



Mahatma Gandhi and Professional Social Work

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Introduction

Social work in its various forms addresses the multiple, complex transactions between people and their environments. Its mission is to enable all people to develop their full potential, enrich their lives, and prevent dysfunction. Professional social work is focused on problem solving and change (Chadha, Y. 1997). As such, social workers are change agents in society and in the lives of the individuals, families and communities they serve. Social work is an interrelated system of values, theory and practice. Mahatma Gandhi wrote, "I suggested to them that my work of social reform was in no way less than or subordinate to political work (Gandhi, M. K. 1977). The fact is, that when I saw that to a certain extent my social work would be impossible without the help of political work, I took to the latter and only to the extent that it helped the former. I must therefore confess that work of social reform or self-purification of this nature is a hundred times dearer to me than what is called purely political work" (GSS VOL. 29, 11) Mahatma Gandhi wrote, "Whilst I criticize this part of missionary work, I willingly admit that missions have done indirect good to India (GSS VOL. 34,12)."

Mahatma Gandhi wrote, "The women certainly do social work, but as individuals. I should like them to assume responsibility as a body, for some social service. This will create in them capacity for organization. When such capacity has been created, individuals may come and go but the organization will remain. God has given such capacity only to human beings. In our country, women have not cultivated it so far. The blame for this lies with the men. But that is a question with which we need not concern ourselves just now. If we believe that women must acquire this capacity for organization, we should try to cultivate it in them. It does not matter if we commence only with my writing a letter to their Association and their replying to me. Slowly (no matter, if very slowly) we may take up other activities (Kumar, K. 1994). If you have fully understood what I have suggested and if the suggestion has appealed to you, if the other women also approve of it and if they are ready to take interest in carrying it out, you may take up this work. If, however, you see difficulties in carrying it out or see no meaning in it, you may drop the idea (GSS VOL. 36,13)."

Social work grew out of humanitarian and democratic ideals, and its values are based on respect for the equality, worth, and dignity of all people. Since its beginnings over a century ago, social work practice has focused on meeting human needs and developing human potential. Human rights and social justice serve as the motivation and justification for social work action (Gandhi, M. K. 1997). In solidarity with those who are disadvantaged, the profession strives to alleviate poverty and to liberate vulnerable and oppressed people in order to promote social inclusion. Social work values are embodied in the professions national and international codes of ethics. Mahatma Gandhi wrote, "I wonder if you were able to pass

on my letter about the opening ceremony to Vinayakrao. He has certainly done very good social work in Ratnagiri, and it must have been a very serious disappointment to him, as also to Sjt. Kir that you were disabled from performing the opening ceremony (GSS VOL. 40,14)."

Mahatma Gandhi wrote, "I hope to be able shortly to issue a statement about the Village Industries Association. I might have issued it earlier, but, in spite of my getting up at half past two in the morning, I have not yet overtaken the arrears. But I shall presently put on speed. Of course, I shall want your assistance and that of all solid workers who would come forward. The resolution aims at moral uplift. Therefore, it includes social work so far as it can be advanced through village industries. If Jagannath offers his services and if he is allowed to do so, he will have to be a whole-timer." (GSS VOL. 15)

Social work bases its methodology on a systematic body of evidence-based knowledge derived from research and practice evaluation, including local and indigenous knowledge specific to its context. It recognizes the complexity of interactions between human beings and their environment, and the capacity of people both to be affected by and to alter the multiple influences upon them including bio-psychosocial factors. The social work profession draws on theories of human development and behaviour and social systems to analyse complex situations and to facilitate individual, organizational, social and cultural changes. Mahatma Gandhi wrote, "I have now heard from Dr. Jayaram. He has come to the conclusion that Bhole never had any tuberculosis but whether he had any or not he is certainly now entirely free and that he should now leave the Sanatorium and take to some social work or continue his studies so as to take his mind off himself." (GSS VOL. 16)

Professional Approach

Gandhiji's contribution to social welfare programmes helped substantially for empowerment of the people especially in the post-independent India. Gandhiji's approach was similar to that of the professional social worker indeed Gandhiji prepared the ground for the establishment of the profession of social work in India. Gandhiji used social work methods like case work and group work. Social welfare programmes and the underlying principles and methods guiding them are evolved and stabilized in a society in response to the socio-cultural economic needs of the people. Thus a meaningful discussion on social welfare programmes in a country should be rooted in its historical past.

Mahatma Gandhi's views on education

Krishna Kumar, Professor of Education at Delhi University, wrote that 'no one rejected colonial education as sharply and as completely as Gandhi did, nor did anyone else put forward an alternative as radical as the one he proposed'. Gandhi's

critique of Western, particularly English, education was part of his critique of Western civilization as a whole. There is a story that, on arriving in Britain after he had become famous, someone asked him the question: 'Mr. Gandhi, what do you think of civilization in England?' to which he replied 'I think that it would be something worth trying'

His experiences in South Africa changed his life. While he was there, he came face to face with blatant racism and discrimination of a kind that he had never witnessed in India. The humiliation he felt at the hands of officials turned him from a meek and unassertive individual into a determined political activist. He had originally gone to South Africa on a one year contract to work for an Indian law firm in Natal Province. There he took up various grievances on behalf of the Indian community and gradually found himself first as their advocate on civil rights issues and finally as their leader in a political movement against racial discrimination and for South African Indian rights. His methods were unusual. He launched a struggle against the authorities which in keeping with his strict Hindu beliefs was based on a strict adherence to non-violence. This meant that it consisted of passive resistance – the peaceful violation of certain laws, the courting of collective arrests (he urged his followers to fill the jails), non-cooperation with the authorities, boycotts and spectacular marches. These methods were later to be perfected back in India in the fight for independence from the British Empire- **all of his actions are closely linked with community action and community advocacy which is considered as a one of the important method of professional social work. Indeed he has developed the most appropriate method of social work consistent with Indian culture and conditions.**

Swaraj and Swadeshi

What Gandhi was looking for **Swaraj and Swadeshi**. These two terms taken together represent the type of society that Gandhi was looking for. Swaraj, very badly translates as independence/autonomy/home rule/self rule. Swadeshi can be translated as self-sufficiency or self-reliance- **These are the ultimate goals of the social work profession. Swaraj** implied value system and life style totally replaced by simpler and spiritual values. He stated that: Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus every village will be a republic ... having

full powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs- **which is the main objective of the social work**. He continues: Thus every villages first concern will be to grow its own food crops and cotton for its cloth. It should have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and playground for adults and children- **these are the areas where Gandhiji emphasized child welfare, income generation and management of the surplus assets**. Then, if there is more land available, it will grow useful money crops, thus excluding ganja, tobacco, opium and the like- **these are the areas of prohibition where the professional social work is putting special efforts..**

The village will maintain a village theatre, school and public hall- these are the recreational facilities needed for integrated development. It will have its own waterworks, ensuring clean water supply. This can be done through controlled wells or tanks- **a crucial aspect of the health and community hygiene where Govt is spending huge amount through various five year plans.**

Education will be compulsory up to the final basic course. As far as possible every activity will be conducted on the co-operative basis. There will be no castes such as we have today with their graded untouchability- **for Gandhiji education is a tool for social transformation**. Non-violence with its technique of... non-cooperation will be the sanction of the village community. There will be a compulsory service of village guards who will be selected by rotation from the register maintained by the village- **is concern with self defense**.

Gandhi was quite certain that any village could become such a republic straight away without much interference even from the colonial government because he believed that their sole effective connection with the villages was the collection of village taxes. All that was needed was the will to do it.

To summarise the paper it is to state Gandhi was of the opinion unless people came together social problems will not be solved. Collective efforts are needed for common solution which will be inclusive, comprehensive and sustainable in the society.

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