

SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL WELFARE



SHANKAR PATHAK



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A Historical - Cultural Perspective

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SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL WELFARE

A HISTORICAL -CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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Preface

In 2012, I published a book – Social Work and Social Welfare, Historical Cultural Perspective, Niruta Publications, Bangalore. It included selected, revised and updated parts of my earlier two books: Social Welfare: An Evolutionary and Developmental Perspective, Macmillan – India, 1981 and Social Welfare, Health and Family Planning in India. Marwah Publications, 1979. I had also added four chapters especially written for that book.

National Book Trust of India, N.Delhi considered this book for a re-publication under its subsidy scheme and decided to sanction the subsidy amount with suggestions for abridgement and reorganization of content of some chapters. Accordingly some changes have been made in the original 2012 edition of the book. They are: deletion of the chapter on Bhakti (chapter No.20), merging the content of three chapters (No 14,15 and 16) into one chapter – Indian Perspective of Social Work and merging the content of chapter 18 – Sarvodaya Methods of Social Work and B.N. Ganguli's views on Gandhian Social Work (Appendix I). Chapter No.15 is an entirely new chapter incorporating the contents of chapter No.17 and Appendix I. I think these changes have improved the quality of the original edition of the book and I thank the anonymous referee of the National Book Trust for his helpful suggestions.

Once again I thank Ramesha M.H. and his team, Niruta Publications for publishing this new abridged and revised edition of my book. I hope the book will reach a wider audience including students and teachers of social work in view of its subsidized, affordable price.

Shankar Pathak

Bangalore

2 October 2013

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PART ONE
Social Policy And Social Welfare
A Social Historical Perspective

CHAPTER-1

Introduction

In this brief opening chapter I propose to explain my approach in studying the evolution of social welfare in India and the rationale for it. In the process, I hope to alert the reader to the value-orientation behind this approach, which is vitally important, because I strongly believe that all intellectual endeavors are influenced by ideology.¹

It is helpful to start with the definition of the terms 'social welfare' and 'social work'. The task is not easy. There have been several unsuccessful attempts to define these terms so that a uniform meaning is attributed to them, both nationally and internationally. Social welfare is used here as a term which is broader in scope than social work. It may be defined as the organised provision of resources and services by the society to deal with social problems. These services may be provided by the state or by voluntary organisations, with a view to ameliorating the conditions of the people affected by the problems as well as to protect others who are likely to be affected in the future. This definition is wide enough to include the traditional and modern views of social welfare, i.e. the residual and developmental concepts of social welfare. It also includes social work. The term 'social work' refers to the work of voluntary social workers, professional social workers and other social work personnel employed in the field of social welfare.

The first part of this book deals with the history of social welfare in India. The subject matter of history is not the frozen and mummified past, but the change and evolution of society. History 'is a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past'.² The study of any history poses a serious problem because we look at past events through contemporary concepts

and mental framework.³ This tendency cannot altogether be avoided (though it could be kept under check by our awareness of its existence) because 'we can view the past and achieve our understanding of the past, only through the eyes of the present'.

Ahistoricity, both in a literal and a Marxist sense, is characteristic of social welfare literature. It may be asked why one should study history, which is concerned with the 'dead past'. It may even be argued that such an endeavour is undesirable for two reasons: it may lead to nationalistic chauvinism by glorification (even mythologisation) of the past; and it may reinforce the existing orientation to the past when we need an orientation to the future to bring about planned social change. These questions raise very pertinent issues because the dangers referred to are real and not imaginary. Yet, it is both necessary and desirable that we study aspects of Indian history because it provides us 'the key to the understanding of the present'. As pointed out by E.H. Carr, 'The past is intelligible to us only in the light of the present; and we can fully understand the present only in the light of the past. To enable man to understand the society of the past, and to increase his mastery over the society of the present, is the dual function of history.'⁴

There is a special reason why one should study the history of social welfare, 'even if the past does not provide easy and clear lessons'. Clarke Chambers has observed:

Historical study may, for example, remind us of experiments in social welfare or in the delivery of social services which we have forgotten or never fully understand. It may provide educators, administrators, and practitioners with professional models drawn from the past. Apprentice social workers especially, I imagine, need to know that social concern did not begin with themselves ... it is important to sense in both heart and mind that others have gone before, that one stands in a long and honourable tradition of both social service and social prophecy, for many early social workers laboured to serve those in need while, at the same time, they moved to elaborate public policies which might alleviate and perhaps even resolve [and prevent] the complex social problems which were the source of human need.⁵

In studying the evolution of social welfare in India from ancient times to the present, I have broadly adopted the approach and method of social history. According to Hobsbawm 'social history is at present in fashion', and 'it is a good moment to be a social historian'.⁶ But it is not for these reasons that I have tried to follow the approach of social history. An aspect of the tradition of social history is that 'it referred to the history of the poor or lower classes, and more specifically to the history of the movements of the poor ["social movements"]'.⁷ In recent years it is also concerned with the study of social structure and its transformation, i.e. the history of societies rather than the dynastic history of rulers, their conquest of new territory and their exploits in war. It is based on the conviction that 'the social or societal aspects of man's being cannot be separated from the other aspects of his being. They cannot, for more than a moment, be separated from the ways in which men get their living and their material environment. They cannot, even for a moment, be separated from their ideas since their relations with one another are expressed and formulated in a language which implies concepts as soon as they open their mouths.'⁸

The study of social structure in its totality is the essence of social history. This is elaborated in the next chapter, which provides the theoretical framework for the remaining chapters (Chapters 3 to 7) which cover the evolution of social welfare in India. If the reader is disappointed in the application of the approach, it is not only due to the lack of time and space, and my intellectual limitations, but also because of the extreme paucity of historical evidence which enable the historian to write reliable social history of the life and movements of the poor. This deficiency is especially marked in relation to the ancient period and to a lesser extent to the medieval period.⁹

An evolutionary and developmental perspective, is another major aspect of the theoretical approach. Hoogvelt mentions three focal elements of the concept of development:

Development as Process, i.e. as an evolutionary process of growth and change of man's social and cultural organisation (that is of society).

Development as Interaction, i.e. as a process of growth and change of societies under conditions of interaction with other societies; and

Development as Action, i.e. as a consciously planned and monitored process of growth and change.¹⁰

The theoretical framework as presented in Chapter 2 is based on Hoogvelt's ideas of development as a process, i.e. as an evolutionary process of development, and development as interaction. I believe that the integration of these two theoretical aspects of development is both appropriate and necessary for the study of the evolution of social welfare in a society which has undergone the process of colonisation. Hoogvelt's concept of development as action forms the basis of the theoretical discussion in Part II.

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CHAPTER-5

Christian Missionaries And Social Reform In India

The official religious policy of the East India Company was one of neutrality towards the native religions. This was a continuation of the policy followed by the Muslim rulers during the medieval period. Their reason for continuing this policy was the belief that the earlier Portuguese rule had come to an end because of attempts to forcibly convert the Indian people to Christianity.¹ However, in 1793 two English missionaries, William Carey and John Thomas, both Baptists, set out to India with the clear intention of starting a mission. In view of the ban on missionary activity they settled down in the Danish Colony of Serampore, north of Calcutta. William Carey, along with two other missionaries, Joshua Marshman and William Ward established the Serampore mission in 1799.² These three missionaries who were to play a major role in the renaissance of Bengal were known as the 'Serampore Trio'.

The Serampore missionaries were the first evangelical Baptist missionaries in India. They were followed later by other missionary groups belonging to different Protestant denominations. Before the arrival of the Serampore missionaries, several centuries earlier, there were Christian missions in the Portuguese territory of Goa, and also on the Malabar coast. The work of the earlier missionaries was limited both geographically and in terms of the number of conversions to Christianity. Thus the major attempt at proselytisation began during the nineteenth century with the establishment of the first Baptist mission in Serampore.

The main aim of the missionaries was converting the native heathans to Christianity, which they considered as the nobler object. It was as an adjunct to this major activity that the missionaries began their work of social reform and social service. The main missionary attack against the native religions of Islam and Hinduism was aimed at a variety of superstitious religious practices. The criticism of the missionaries was particularly directed against the Hindus who believed in idol worship and in several gods and observed a variety of practices, some of which like the sati created a moral revulsion in the minds of the missionaries. The proselytisation work of the missionaries did not succeed much. Firstly, the preaching of Christianity was based on a negative approach. It involved crude and harsh criticism of the religious convictions, superstitions and practices of the local people. Secondly, the age-old resilience of Hinduism to adapt itself to changing times by first permitting protestant sects to emerge and then later absorbing these, also was a major factor.

A direct result of the proselytisation activities of the Serampore missionaries was the birth of the Brahma Samaj under the leadership of Rammohun Roy. The Brahma Samaj absorbed the best of Christian ethics and shed the earlier orthodox religious practices such as idol worship and caste discriminations, which were the main targets of the missionary attacks. While the Serampore and other missionary groups who spread out in different parts of the then Bengal province and southern India failed in their evangelical work, they achieved great success in the spheres of social reform and social work. In these two areas they made a lasting contribution, which is acknowledged even today by discriminating and fairminded historians.³

In the area of social reform, the earliest attempt by the Serampore missionaries was to prevent the infanticide at the small island of Ganga Saugor, near Calcutta. A superstition prevailed whereby childless women took a vow that if they had two or more children, they would offer one child to the river Ganga.⁴ According to the statistics compiled by the Serampore missionaries every year about 100 children were drowned in the river.

The missionaries appealed to the Governor-General in Calcutta. They were successful in this venture as the Company government banned the practice quickly. It may be noted that this was not only the first successful attempt in social reform by the missionaries, it was also the beginning of an approach to social reform. For introducing social reform they appealed to the government to pass legislation or issue an executive order preventing an obnoxious or inhuman social-religious practice. In order to persuade the government to act they collected information about the incidence of the particular problem by their own efforts or from other sources, and thus anticipated the later technique of social survey.

The next major issue of social reform which engaged much of the time, energy and resources of the Serampore missionaries was the practice of sati in Bengal. The burning of a widow on the funeral pyre of her husband was an ancient custom which was widely practised among some of the higher castes in Bengal, Rajasthan and even in the south. The Muslim rulers had tried to prevent it, but did not succeed. 'Albuquerque was bold enough to prohibit suttee within Portuguese India in 1510.'⁵ The Danes, the Dutch and the French had prohibited sati in their settlements in Bengal much before the East India Company took action against it.⁶ There is a controversy about whether the Company's rule in some way contributed to the increasing incidence of this practice or not.⁷ At any rate, it is widely admitted that the practice of sati was quite common in Bengal during the Company's rule and it attracted the reforming zeal of the Serampore Trio. While the Serampore missionaries had achieved an easy success in persuading the Company government in their first attempt at social reform, they found it an extremely difficult task when it came to making them agree to ban the practice of sati. The Company government was understandably cautious and unwilling to be persuaded or pressurised into acting on a matter which might create unfavourable reactions among the native people. This cautious approach was not merely the logical corollary of the official policy of religious neutrality. The memory of the

mutiny in Vellore was fresh in the minds of the Company administrators and they were not willing to risk another rebellion among the native population.⁸ Thus, the missionaries had to fight hard and long, before they could succeed in compelling the Government to act on this issue. In this difficult task, the missionaries followed their earlier approach augmented by some new approaches. They collected statistics regarding the number of cases of sati taking place within 30 miles of Calcutta. According to Carey's sources, there were 438 cases of sati in the city of Calcutta and its neighbourhood alone in 1803.⁹ Later, another estimate was made by Buchanan according to which in 1813 there were 10,000 cases of sati annually in the country.¹⁰ This is considered an exaggerated estimate.¹¹

Apart from highlighting the magnitude of the problem by the compilation of statistics, the missionaries continued to appeal to the Christian conscience of the rulers in India and their masters in England. Being equipped by then with a printing press and weekly journals in Bengali and English, the Serampore missionaries made effective use of these in their social reform work, especially sati. Through the pages of their journals and the publications of tracts, they argued against the practice of sati on religious and moral grounds. In this endeavour they received valuable support by the emerging new elites of Calcutta, under the leadership of Rammohun Roy. The work of the reformers, whether the missionaries or the indigenous reformers, in relation to sati brought forth one more method of social reform which was to be a familiar feature of subsequent social reform activities by the Indian reformers. This was the recourse to submitting memorials to the Government requesting for their intervention in passing legislation to deal with the social problem. The memorials were signed by a substantial number of people who were sympathetic to the cause that was being advocated by the reformers. This approach, which was called 'petition politics' was first used by the leaders of the Dharma Sabha to oppose prohibition of sati and later adopted by Rammohun Roy during the campaign for the abolition of sati.¹² It is worth noting, however, that

petitioning of the government by the public was advocated by the missionaries much earlier, though, it was put in practice for the first time during the campaign against sati by Rammohun Roy and others.

While the campaign against sati was the most celebrated of the reform activities of the Serampore missionaries, they were not content with the success on this issue. Their Christian conscience continued to spur them on to newer issues of social reform. The missionaries campaigned against kulinism through their journals and publications. Polygamy among the kulin Brahmins of Bengal was another superstitious social practice which caused considerable misery to several young widows. There was a belief among the lower castes in Bengal that by marrying their daughters to a kulin Brahmin they received religious benefit. This resulted in a large number of girls being married to sons of kulin Brahmins at an young age, as was common in those days.¹³ It also meant as many widows when the man died.

Self-torture by some Hindus, such as 'swinging in a circle while suspended from posts with metal hooks inserted in the fleshy part of the back and then, sometimes falling upon upright iron spikes and other sadistic tortures' soon attracted the attention of the missionaries.¹⁴ Though the act was claimed to be voluntary, the missionaries believed, with some justification, that out of misery and wretchedness many people were compelled to indulge in these practices at the behest of their masters. The missionaries gave protection in their mission premises to those who escaped from performing these practices against their will, and also urged governmental aid for the unwilling victims.

Another practice which disturbed the missionaries was what was known as the 'Ghat murders'. There was a common belief among the native population in Bengal that if those who were sick and dying were to die on the banks of the holy river, they would go to heaven. Here is a vivid description as recorded by one of the Serampore Trio:

When a person is on the point of death his relations carry him on his bed, or on a litter to the Ganges ... some persons are carried many miles to the river; and this practice

is often attended with very cruel circumstances; a person in his last agonies is dragged from his bed and friends, and carried, in the coldest or the hottest weather, from whatever distance, to the river side, where he lies, if a poor man, in the open air, day and night, till he expires.¹⁵

As early as 1802 Carey had advocated the outlawing of this practice. Aided by other missionaries and by Rammohun Roy, who is reported to have exclaimed 'It is murder' and through the propaganda in their journals, the Serampore Trio were able to force the reluctant government to intervene in preventing this practice.

Slavery has been practised in India since ancient times. It was further strengthened by the practice of Muslim rulers to take the prisoners of war as slaves. Akbar banned it, but he did not succeed in eradicating it. So, on the eve of the British rule, slavery was widely practised in several parts of the country. The Christian missionaries in Bengal led by the Serampore Trio began a crusade against it. So common was slavery in those days, that newspapers carried advertisements offering girls and boys for sale.¹⁶ Strangely enough this inhuman practice did not evoke the interest and attention of Rammohun Roy and other Indian reformers who were otherwise very active in many aspects of social reforms like sati, kulinism and widow remarriage. As a result of the campaign by the missionaries, the Company government finally banned slavery in 1843. But this act had no legal validity in the princely states of India.

The problem of slavery was quite serious in the southern part of the country, especially in the princely state of Travancore. In 1853, it is stated that there were 130,000 slaves in the state, of whom 6,000 were sircar slaves (i.e. slaves owned by the state).¹⁷ The Christian Mission Society and the London Mission Society were both active proselytisers in this state, especially among the lower castes like shanars, pariahs and puliyas. Despite their internal rivalry the two missions came together to work for the abolition of slavery in the state. During the 1850s they kept up an organised and continual pressure on the state government in a number of ways. They wrote horror stories on slavery in the jour-

nals published by other missionary groups in Calcutta and Madras, and these were reproduced later in England.

The two missions also jointly presented a petition in 1847 to the new Maharaja on this issue. For about eight years before this, the missionaries were closely involved in their work with the slaves. They had organised schools for them and pleaded for their economic improvement through employment in the state service. They had also fought for 'civil rights' for the convert slaves and other low caste people. These rights included access to the roads used by high caste people, and permission for the women of these groups to use orhis (wraps). They were forbidden by caste rule to cover their breasts.

The missionaries were not willing to be the passive onlookers in the face of social injustice. They described their role as political missionaries in these matters. They were aggressive, insistent and did not hesitate to make use of the political leverage they had by virtue of their relationship with the British rulers in Madras and their sympathisers in the political circles in England. As a result of their educational and political work, even the oppressed groups in the state had become increasingly assertive. This led to confrontation with the high caste people including the Syrian Christians who were land-owners. The breast-cloth disturbances of 1859 was a culmination of this process. Another area of reform work in which the missionaries succeeded was the abolition of uriam or forced free labour for the state. The state government till then did not have a department for its construction work of roads and buildings. This was accomplished by compelling poor labourers, most of whom belonged to the low castes, to work freely on these projects. The other civil rights for which they campaigned was the right of the low caste people to appear and speak in public buildings and offices.

The missionaries achieved success in all the areas of social reform. Slavery, which was banned in Cochin in April 1855, was abolished in Travancore in June 1855. Uriam was not demanded by 1865 and by 1870 designated public roads could be used by the low caste people. The low castes were also permit-

ted access to most of the cutcherries (offices). However, the discrimination in actual practice continued for many years.

The missionaries were not content with their social reform work alone. They were also the pioneers of social work programmes and services for the local population. They worked for the humane treatment of lepers who supposedly committed voluntary suicide but were either drowned or killed. They succeeded in getting the Government to end this practice also. The missionaries gave shelter to orphan children and other destitutes in their missions and provided education for them in their boarding schools. Particularly after the famines which were quite common during the nineteenth century (and many of these were very severe) the missionaries offered relief to orphans and destitutes. It is true that while providing shelter and succour they had an opportunity to convert these unfortunate people to Christianity. It is reported that as early as 1811, destitutes and orphans were kept in the missionary boarding schools. The Serampore and other missionary groups in India were also the pioneers in providing medical care, based on modern methods of medicine, to the poor and the sick people in the country. Sometimes their own knowledge and skill of the new science of medicine were limited. They also established hospitals for providing medical care.

The missionaries in India were the earliest to initiate programmes of education for women.¹⁸ It is well known that traditionally, whether among Hindus or Muslims, women were not permitted to receive education. Notwithstanding the occasional example of some eminent women from among them who were educated and engaged in learned discourse, the general practice was one of discouragement of women, if not outright prohibition from education. The traditional practices which restricted the freedom of girls and women, also came in the way of their education. It is reported that as early as 1817 in one of the missionary schools in Chinsura in Bengal (now in Bangladesh) a few girls were being taught. They were separated from the boys by a screen. But the major impetus for the education of girls came during the 1820s when Miss Cooke arrived in Calcutta at the re-

PART TWO
Social Work–Profession And Practice.
A Cultural Perspective

A human being is like all human beings,
Like some human beings and,
Like no other human being.

Clyde Klukhon and Henry A. Murray

CHAPTER-9

Evolution Of Social Welfare In India

In the evolution of social welfare in India, like in many countries, two broad trends can be noticed: reform of the society and the provision of specific services to the handicapped and disadvantaged individuals and groups. Much before the beginning of social reform during the nineteenth century, there were several religious reform movements by the saints. They were revolting against the religious inequality and in some cases against social inequality as well. They fought against the prevalent practice of excluding the lower groups in society from opportunities to worship God, and their access to religious knowledge. Some of them attempted to remove the social discrimination by preaching that all human beings were equal before God.

The social reformers from Ram Mohun Roy to Gandhi also aimed at reforming the Hindu society. They focussed their attention on the abolition of some religious or social practices which were detrimental to the welfare of certain segments of the Hindu society, such as sati, prohibition of widow remarriage, child marriage, idol-worship and some features of the caste system. They approached their task of reform, which concerned mostly women and children, from a rational and critical analysis of the social system of the day. To achieve their goal they relied heavily on state intervention and the instrument of social legislation. The reform activities which began in Bengal spread to several parts of the country. It was an elitist reform movement confined mainly to the western educated, urban middle class. It did not become a mass movement until the entry of Gandhi on the social reform arena. The point to note here is the fact that many of these social reformers who began their work with a broad orientation to social problems and the need to change society in certain respects, very soon found it necessary to provide specific services to indi-

viduals affected by the harsh features of the society. Thus institutions were established to provide shelter and education for widows, orphans, and destitutes.

With the entry of Gandhi on the political and social scene of India, we see the beginning of a new phase in social reform. For Gandhi, the struggle against social inequality could not be separated from the fight for political freedom. At the same time, he felt that the fight for freedom and political equality has no meaning without fighting for social equality. Gandhi was not content with his efforts to change the society. He also established organizations to provide services and to work for the welfare of the weaker sections of the society. Unlike the social reformers before him, Gandhi's field of action was not limited to urban areas. His analysis of rural poverty led him to initiate measures for rural development through self-sufficiency of the villages. While not agreeing with all the Gandhian ideas and programmes, it must be pointed out that there was none before him (and none after him so far) who had his breadth of vision, the integral view of society (social and political, rural and urban) and who had realised the value of people's participation in the struggle for social and political reform. For the first time social reform became a mass movement drawing in its fold large number of men and women from all strata of society.

I. Evolution of the Role of Government in Social Welfare

Before India came under the British rule, social welfare activities such as care of the handicapped and the destitutes, were the responsibilities of the joint-family, caste and religious institutions. The government or the rulers assumed only limited responsibility for social welfare. During the period of British rule, with the gradual changes in Indian society like urbanization and industrialization, organized social welfare came into existence. These were mostly in urban areas. The government, which subscribed to the laissez-faire theory of state, followed a policy of least intervention in social reform and assumption of minimum responsibility for social welfare. Most of the social welfare work

was done by voluntary organizations through volunteer service. These organizations were mostly run on communal lines and their service was limited to a particular caste or religious group. The state passed some social legislation on its own initiative, mainly for the control of vagrancy and crime. Other social legislation were introduced reluctantly by the government under pressure from the social reformers like Rammohun Roy and others who followed him. Institutional services were provided by the government in provincial capitals or in big industrial towns under the legislative measures introduced for the control of delinquency and crime. Thus, during the British period, the government played a very minor role in social welfare. One area where the government was more active was the welfare of industrial workers, mainly under pressure from textile mills in England, and later also due to the work of the philanthropists and early trade union leaders like N.M. Lokhande, S.S. Bengali and N.M. Joshi. Several provincial governments passed a series of labour legislation to regulate the working hours in the factory, and to provide minimum safety and health measures for the prevention of exploitation of workers. The introduction of these measures were particularly pronounced during the period of popular rule in the late 1930's when Congress party came into power in the majority of provinces of British India. All these resulted in better working conditions in factories and, provision of housing and recreational measures for industrial labour.¹

After the Independence, one of the major problems facing the government was to provide shelter and food to the refugees who were pouring into the country in large numbers. This was a problem of unprecedented magnitude, and the government had to organize relief and later rehabilitation measures on a massive scale. The task was handled by the government by utilizing its administrative machinery and personnel in association with some voluntary social workers and organizations. A few professional social workers also participated in this tremendous humanitarian work. The problem is still there, though not on the same scale, as expatriate refugees continue to come from other countries.

Increasing Role of the State

The year 1950 marks a new phase in the role of the state in social welfare. It was the year during which the Constitution came into force and the Planning Commission was established to begin work on the planned development of the country. The Directive Principles of State Policy emphasized the achievement of justice-social, economic and political. This was further elaborated in the various articles of the Constitution. Article 38, directs the state "to secure and protect a social order which stands for the welfare of the people". Various articles of the Constitution deal with specific activities to be undertaken by the state in this direction. Some of the major references to the state activity to achieve the welfare of the people are: securing adequate means of livelihood to all citizens; the protection of the strength and health of the workers and avoiding circumstances which force citizens to enter avocations unsuited to their age or strength; protection of childhood and youth against exploitation or moral and material abandonment; to secure the right to work, education and public assistance in cases of underserved want such as unemployment, old age, sickness etc.; to secure just and human conditions of work, a living wage, a decent standard of life, leisure and, social cultural opportunities for people; to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, especially the scheduled castes and tribes.²

The goal for the country was stated originally, as the creation of a welfare state and later, as the achievement of a socialistic pattern of society. This required that the state should play an increasingly major role in the field of general and social welfare of the people of this country. The necessity for the state to assume a more dominant role in the field of social welfare was recognized in the First Five-Year Plan which stated that "As the social structure becomes more complex, the state is called upon to play an increasing role in providing service for the welfare of the people".³

II. The Goal, Nature and Functions of Social Welfare in India

It is necessary to define the goal, nature and functions of social welfare. Such an attempt is beset with many formidable difficulties. The nature of social welfare and its area of operation do not lend themselves to a clear and precise statement as in the case of other professions like medicine, law etc. What is more, such a definition cannot have universal applicability. In the past, several attempts have been made to define the nature and scope of social welfare. The following quotation is taken from a U.N. document:

Social welfare is an organized function and is regarded as a body of activities designed to enable individuals, families, groups and communities to cope with the social problems of changing conditions. But, in addition to and extending beyond the range of its responsibilities for specific services, social welfare has a further function within the broad area of a country's social development. In this larger sense, social welfare should play a major part in ensuring that the human and material resources of the country are effectively mobilized and deployed to deal successfully with the social requirements of change and thus contribute to nation building. Social welfare tasks are those which involve the improvement of social functioning and social relationship in meeting social needs at individual, group or community levels. Such tasks may consist of providing services as a response to social needs or problems; predicting the emergence of such situations and taking preventive measures against their occurrence; or helping to create conditions conducive to social development.⁴

In India very few attempts have been made to define the goal, nature and functions of social welfare. For a long time since the beginning of social work education, the schools of social work not only used a borrowed model of social work education, but also the model of social welfare as developed in U.S.A. Social work model in the late 1930's in U.S.A. had mostly focussed on the provision of curative services to mainly individuals and groups. It was also based mostly on the practice of social work in private agencies. There has been, however, some

questioning about the usefulness of this model to the needs of our country and, during the last seven decades a few attempts have been made to adapt this model to the culture and conditions of our country.⁵

Gore is one of the very few persons who have attempted an analysis of the role and functions of social workers in India. But his attempts at analysis and conceptual clarification have been made in a piece-meal fashion in various papers he contributed over a period of time. As a result, his views at times are contradictory and confusing. In discussing the nature and relationship of social work and social reform, Gore states:

Social reform aims essentially at change - a change some times involving the basic values of a society whereas social work primarily relates to welfare activities undertaken within the limits set by the existing values. Social reform is addressed to the change of social institutions and social work to relieving the suffering resulting from the failure of individuals and groups to function effectively within an institutional set-up.⁶

In the same paper, he says that the demarcation between these two fields is not easy and in India the distinction between social reform and social work is particularly blurred.⁷

Gore runs into difficulties in his analysis of social work and social reform, because he fails to see that these are two facets of the whole field of social welfare and in terms of functions, these are two levels of social workers' functions. What he refers to as 'social work' is the traditional concern of social work to provide curative and rehabilitative services, which is only a part and not the whole of social work. In another paper Gore rightly states:

The social worker's job in India primarily calls for the fostering of attitudes, institutions and processes in the community that would lead to greater production and a more equitable distribution of the means of life and subsistence.⁸ But at a later point in the same paper he poses this dilemma:

The social worker finds that he is working in an atmosphere of great intellectual turmoil where he cannot expect to have a ready frame of reference..... what kind of attitudes, therefore, can he foster in the individuals he is working (sic)?

Should he ask the members of his play-group to learn to follow the leader, or should he ask them to develop democratic attitudes and practices?⁹

Once he defined the role of a social worker in India as essentially that of an agent of change, I fail to see the dilemma as to what attitudes a social worker should foster in his work with individuals and groups. The answer to the questions seemed obvious.

Later another attempt was made to define the goal of social welfare and the functions of a social worker in India at the Seminar on "Social Responsibility of Social Work in Social Reconstruction".¹⁰ Various papers that dealt with the theme of the Seminar seemed to reiterate the position unambiguously and categorically that the goal of social welfare in India is social change and social reconstruction, and the role of social worker was to function as an agent of change. Dasgupta says:

To influence the direction of social change, social worker's concern with social reconstruction should be made evident. That social change is our main concern and social reconstruction the main emphasis of social work should, therefore, be expressly stated It (social reconstruction) is concerned with the stimulation of change not only in the society as a whole and in its many institutions, but also in achieving the same through self-determination of communities, special groups and individuals.¹¹

In another paper presented at the same seminar Kulkarni says:

In fact, in a developing country where there are national policies and programmes for planned development, the social work profession would not be true to its commitment if it did not throw its full weight in favour of balanced and integrated national development. In other words, while the individual social work practitioner need not abdicate the duty germane to the particular station in the profession which he holds, it is certainly essential that the profession must act as a powerful force in favour of democracy, social justice and social development.¹²

It is significant to note that the First Five Year Plan defined the objective of social welfare broadly in a developmental perspective as "the attainment of social health which implies the

realization of such objectives as adequate living standards, the assurance of social justice, opportunities for cultural development through individual and group self-expression, and readjustment of human relations leading to social harmony".¹³ It also recognized the importance of social welfare in achieving the objective of planned socio-economic development of the country.

To sum up the discussion so far, we can say that historically social welfare in India was mainly concerned with bringing about changes in the social system for the welfare of the members of the society. At the same time, it did not ignore the need to provide specific services to the individuals and sections of population, who were either adversely affected by certain harsh features of the social system or by circumstances beyond their control. The country is now committed to the goal of socialistic pattern of society and has adopted the instrument of planned socio-economic development to raise the standard of living of the people. This involves inducing changes in the social system. Social welfare in India has to adopt the goal of planned social change and development which should be its major concern. On the other hand, it is also concerned, though to a lesser extent, to provide effective curative, rehabilitative and preventive services to the deprived and handicapped individuals, groups and communities who need such services. The role of a social worker in India is mainly that of an agent of social change. In some positions he may be functioning wholly or primarily as an agent of social change; in some others, he may administer social resources and/or provide direct service of a professional or sub-professional character, and his role as an agent of social change may be secondary.

III. Social Work Practice: Present Status and Emerging Trends

A study of the professional social workers in India conducted by the Indian Council of Social Welfare (ICSW) enlightens us to some extent about the level of professional practice and the deployment of professional social workers in the field.

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CHAPTER-15

Sarvodaya – Gandhian Social Service

The ideology of Sarvodaya is embedded in the Gandhian conception of an ideal social order as described by Ganguli who devoted his post-retirement phase, his time and energy to study Gandhian social philosophy. Based on this scholarly study he has written Gandhian Vision of an Ideal Social Order. I draw hereafter substantially from his work mostly in his own language.

Gandhi had in mind a structure of rural society which would shed its old weakness and be a fitting medium for the social processes under the changed conditions of modern life. The structure of society appears as a series of successive zones which are successively larger grouping of individuals. The initial grouping is the family – an eugenic base resting upon an economic base ... the next inclusive group is the neighbourhood or the extended family...which forms the village community (outsiders may also be members of the community, subject to certain limitations). Gandhi thought of a casteless egalitarian rural society against the stark background of a caste-ridden village community. This was a contradiction. He not only faced it but tried to resolve it by means of progressive interpretation of the ancient differentiated social functions. Gandhi was in favour of an element of communism, what is called as primitive communism. Gandhi said “land today (in 1936) does not belong to the people is too true.....Land and all property is *his* who will work it.”

Another dimension of this ideal society was that it was a non-violent, non-exploitative equalitarian society.”Non-violence in practice” he said, “means common labour with the body.” He called it later as “bread-labour” an idea borrowed from a Russian philosopher Bondareff, through the work of Tolstoy. Gandhi’s approach to machine, which has been widely misunderstood,

was “ I have no consideration for the machinery which is meant either to enrich the few at the expense of the many, or without cause, to displace the useful labour of many”.

Gandhi was not a theorist like Karl Marx, who read books in the London library and formulated his theory of communism – Communist Manifesto. He was a practitioner engaged in the movement for political independence including in it social reform and social service (constructive work) in rural areas. He formulated his ideas over a period of more than two decades. At times his ideas were full of contradiction when compared to what he had said before. He admitted this with the response that his views were responses to the prevailing conditions and if those conditions had changed over a period of time, he had to respond to those changed conditions. So, we may take as his final position an article he wrote in 1946 in Harijan, on the eve of independence and about two years before his assassination. The title of the article was “Content of Independence.” To requote from Ganguli:

Gandhi said so often, that political independence did not mean anything if it did not mean a new social order with a new system of human values. In my view, this essay (which was lost in the confusion of 1946) contains the quintessence of Gandhi’s social philosophy. It deserves better attention today than it received in the dark days of 1946 and the aftermath of Indian Independence when Gandhi’s voice had already been stilled in the Indian wilderness.

Gandhi said :

(1) “Indian independence must begin at the bottom. Thus every village will be a republic or panchayat having powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its own affairs, even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world. It will be trained and prepared to perish in the attempt to defend itself against any onslaught from without.”

(2) “Ultimately, it is the individual who is the unit. But this does not exclude dependence on the willing help from neighbours

or from the world. It will be free and voluntary play of mutual forces.”

(3) “Such a society is necessarily highly cultured in which every man or woman knows what he or she wants, and, what is more, knows that no one should want anything that the others cannot have with equal labour.”

Gandhi thought that the essence of culture lies in knowing what one really wants. Also if one wanted anything that others cannot have with equal labour there is an element of exploitation which means violence as well as inequality that violence helps to sustain.

What would be the pattern of society that would emerge from the aggregation of numerous village republics ? Gandhi was opposed to a stratified society structured according to the requirements of concentration of economic and political power operating through remote control. This was contrary to his humanist conception of freedom. Let me quote some extracts, which are poetic alike in imagery and expression and have an air of sophistication about them if one were to analyse them in depth.

(4) “In this structure composed of innumerable villages there will be ever-widening, never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals never aggressive in their arrogance, but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units. Therefore, the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle, but will give strength to all within and will derive its own strength from it.”

One notes in Gandhi's Harijan article his repeated insistence on the moral value of the individual being the basic unit of an ideal social order.

But what kind of economy would sustain Gandhi's “oceanic circle ?” His synoptic description of such an economy is illuminating in many ways :-

(5) “In it there is no room for machines that would displace human labour and that would concentrate power in a few hands. Labour has its unique place in a cultured human family. Every machine that helps every individual has a place.”

Gandhian View of Social Service

Ganguli has selected the scattered ideas expressed on different occasions by Gandhi and has presented them under the title “Gandhi's Plan of Social Work” in a speech he delivered in 1972. Hereafter, I will quote from that speech the relevant concepts and methods of constructive work also referred as *samaj seva* by Gandhian constructive workers. “Gandhi's philosophy as well as the plan of social work was grounded on a broad strategy of total social development, resulting from a radical transformation from within in the case of the individual and of the community in which he lived. Social work was not to be directed merely to corrective or ameliorative activity although this was important . It had to be geared to radical transformation, not merely dealing with the consequences of an inequitable social order. For this purpose the spirit of *swadeshi* is important. It meant restrictions on the use and services of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of more remote, which meant using only things that are produced by the immediate neighbours i.e village industries.

Gandhi also stressed the importance of education as part of his concept of *swadeshi* which flowed from his basic principle of social action. “The masses have not shared our knowledge. If they had, the problem of village sanitation would have been solved and the village panchayats would be a living force in a special way.” Gandhi had further developed his idea of education as basic education or ‘Nai Taleem’ relevant to the day to day life of the villagers.

Gandhi wanted his teachers to be social workers and social workers to be teachers. “our teacher will touch the lives of grown-up and if at all possible, penetrate the purdah. (He used “purdah” metaphorically to refer to the passivity of the villagers) “Instruction will be given to grown up people in hygiene and the advantage of joint action for the promotion of community welfare.” Gandhi’s approach to social work was a total process – the concept of *Samagra Grama Sevak*. Written in 1946 he stated that “after a lifetime of field experience, he had realized how difficult it was to break down the passivity of the villagers.” Gandhi had in mind a resident *Samagra Grama Sevak*, who identifies himself completely with the village he serves – a worker who serves the entire village. “The *Samagra Grama Sevak* should know everybody living in the village. He should render them such service that he can. This does not mean the worker will be able to do everything single handed. He will show them the way of helping themselves. He will procure for them such help and materials they require. He will train his own helpers” He further said on a different occasion. “Social workers must be brave, intelligent and persevering. The villagers may not readily respond. They may even prove hostile. Many vested interests have to be disturbed before the necessary social change can occur. But non-violent workers should choose the line of least resistance. They should suffer in their own person before they could aspire to gain the cooperation of inert villagers on the one hand, and hostile villagers, on the other. They must persevere and persist without resentment and bitterness. Then only will their conduct strike the imagination of the villagers. And the element of surprise will open their way into their hearts. Once the inart mass begins to yield, work will make rapid progress”.

Gandhian ideas of social service (constructive work) have been summarized into five basic principles - “*Pancha-swa Sutra*” (Pathak, 2013). They Are :

1. *Swaraj* or self-rule

Originally formulated in the context of nationalist movement for independence as the goal, it is capable of wider application

in other areas of work. It means self-rule of an individual or a family and of a village society. Gandhi had considered, as quoted earlier by Ganguli, the individual as the ultimate unit, then expanding in successively widening circles of extended family, the village and finally a federation of villages. At the level of the individual it may be stated as the right of self-determination, a basic principle of professional social work.

2. *Swadeshi*

During the nationalist movement this was used mainly with reference to preparing Khadi and wearing dresses made from Khadi, discarding the western (later Indian) mill made cloth. Gandhi himself had used the words “the use of immediate surroundings”. He meant use of local village products. Once again the concept can be broadened to include non-material “immediate resources” such as local village culture, or more specifically the sub-culture of a village community. As already explained in the previous chapter concepts of culture and subculture are quite relevant for the practice of social work. So we may rephrase *swadeshi* to mean the indigenous culture of the people which includes elements of a national culture as well as specific aspects of a sub-culture within which the villagers live and function.

3. Self-reliance or *Swavalamban* is the third basic principle of Gandhian social service. Whether an individual or a village community should try to live on one’s labour, capacity and resources, limiting the wants to match the available resources of a family or a village community using to the maximum the productive capacity of the people.

4. Personal experience of life and work is an important source of knowledge both to the village community and sarvodaya worker. This is called as *swanubhava*, practice-based knowledge and skills. Gandhi, as quoted earlier, had stated that “after a life time of field experience I came to the conclusion...” etc.

5. Closely linked to the principle of *swanubhava* is *swadhyaya*, self-study. Sarvodaya social service practitioner usually does not go through a process of formal education or training. The Gandhian constructive worker usually works under a leader as an ashramite, with *sahawas* and *sahakarya* i.e. living and working with a leader, learning through observation, and practice under guidance. Whatever he would have learnt if at all through a course of lectures of a week would have been on the thoughts of Gandhi and Vinoba, their social philosophy relevant for constructive work. This would include the values of truth and non violence which are absolute values to be practiced in all situations without any deviation. He has to continue this process of learning by doing even after he starts working independently in a village community. So an important source of knowledge is "*swadhyaya*". He has to reflect on his own field experience periodically and draw appropriate lessons to improve his practice skills. So, the principles of personal experience of field practice and self-study are closely inter-linked. They are inseparable and mutually reinforcing.

From Constructive Work to Sarvodaya

As already mentioned (chapter No 6, pp 124-126) Gandhi's approach to independence was not restricted to the political struggle through such activities like civil disobedience movement i.e. defying the laws imposed by colonial rulers which were considered unjust such as Dandi March to make salt without permission and without paying tax or non-payment of land revenues, and the struggle against the exploitation by the indigo planters of the rural poor in Bihar – the Champaran struggle. This resulted in courting arrests without violence and going to jails (jail bhara) after individual or mass satyagraha. Alternately there was the programme of constructive work called '*rachanatmaka karya*' through which the nationalist followers of Gandhi were to work in the villages with the goal of rural reconstruction or what we now call as rural development. In 1925 Gandhi had prepared an 18 point programme which

included : promotion of communal unity, removal of untouchability, promotion of Khadi and other village industries, promotion of village sanitation, basic and adult education, promotion of economic equality, service of the leprosy affected etc.

While some Gandhians devoted more time to political agitation, some others chose to devote most of their time to constructive work. Prominent among the latter group was Vinoba Bhave, popularly called as Vinoba. After independence it was Vinoba who redefined and further developed the original Gandhian ideas of social service and also initiated a major movement called *Bhoodan* movement (Land gift movement) . It was not a deliberately thought out and planned programme. It had its origin in an event that took place at the village Pochampalli in the Telengana region of Andhra. During his visit to this village Vinoba visited all the houses in the village to study their social-economic problems. And he identified 40 families as extremely poor who worked as daily wage labourers on the land of the rich landlords of the village, whenever they could find employment which was mostly seasonal. They had to starve frequently if they did not find work.

During the evening prayer meeting organised and presided over by the local M.L.A. on 18 April 1951, Ramachandra Reddy, Vinoba stated that these 40 families needed a piece of agricultural land of about two and a half crores to cultivate and eke out a living. He asked the audience: is there anyone who is willing to donate land to these poor families? Ramachandra Reddy after some reference to his father's concern for these poor families who had worked on their land, announced that he would donate 100 acres of land to be divided among the 40 families. Vinoba was both surprised and happy, at this turn of events. And it led him to conceive of a countrywide programme of voluntary land-gift movement through persuasion and not through agitation and violence as witnessed in Telengana during a short period of Communist Party rule-a parallel government. (Doraiswamy, 2011)

Gandhian constructive workers joined Bhoodan Movement in large numbers. Vinoba travelled across the country by foot for a period of 14 years until bad health prevented him from continuing the movement. It may be mentioned here that there were two women among his followers who were with him during the long *padayatra*-Mahadevi Tai, a child widow from an illustrious family of freedom fighters of Siddapur taluk of Uttar Kannada district in Karnataka who had joined his Paunar Ashram during the 1930's and Nirmal Vaid a North Indian young lady who had completed a professional social work course from Delhi School of Social Work. Among those who joined the Bhoodan Movement were Jayaprakash Narayan, leader of the Congress Socialist Party before independence and after independence, the first Secretary- General of the newly formed Socialist Party of India. Also Nabakrushna Chowdhary who resigned as Chief Minister of Orissa to join the movement and Dhiren Muzumdar, Achary Ram Murti, Manmohan Chowdhary and Malati Chowdhary, Narayan Desai and R.K. Patil who had resigned from the prestigious Indian Civil Service (I.C.S) and many more Gandhians active in the constructive work in various parts of the country. It is during this post-independent phase of constructive work under the supreme leadership of Vinoba Bahave, Gandhian constructive work was renamed as Sarvodaya, which was to be the popular name subsequently. Gandhi himself had used the word Sarvodaya as a title for the Gujarati translation of the English book by John Ruskin, *Unto the Least of These*, which Gandhi had read and was deeply influenced by Ruskin's ideas (Doraiswamy, 2011).

Sarvodaya: Ideology and Practice

Gandhian social workers prefer to describe themselves as constructive workers engaged in the process of radical transformation of society, which they consider as a revolutionary activity. The word "revolutionary" gets repeated in a variety of contexts as part of the goal, as part of social action and as part of an approach or method of work. They distinguish between professional or traditional social work which they term as an ameliora-

tive work. '*Rahat Ka Karya*' and their constructive work as "*Mukti Karya*", liberation work i.e. to liberate people from exploitation by others and fight against social injustice like the practice of untouchability, exploitation of the village poor by the rich landlords in a variety of ways because of economic inequality based on land-ownership.

Bhoodan movement became a prominent area of social service during the post-Gandhian phase of constructive work. New concepts emerged in addition to earlier concepts and some of the concepts were modified and reformulated by Vinoba. Spirituality is one such concept which refers to the man's relationship with God, a superior, super-natural force. Gandhian attitude to man is drawn from the spiritual objectives of existence. Man's capacity to acquire strength from something transcendental and higher is recognised by Gandhian workers as axiomatic although this does not exclude the atheists from the Gandhian movement. The emphasis is more on ethical norms than on religious rituals. This new orientation of the whole concept of spirituality, recognising its importance along with science led Vinoba to re-fashion his prayer meetings, drawing more on the spirit of compassion (*Karuna*) than on various religious preachings (IR. p 169-171).*

Jayaprakash Narayan has described the Gandhian constructive work as a psycho-ethical approach to social problems through service (*seva*). It is not going around preaching but by doing somethings to help the people by means of social service, showing them how life in the village could be better organised, the internal effort leading to economic development, if the land of the village became the property of the community (I.R. p. 92).

Another important concept is *Loka Sakti* in the sense of people's power as an action of resistance. According to Gandhiji this meant building up the capacity of the people to resist any wrong or resist any authority when it is abused. Real *Lok Sakti*

* Interim Report, Dasgupta, 1968.

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