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## **Spiritualised Social Work as A Indian Way of Life**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Social Work Profession is now more than 100 years old. No doubt it has come a long way and witnessed continuous growth and professionalization. However, even today, people continue to have trouble in understanding what Social Work is all about-what it wants to achieve and by what means and methods. Questions about the professional status of Social Work have also been raised since the very beginning. Flexner first raised the fundamental question, "Is Social Work a Profession?" way back in 1915. Flexner found that while Social Work demonstrated some professional attributes-it was intellectual, derived its knowledge from science and learning, owned a "professional self consciousness" and was altruistic; it was found lacking on some other important professional criteria. The major deficiency of the profession was found in the broadness of its boundaries. He believed that professions had to have definite and specific ends.*

The universal values of the profession are critiqued by some as emanating from the individualistic western value system and thus creating intellectual hegemony for understanding of the prevailing social problems and the strategies to address these. The contents of and the need for a global definition of social have also been questioned as it fails to adequately capture the vastly different socio-economic and political contexts and their realities.

On the other hand, the process of globalization lend additional support to the argument in favour of universalism and developing a global understanding of the problems and finding global strategies to address these. The indigenous knowledge and practices in Social Work therefore gets undermined resulting in imperialization of Social Work. The role of Social Work on the one hand in 'so called' welfare states like Great Britain, other European countries and Canada, etc, has been reduced to administration of Social Welfare benefits prompting some of the authors to call it "state mediated Social Work" and on the other hand Social Work Profession proclaiming for itself the role of empowering and liberating people and attaining Social Justice on their behalf, is assuming some of the functions of pre-globalization era state.

**Key Words:** *Social Work, Professional Spiritualized, Traditional, Indian view*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Social Work Profession is now more than 100 years old. No doubt it has come a long way and witnessed continuous growth and professionalization. However, even today, people continue to have trouble in understanding what Social Work is all about-what it wants to achieve and by what means and methods. Questions about the professional status of Social Work have also been raised since the very beginning. Flexner first raised the fundamental

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The effectiveness of Social Work interventions and the achievements of the profession as measured in the light of the tall objectives set out in the global definition of Social Work therefore are not inspiring enough, if not disappointing. The question therefore about its professional status, raised in 1915, particularly on account of a lack of precise boundary and a distinct contribution to the society; continue to haunt even today.

In India, Social Work Education started in 1936 with an initial focus on developing trained human resources to cater to the requirement of welfare officers to oversee the administration of statutory welfare benefits for the exploited and toiling industrial workforce; spread to include rural and urban community development, family and child welfare, correctional Social Work and medical and psychiatric Social Work as the major areas of Social Work practice which largely functioned in state funded institutions and institutions under the patronage of the state. Structural adjustment programme that India adopted to bail out the economy in early 1990s resulted in far reaching implications, not only for the Indian economy, but also the social sector, and consequently Social Work Profession. The profession even then did not change much both in terms of its content and approach. As a result the efficacy of Social Work interventions in the changed scenario of shrunk state became all the more questionable. In a country which has a population of 1.25 billion people, a substantial proportion of which still struggles to achieve decent standards of living, having limited access to health services, drinking water, housing and employment, the kind of Social Work as practiced in the global north has been criticized by many. The dimensions of criticism have included the debate on specialist and generalist model of Social Work, efficacy of field based specializations, methods like case work and group work and their limited outreach particularly in view of large sections of population afflicted by poverty, hunger,

unemployment, exploitation and discrimination. This debate and discussion however, largely remained confined to the seminar rooms and conference rooms of the Schools of Social Work among the Social Work educators and sometimes with the Social Work practitioners. The close collaborative relationship that should exist between the practitioners and educators to enrich a practising profession has been severely lacking in the Indian context. Development of indigenous literature and methods of practice more suited to the socio-economic contextual realities to overcome the deficiencies of “borrowed” ones therefore remains largely elusive. It is high time that these along with other related issues are discussed threadbare by educators, practitioners and other stakeholders to make the profession more focussed and its interventions more precise and incisive with a higher degree of professionalism and demonstrative effect.

Some of the issues that the need wishes to focus on are:

1. Relevance and Efficacy of Social Work Education
2. Changing Scope of Social Work Profession
3. Challenges before the Profession
4. Knowledge in Social Work, Trans-disciplinary nature and resistance to new Knowledge
5. Evidence based Practice

Care and concern for the individuals and society are at the core of social work profession and practice. Historically, this concern has led to the evolution of this profession from a charity and philanthropic oriented activities and initiatives. India has such initiatives during the pre- and post independence phase. Among them, Rām Mohan Roy, MahātmāJyotibāPhūle, PaṇḍitaRāmābāi, Vivekānanda, MahātmāGāndhi, ĀcāryaVinobāBhāve, ĀcāryaTulsī and PāṇḍuraogŚāstrī. They all worked, in various capacities and of genres, against some or all of the pitfalls of modernity, colonial subordination, and degeneration of human, social and spiritual values.

Human unity, co-existence of individuals, groups and communities in society, self introspection, will-power and self-restraint are the core principle of *aṁvratā*. Individuals constitute a society. The individual and collective integrity and morality will be the basis of a sound social order.

In this context, purity in thought, thereby pure action is the key to achieve such a macro goal. This requires the social, psychological and spiritual transformation of an individual. The *aṁvratā* code of conduct is quite helpful in this direction.

A social worker is often labeled as a social facilitator. As such, often the effort would be to facilitate human action in the interest of society and societal goals. This is a broad moral responsibility of a social worker. As Shaun (2007) gives emphasis, a professional social worker, in spite of all complexities in the society, should insist that:

... [T]he institutions of society must be kept in harmony with the genuine interests of the human personality, that the rights and essential prerogatives of the person shall not be sacrificed to the tyranny of technological efficiency, legalistic convenience, economic advantage, or authoritarian whim. (Shaun, 2007, p. 79)

*Aṁvratā* (small vows) are eleven in number. These vows value the life of innocent creature, communal harmony, world peace and disarmament; a human society sans discrimination;

religious toleration; a life with judicious restraint; ethical practice; social reform; and a safe and a healthy environment. The vows imply action to promote the cause; and the same time, imply restraint – not to indulge in actions harmful to self and society. This is quite an active process. The vows have been reconfigured to the requirement and appropriateness of the students, teachers, entrepreneurs, employees and employers. For an individual as a person with certain expected roles as stated above, the vows reflect matching promotional as well as restraining actions, suiting the need of individuals and society.

The vows individuals take reflect their capability to do so, will power, and moral courage. It is voluntary to adhere to these vows. The vows the individuals take, single or more, reflect their innate capacity. However, individuals differ in their abilities and qualities. Therefore, small vows are pragmatic. It is a process of self realization. It is slow and, therefore, inclusive in nature. Adherents to these codes not only shape and develop their own personality but also become change agents in a society.

The achievement of any movement depends upon the efforts of its constituent and pursuant members. The same rule applies to *aōuvrata* movement also. As Rādhākṛīṇ says, We cannot say that, as a result of this movement, things have improved very considerably. Public spirit, commercial integrity, individual rectitude, family life, peaceful behaviour, these require to be cultivated. These cannot be achieved by merely talking about them. The only way in which this can be brought about is by imparting to our young people the essentials of our culture. These may be summarized in the three great words -

*abhaya*, *ahiṃsā*, *āsaoga*- which are the common possessions of all systems of religious thought. (Radhakrishnan S. , 1985, p. 19) Ethics is about dialogue and rational arguments. In a pluralistic society,

There are differing values and morals. A rational and ethical act would be accepted by all. Dialogical deliberations are needed towards mutual agreements. In a democratic and plural society like India, we have personal freedom. There is space for many ways of life and many moral codes.

The situation is, therefore, complex and challenging. Contextualising similar cases, Pruzan (2009) views, ‘since there is no overriding logic that can substantiate an ethical position, it cannot be expected that everyone at all times will arrive at the same ethical result’ (p. 28). Here comes the relevance of *anekānta* and *aōuvrata*– reflecting multiple truths and coexistence. *Aōuvrata* code of conduct enables this stance. This process can help everyone to respect others and their understanding of what is good and bad. Individuals are capable to take decisions and there should be space for them to have dialogue to refine one’s thinking and plan for growth. This is quite matching with the ideologies of social work practice.

## CONCLUSION

Social Work is a value based profession. The sources of these values are many. The social reformers making incessant effort for the upliftment of poor, vulnerable and downtrodden in the society, contribute more to the pool of social work values. In India, there are many spiritual and political leaders who demonstrated this ideal through many ‘established educational and social service programs, medical institutions, cultural activities, rural and tribal development programs, and youth training for social service’ (Canda & Furman, 2010,



p. 165). Ācārya Tulsī is one among many such saints, hilosophers and social reformers. *Aōuvrata*code of conduct, as propagated by his initiative, promotes individual as well as social and environmental well-being. It is based on Indian values and philosophies. Its effect can be discerned both at micro and macro levels in the society.

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