new information. The study of social problems is known as social research. It investigates human behaviour as a member of society, including feelings, responses, and attitudes in various situations. A detailed, analytical, and methodical investigation into or investigation of an issue, an endeavour to acquire new knowledge through study and experiment, and a process that helps in finding solutions to challenges of social work, all are examples of social research. Research is used to find solutions to individual, group, and communal problems. Indeed, social work research is a deliberate attempt to learn more about many parts of society and social phenomena. In the field of social work, social work research is very important. Its scope has been determined by the nature of social work. From a practical standpoint, the scope of social work research includes numerous treatment methods, as well as identifying the needs of society and available resources. In terms of theory, social work research encompasses every part of the spectrum of social philosophy. Social work research encompasses the entire scope of the profession, including concepts, theories, methods, programs, services, and the issues that social workers face in their work. A social work method and social work research both aim to achieve the same humanistic goals. It gives all social workers the chance to make a difference in their work. If a social worker wants to be a more effective practitioner, then he/she must follow the social work research.

National Association of Social Work in India

Every profession has professional associations for the academicians and practitioners and just like that social work profession also has professional associations for its academicians and practitioners. Professional associations are responsible for preparing, maintaining, and promoting a high standard of services, as well as promoting social action for social change as it is the need of the hour in the context of the current social situation. In 1936, the country's first school of social work (Sir Dorabji Tata Graduate School of Social Work) opened in Bombay, followed by two more under the purview of the Indian Council of Social Welfare and a slew more under the auspices of universities around the country. The former Director of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Dr. J.M. Kumarappa, had proposed the formation of professional organizations during the Indian Conference of Social Work's annual meeting in 1961.¹¹ The result of this conference can be seen that the Association of Schools of Social Work in India (ASSWI) was founded the same year, while the Indian Association of Alumni of School of Social Work, later named the Indian Association of Trained Social Workers (IATSW) was founded.¹²

Then, there was a rapid increase in the number of social work schools throughout

¹¹ A. R. Wadia and N. Hormasji, *History and Philosophy of Social Work in India*. (Bombay: Allied Publishers Private Limited, 1961).

¹² Meher C. Nanavatty, "Professional Associations of Social Work: An Analysis of Literature," *Indian Journal of Social Work* 58 (1997): 287-300.

the 1960s and 1970s. The Association derives from an institutional base of social work schools as members, ensuring its continued existence through membership fees and the prestige provided by grants from various institutions. However, it has had its ups and downs, much like a professional association of practitioners, owing to the interest and devotion displayed by office-bearers and members of the management committee. The Association published several professional periodicals throughout the 1970s. Its activities had reduced in the 1980s, limited to yearly or biannual gatherings¹².

Other associations include the Indian Society of Professional Social Work (ISPSW), the National Association for Professional Social Workers in India (NAPSWI), the Department of Social Work, the University of Delhi, and numerous state-level associations. The ISPSE is the oldest and most active society of professional social work associations in India. It was formally known as the Indian Society of Psychiatric Social Work which was established in the year 1970 (IFSW, NA). A national-level organization Named NAPSWI was established in the year 2005. The organization is devoted working to promote the status and standard of the social work profession in India. It is non-political. This organization is working to address the genuine concern of professional social workers that is not having a professional body at the national level. Apart from these associations, many states have their social work associations such as Karnataka Association of Professional Social Workers, Professional Social Workers Association (PSWA), Chennai, since 1985, Kerala Association of Professional Social Workers (KAPS), established in 2012, etc.

Social Work in Indian Context - A Way Forward

In a developing country like India, people are facing tremendous issues which gives great space for social workers. The popularity of social work education is increasing day by day and the students are competing with each other to secure admissions for courses related to social work in the prestigious educational institutions of India. Today, social work is in a particularly difficult and ambiguous position. It needs to break free from constraints and rediscover ambiguity and uncertainty in terms of the range of elements (including risk factors) that influence human cognition, motivation, and behaviour. Focusing on removing obstacles and strengthening higher education is essential for a better future. There has also been a debate over the precise form and purpose of a Code of Ethics in a diverse community like India, which has yet to be settled.¹³ According to research, better resources, networking, exposure, and a preference for experiential learning will improve the quality of social work education. In addition, ongoing monitoring and improvement are required to increase quality, which will result in a shift in public view of social work as a profession. The trends in social work are extended to

¹³ Frederic G. Reamer and Jayashree Nimmagadda, "Social work ethics in India: A call for the development of indigenized ethical standards," *International Social Work* 60, no. 1 (2017): 182-195.

various fields such as the removal of social problems, solution of individual and family problems, policy-making, environmental issues, disaster management, etc. Even after completing 85 years of professional social work in India, we continue to face a set of problems and challenges in imparting quality education and maintaining standards in social work education and practice. All stakeholders in the Social Work fraternity should come forward and address the challenges towards standardization and the Indianisation of the Social Work Profession.¹⁴

Conclusion

Social Work as a newly emerged profession faces lots of impediments in its way. People are still confused with charity, social service, and social work. Though, in India, the social workers didn't get proper acceptance and respect. But social work and social workers are doing many things systematically more than just helping others. The social work profession faces several threats, including inadequate research, failure to reach the unreached, misunderstandings about the notion of social work, and lack of acknowledgement of professional social work. Although there are many problems ahead for social work in modern times, as Thomas S. Monson correctly stated, "Our most significant opportunities will be found in times of greatest obstacles," these challenges do bring enormous potential for growth and transformation.

Declaration of conflicting interest

The author declared that there are no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding statement

The author did not receive any financial assistance for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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¹⁴ Ramababu Botcha, "Problems and challenges for social work education in India: Some recommendations," *International Journal of Multidisciplinary educational research* 1, no. 3 (2012): 201-212.

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