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Indic Values and Ethics of Social Work Profession of India

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Abstract

Social work education in India has its values and ethics in various capacities, but simultaneously, the standardised values and ethics are entirely Western-centric. The Western-centric social work practice has difficulty in India due to India's socio-economic, cultural, traditional, and geographical nature. The present paper focused on the social work values and ethics practised in India, which were not recognised as Western-centric. So, the researchers are focused on how values and ethics are practised without knowing the social work profession in ancient India, the relationship with ancient literature, and the present scenario of social work profession practice in India.

Keywords: Social Work, Indic Social Work, Vedas, Indigenous Social Work and

Several social work professional associations in India have emerged and engaged in practical efforts to get a national council for professional social workers with a proper code of ethics, standards and education through the National Education Policy 2020. The primary purpose of the present paper is to understand the need for a standardised code of ethics by incorporating Indic values and ethics in social work. Globalisation and importing Western ideas destroy the local context of social work (Coates et al., 2008). Western-oriented social work has influenced the development of social work education and practice in South Asia since its beginning without considering the area's local conditions or colonial past. It is essential to develop knowledge of decolonising Indian social work. Social service in India stems from deep-rooted religious beliefs (Nadkarni & Joseph, 2014). Philosophies of welfare and humanitarianism arose from deep-rooted religious beliefs and practices of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, Christianity, and other indigenous beliefs. Social work existed through almsgiving and charity to people experiencing poverty and creating shelters, kitchens, and institutions for orphans, the elderly, the destitute, and beggars (Dash, 2017; Nadkarni & Joseph, 2014).

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Over the years, there has been a gradual increase in the interest in granting social work a professional status. In India, social work is considered a semi-profession as it either needs certain essential traits or has not developed to its fullest potential (Etzioni, 1969). Since the beginning of the third quarter of the 19th century, social work has become a global profession practised in over 144 countries across the globe (IASSW, 2002). In 2012, the social work profession marked its platinum jubilee in India. It has been a crucial period in the establishment of social work as a profession, an independent helping profession, interdisciplinary and based on a foundation of traditional social work methods and skills (Nadkarni & Joseph, 2014). There needs to be more recognition in India of social work as a profession (Dash, 2017); there is no professional council or licensure/registration for social workers in India. Babu and Jose (2019) have mentioned some gaps that have hindered social work from developing into a separate profession altogether. Indian social work could not engage itself with the various cultures, languages and terrestrial features of Indian society, and this is one of the reasons why the profession of social work has failed to create its unique identity in the Indian community. Thus, it is significant for the professional bodies and institutions in the country to create local knowledge and simultaneously ensure that the created knowledge can be disseminated to prospective consumers. The professional bodies and institutions must be actively involved to encourage the practitioners to move in the right direction (Rao, 2013).

In India, social work has yet to find its identity as a separate profession, like in Western countries. Indian schools of social work are working to create a curriculum in social work practice that is not colonised but applicable to the Indian context. Based on the needs and problems of the country, the indigenisation of social work education and practice has gained momentum. Social work education and practice must blend universal and contextual social work models. Social work practice must reflect a mixed trend, which can give a global perspective but locally adapted practice roots. No method of social work practice can take place in a vacuum, and it is essential to identify the locally-led adaptations with a global outlook (Nanavatty, 1993).

According to Abrams and Moio (2009) Cultural competence is a fundamental tenet of social work education. Although cultural competence with diverse populations historically referred to individuals and groups from non-White

racial origins, the term has evolved to encompass differences in sexuality, religion, ability, and other social workers in India do not have professional bodies to support them in difficult circumstances. Secondly, Indian society is undergoing a crisis of values as values are being questioned, and This has affected every section of society, including social workers. While all social work educators consider social work ethics necessary, it is given secondary importance in the curriculum. Students frequently consider it idealistic rather than something that should be practised in the field. Social work syllabuses of many universities in India do not have ethics as a component for classroom teaching. In emphasising a critical approach to social work education, the importance of the recently adopted Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles (GSWSEP) (International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), 2018) becomes apparent, representing as it does, according to Sewpaul and Henrickson (2019), an (r) evolution and decolonisation of social work ethics. Social workers' ways of thinking and their choices about social work and social development produce different ethical practices and outcomes. As a global profession, social work practitioners must think carefully about ethics in international field training and the assumptions that guide the actions of social work trainees.

Social Work Values

Social work education relates to the following values concerning the NASW Code of Ethics (2019): service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, and integrity.

Service

The fundamental principle of the social work profession is for social workers to provide service to those in need. Service value requires social workers to employ their knowledge, values, and skills to help others address their needs. A significant portion of social workers' knowledge, values, and skills are obtained from social work-related instructions. Social workers would then need adequate training to gain the requisite knowledge, values, and skills to draw from to provide service to those in need.

Social Justice

Social workers must promote social change to address social inequities as part of the social work value of social justice. Social workers are responsible for carrying out social work's objective to promote justice for everyone, regardless of their religious backgrounds, because there are numerous religious groups. Universities may need help in addressing social justice issues relating to religion. There are many different religious sects, as was already said. Some of these groups have favourable perceptions, while others do not. Social workers must receive training in addressing the needs of clients from many faith traditions, even those that are not well-liked. Social workers must be cautious and avoid prejudice toward anyone following a different religion.

Dignity and Worth of the Person

Social workers are advised to treat clients with respect by this social work value. Social workers can best show the respect and value of their clients by being culturally competent to address their spiritual needs. Respect for clients comes from understanding that each one is unique and may belong to a less powerful religious group but deserves to be treated with respect. Social workers should not push their religious views on their clients to respect their right to spiritual autonomy (Hodge, 2002).

Integrity

The social work value of integrity centres on social workers demonstrating trustworthiness. This trustworthiness involves social workers recognising the "mission, values, ethical principles, and ethical standards and practice" (NASW Code of Ethics, 2019, p. 6) of the profession that should be congruent with their professional beliefs and practices. Social workers exhibiting behaviours to the contrary, such as incompetence in meeting clients' spiritual needs, would subvert their integrity and the integrity of the profession.

Social work Ethics

Ethical standards in social work and professional ethics education have developed unevenly worldwide (Congress & Kim, 2007; Congress & McAuliffe, 2006). The most ambitious developments have been in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. India needs to

catch up. Ethical standards in social work have evolved significantly since the profession's formal inception in the late 1800s (Reamer, 2006, 2012). Ratified codes of ethics only existed during the first half-century of social work. Although ethical norms emerged during social work's early years, they took decades to be codified. The earliest codes of ethics in social work were relatively simplistic, as were codes in every profession. Early codes of ethics resembled affirmations, oaths, and pledges and, in contrast to contemporary codes, did provide in-depth, comprehensive coverage of a wide range of complex ethical issues (Banks, 2003; Reamer, 2006).

Social Work Ethics in India

The social work profession in India has yet to develop formal, indigenous ethical standards or a rich body of scholarship on professional ethics (Goswami, 2012; Raju & Raju, 2012). Social work in India does not have deep roots in the culture's longstanding values. Indeed, India has a very ancient history of thinking about ethics (Clothey, 2006). Its central concepts are embedded in Rigveda, one of the oldest knowledge texts of India and the entire world. In Rigveda, one finds a discussion of a cosmic order (*rta*), which stands for harmony and balance in nature and human society. In Indian tradition, the concept of *rta* underpins the idea of Dharma. Dharma entails the core ethical concepts of duty, obligation, and righteousness. Dharma represents a way of life in which ethical values are considered supreme, and everyone is expected to perform his or her duty according to his or her social position and station in life. There is a keen link between Dharma and longstanding social work ethics concepts.

Social work in India has also been influenced directly by the culture's embrace of core values related to the *Bhakti* movement's value of humanism and individual worth and dignity, *Sarvodaya*, which emphasises the values of equity, justice, and empowerment of the community as a whole; and the spirit of *Swarajya*, which promotes self-governance. These, too, are values that resonate with traditional social work values (Tata Institute of Social Sciences, 2014). Indian social work values are replete with influences from the Vedic period, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism (Clothey, 2006).

Indic Values in Social Work

Values are of great importance to professional social work practice. Perhaps more than any other profession, values in social work give direction to the profession (Mattison, 2000). Values act as guidelines for our behaviour. Our system of values is so much a part of us that we cannot separate it from ourselves. It becomes the navigating system that guides us. It establishes the priorities in our lives and judges what we will accept or reject (Maxwell, 1993). Values are used to articulate goals and outcomes, identify preferred means of attaining them and support policy decisions at various levels of practice (Gambrill, 1997). The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) of the USA has listed six social work values widely accepted among the social work fraternity across the globe. The NASW mentions social service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, the importance of human relationships, integrity and competence as social work values.

Values are the foundations of the social work profession as they guide social workers in pursuing welfare and social development. Adherence to the values will enhance the quality and effectiveness of social workers towards service delivery of their clients. As a human service profession, social work values play an essential role in guiding social work professionals to serve humanity in a more professional, dedicated and spiritual manner. Dash and Roy (2016) define social work as “a value-based ethical and spiritual practice-based profession that aims at addressing the overall problems of individuals, groups and communities to attend a peaceful life”. The social work practice is closely related to the country’s prevailing socio-economic, political and cultural settings. The social dynamics of Indian society are witnessing fast changes due to globalisation and colonisation in every field, which calls for decolonising social education curriculum and fieldwork modalities in tune with Indic value systems. A social worker’s life and actions are based on and guided by a set of core values. Also, it is critically important for them as they work with individuals, families, groups and communities in problem-solving (Thomas, 2016).

Dharma is derived from the Sanskrit word ‘dhru’, which refers to hold together and preserve (Kane, 1941). Dharma is also considered a norm that sustains the universe, the principle of a thing in virtue of which it is what it

is (Radhakrishnan, 1948).

Dharma is the first Purushartha of human life. In ancient Indian literature, there is a common axiom, ‘Dharmen Vihina Pashau,’ meaning humans devoid of Dharma are better as animals. Just as material possessions are evaluated based on its monetary values, human beings are evaluated in terms of Dharma, spirituality and the duties performed for the welfare of the society. According to Manu, the first lawgiver of humankind, Dharma is constituted of ten prominent values. They are dhati (patience), kshama (forgiveness), dama (control of mind), asteyam (non-stealing), auca (cleanliness), indriyanigraha (control of sense organs), dhi (intellect), vidya (education), satyam (truthfulness), and akrodha (non-anger) (Arya, 2018). As a social work principle, Dharma upholds the rights and dignity of all living beings and provides restraints from any harm towards any living creatures in the world. As a social principle, Dharma is essential for society’s harmonious and peaceful coexistence. Social work professionals should practice Dharma in their social work practice and perform their duties in a very righteous, truthful, and honest manner, aiming at the all-around welfare of their clients.

According to Patanjali, Dharma is of two types: Yamas (restraints) and Niyamas (observances). The five Yamas, according to Patanjali, are a) Ahimsa or abstention from all kinds of injury to any one life; b) Satya or truthfulness in thought and speech and abstention from falsehood; c) Asteya; non-stealing, i.e., abstention from an unauthorised and illegal appropriation of things and values from other persons, d) Brahmacharya, which means abstaining from cardinal desires and passions and lastly e) Aparigraha which means abstention from expecting unnecessary gifts from other persons. The five Niyamas consists of developing good habits required to be a successful social worker viz, a) sauca, which means cleanliness by eating pure food and developing pure thoughts and emotions as well as kindness and abstention from arrogance, jealousy and vanity), b) Santosa, the habit of being satisfied in ones means; c) Tapas or penance which consists of in the habit of enduring cold and heat etc., and observing austere vows, d) Svadhya means to study and pursuit of religious books and lastly Isvarapranidhana or meditation meaning devotion to supreme God (Chatterjee & Datta, 2007). The social worker should have a sound body and mind to effectively discharge his duties religiously and spiritually. Social workers should properly observe the various niyamas and yamas to

abstain from evils, which will enable them to do his/her duties devotedly for the welfare of humanity.

Ahimsa- Ahimsa (ahimsa) simply means without violence. Ahimsa means not inflicting pain or injury upon others. It is usually understood and interpreted as non-violence. However, non-violence is just one aspect of ahimsa or non-injury. Non-violence is considered one of the highest virtues in ancient Indian traditions. Even the Jains practice the highest form of non-violence as they do not want to harm or injure even the smallest organism in the world. It is one of the five anuvratas or vows to be followed by every Jain before beginning their spiritual path to complete monkhood. Buddhism also propagates for non-violence, and its followers adhere to the eight-fold paths of Buddhism. In Indian traditions, particularly among the Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains, non-violence is the epitome of detachment and renunciation, practised in various ways and forms. It includes non-injury to living beings, abstaining from animal and human sacrifices, and the practice of forgiveness, compassion, and kindness to all living beings.

'*Nishtha*' means having complete devotion and reposing faith and confidence in clients. It is based on the principle that social workers should accept the client as he or she is with trust and confidence in the client and every human being. Social workers should accept the client as he/she is. The principle of acceptance is universally accepted in social work. In Bhagwat Gita, Bhagwan Krishna mentions two types of Nishtha: Jnana yoga and Karmoyoga. Social workers must thoroughly and deeply understand social work theory and practices. They must have a deep interest in learning the latest developments in the field of social work so that they can serve the clients effectively towards their satisfaction and dedication (Dash, 2019). Karma yoga is also essential for social workers. They should concentrate passionately and thoughtfully with utmost honesty and dedication.

Upeksha means imperturbability, placidity, self-assuredness, self-confidence, self-trust and easygoingness. However, it does not refer to indifference. Upeksha rejects any discrimination and prejudices. Upeksha is a Sanskrit term which means self-control, tolerance, and non-attachment. Upeksha is the fourth element of the Buddhist Brahmaviravas. Patanjali's Yoga Sutras also describe Upeksha as a medium for obtaining a balanced life, removing

intolerance and caring for all equally. The value of upeksha among social workers helps them to examine the situation holistically. It also imbibes the quality of self-confidence to handle the situation successfully (Dash, 2019). It is also essential for rapport formation among clients and colleagues. It also motivates social workers to work for the happiness of others with a devoted mind. So, upeksha is of significant value in delivering social work interventions effectively.

The word 'Satya' in Sanskrit refers to truth. Satya is considered a virtue in various forms of Indian religions. It highlights honesty and truthfulness in one's behaviour, action and thought. It prescribes any dishonesty or falsehood in one's behaviour and actions. Even the Patanjali's Yogsutra mentions 'Satya' as one of its 'yamas' (restraints). Satya is an essential requirement for the harmonious existence of the society. Social workers should operate on the principle of Satya, practice truthfulness and honesty in their behaviour, approach and actions and prevent any kind of falsehood and this will promote a harmonious and healthy relationship between the social worker and the client. The social work profession in India should eliminate colonialism and imperialism and promote Indic social work values, methods and techniques for dealing with clients successfully. It will harness their skills as social workers and provide impetus for more acceptance and recognition of social work as a profession in India.

Furthermore, many social work licensing and regulatory bodies worldwide require ethics education as a condition of licensure. In light of the profession's growing awareness of ethical issues, social work regulators recognise the need for social workers to keep pace with new developments, for example, social workers' increasing use of digital technology to provide services (Reamer, 2012). Social workers in India must take assertive steps to strengthen ethics education (Botcha, 2012). Indian social work educators need to develop indigenous curricula, curricular standards, publications (textbooks, journal articles, online resources, and other educational materials); clinical intervention, community organising, and policy practice models and methods; and human behaviour theories that incorporate uniquely Indian values, concepts, and cultural norms.

The quality of professional practice, the integrity of social work in India,

and, most importantly, the ability of social workers to carry out their mission will all be improved by the development of social work standards and ethical guidelines that are specifically tailored to India's culture and values.

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