



Mahatma Gandhi an Ideal Professional Social Worker

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Introduction

Since then the number of institutions imparting social work education have rapidly multiplied. But the development of social work literature has been far too inadequate. In fact there is very little of literature which social work can claim its own. Most of the available literature is in the nature of survey of social welfare programmes. There is hardly any writing on the subject where attempt has been made to clarify social work concepts or to discuss its tools and techniques suitable to Indian conditions. In the available literature for instance one finds a good deal of confusion about the concepts of social work and social welfare. In fact, many times these two concepts are interchangeably used. There is also little of organised literature describing the socio-cultural conditions in which social work has grown in this country. However Dr. Muzumdar's book is a significant effort in social work literature to define the concept of social work and also developed a framework to study social welfare programmes for weaker sections, women and rural people. This literature is very helpful to all social work students in analysing and understanding various conditions in which social work has grown in this society. Nodoubt that there is a great impact of Gandhi on both the growing concept of social work and on social welfare programmes in India.

Mahatma Gandhi was a true social worker. There was based on his constructive work. He did a lot of social work. He fought against evils of society. He told always, if you want to do social work, you start it yourself. He was very worried about poverty of India. His political movements were also a type of social work. You can see it in Champaran, Kheda etc. movements. Poverty was the main focus of early social work, it is intricately linked with the idea of charity work, but it must now be understood in much broader terms. For instance it is not uncommon for modern social workers to find themselves dealing with the consequences arising from many other 'social problems' such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and discrimination based on age or on physical or mental ability. Modern social workers can be found helping to deal with the consequences of these and many other social maladies in all areas of the human services and in many other fields besides. Mahatma Gandhi wrote, "Your fear about my being engrossed in the political strife and intrigues may be entirely set aside. I have no stomach for them, least at the present moment, had none even in South Africa. I was in the political life because there through lay my own liberation. Montagu said, "I am surprised to find you taking part in the political life of the country!" Without a moment's thought I replied, "I am in it because without it I cannot do my religious and social work," and I think the reply will stand good to the end of my life."¹

Mahatma Gandhi wrote, "It has been suggested that this programme turns the Congress into a purely social reform organization. I beg to differ from that view. Everything that

is absolutely essential for swaraj is more than merely social work and must be taken up by the Congress. It is not suggested that the Congress should confine its activity for all time to this work only. But it is suggested that the Congress should for the coming year concentrate the whole of its energy on the work of construction, or as I have otherwise described it, the work of internal growth."² Whereas social work started on a more scientific footing aimed at controlling and reforming individuals (at one stage supporting the notion that poverty was a disease), it has in more recent times adopted a more critical and holistic approach to understanding and intervening in social problems. This has led, for example, to the reconceptualisation of poverty as more a problem of the haves versus the have-nots rather than its former status as a disease, illness, or moral defect in need of treatment. This also points to another historical development in the evolution of social work: once a profession engaged more in social control, it has become one more directed at social empowerment. That is not to say that modern social workers do not engage in social control and many if not most social workers would likely agree that this is an ongoing tension and debate. Mahatma Gandhi wrote, "The hospital started under such auspices with fairly ample funds at its disposal should grow day by day and supply the need of the middle class women of Bengal. This hospital reminds us of the fact that social work was as dear to the Deshbandhu as political. When it was open to him to give away his properties for political work he deliberately chose to give them for social service in which women's service had a prominent part."³

Mahatma Gandhi wrote, "We realize, they say, that our real work lies in villages, and that while doing this work we can also do other social work among the villagers. By popularizing the use of the spinning-wheel we can convince people what a terrible disease their idleness is. Wherever the volunteers work in a spirit of service, they succeed in creating a sense of brotherhood among the people. And the difficulty of selling khadi, they point out, is avoided by following the method of getting people to stock their own cotton and produce khadi for their needs."⁴

Social Work is the professional activity of helping individuals, groups, or communities enhance or restore their capacity for social functioning and creating societal conditions favorable to this goal. Social Work practice consists of the professional application of Social Work values, principles, and techniques to one or more of the following ends: helping people obtain tangible services; counseling and psychotherapy with individuals, families, and groups; helping communities or groups provide or improve processes. The practice of Social Work requires knowledge of human development and behavior; of social, economic, and cultural institutions; and of the interactions of all these factors. Mahatma Gandhi wrote, "I understood from another visitor this afternoon that you are without

any organization here for doing this class of social work or political work of any nature whatsoever, and indeed nothing would please me better than to find that as one of the results of this meeting, you had such a working organization manned by selfless workers.”⁵ Mahatma Gandhi wrote, “Mr. Diwan A. Mehta brought a collection (Rs. 270) made from among the Indian passengers on board to be handed to me on the condition that if the Bardoli struggle was over the money should be utilized for some social work of my choice. I have earmarked the donation for untouchability work, and I thankfully make this acknowledgment here as it could not very well appear in the Bardoli fund collection list that is printed from week to week as supplement to Young India.”⁶

Mahatma Gandhi wrote, “He, who lives in the social group, must have no dislike to social work, that is, collective prayer. He who loses himself in God, sees the whole world as God. It may be said that collective prayer is the first step in social work for attaining such a state of mind. From the Negroes to the Christians of Europe, from the Muslims of Arabia to the Hindus of Bharatavarsha, none of them has been able to do without prayer. If the churches, the mosques and the temples were to be demolished, the society, too, would go down with them. Divine music is going on all the time where God is and we can only imagine what it is like. Collective prayer is a rationally inexplicable attempt to join in that music, and he who joins in that music is for ever in a state of bliss. I take it that you will be able to deduce the rest from this. If you cannot do so and doubts remain, go on asking me again and again.”⁷

Social Work is concerned and involved with the interactions between people and the institutions of society that affect the ability of people to accomplish life tasks, realize aspirations and values, and alleviate distress. These interactions between people and social institutions occur within the context of the larger societal good. Mahatma Gandhi wrote, “We in Gujarat have a unique Vidyapith. I am not exaggerating if I say that it is a centre of Gujarat's public life and social work.”⁸ Mahatma Gandhi wrote, “Not much work could be done for long years. Meanwhile the Calcutta Congress passed a resolution appointing the Anti-untouchability Committee and the work was entrusted to Jamnalalji who was able to achieve

some result and the credit for it went to the Congress. It is not the main work of the Congress to take full responsibility for social work. It should at the same time promote it. The Congress is a political body in which there are bound to be frequent differences of opinion. I would urge to have a far-sighted vision and to create these Committees and to let them do good work by organizations which are of their own making and with money which they collect.”⁹

Mahatma Gandhi wrote, “I had explained this even at the time I asked for donations from you. You had remarked that my work was of a political and social nature. After this was made clear, you gave me this money for social work. Likewise you accepted my views generously. It is not proper that you should now demand a hand in the management. I ask you to have a committee of inspection. If you feel that the work is not being carried on properly, you may stop your donations. Even the Government does not participate in the management though it does supervise. You too can do what you like as inspectors. Even then if you do not like to donate funds, I shall make another suggestion. The people are filled with admiration for the school that is being run there, the Montessori school. Donate money to Prof. Miller. The labourers need that money. You talk of the increase in the wages of labourers. I must tell you that even sons of big men study there and do not pay full fees. You seem to desire that this school should be run on the small sum that the labourers save. Do the labourers collect money for the purpose of fighting? You should be thankful to me because they do not collect funds to launch a fight.”¹⁰

To summarise the discussion on social work is the professional activity of helping individuals, groups, or communities enhance or restore their capacity for social functioning and creating societal conditions favorable to this goal. In view of Gandhi the social work practice consists of the professional application of Social Work values, principles, and techniques to one or more of the following ends: helping people obtain tangible services; counseling and psychotherapy with individuals, families, and groups; helping communities or groups provide or improve processes

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