



## GENESIS, DEVELOPMENT AND TRENDS IN SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION

**Dr. Buktare Deepak Mohanrao**

*Assistant Professor, Shri Shankarrao Chavan College of Social Sciences and Research, Ramnagar, Jalna (M.S.)*

### Introduction

Some aspects and concepts need to be highlighted in social work and it is necessary to know where does the profession seem to be going? Certain developments which are of major importance to the profession and to broad community welfare; there are others which are less so. But demand attention first of all let us consider those which appear to have widest significance. It seems to us that there are five such developments which are given below.

1. The revived interest of social workers in social movements and social action.
2. The cooperation of labour and social work.
3. The adaptation of social work to new settings.
4. The acceptance of the profession of social work as a legitimate and necessary community service.
5. The genuine concern of the profession that its educational preparation shall be soundly conceived in order that competent performance may be facilitated.

Let us consider briefly each of these points.

Firstly, social work is experiencing revitalization. It is looking at itself critically and constructively. It is adapting itself to a rapidly changing milieu. It is restating its philosophy. In the early years of what we now call social work, the leaders, not yet having formulated techniques, did not worry about their lack but put major emphasis on the social environment of the persons with whom they worked. If the environment was inadequate and unsatisfactory, they had the courage to expose it and to attempt its change, at least within the economic framework of the nineteenth century.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the scenario was however, almost total consideration was given to techniques and method, an inevitable and even desirable phase of any profession provided the forest is not lost sight of, which unfortunately almost happened in social work. Techniques were in danger of becoming masters instead of servants. A depression and a war made that point of view anachronistic. Today social work is less self-conscious and introspective, more aware of its place in a larger setting. Its objectives include providing technical skills to individuals with needs and improving situations causing distress. This implies need for knowledge of economic and social condition and of national and international problems, as well as of methodology. As an illustration, the emergency Committee for social work, comprised of seventy social workers from all over the country, published in the April, 1944, an article entitled "To social workers: A call to Action". Their broad objectives were: (1) full development and equitable distribution of national and international resources; (2) full employment and balanced wage price system; (3) extension of education health services, housing, recreation, and social security; and (4) racial and ethnic equity. These social workers were concerned with socio-economic factors.

Outstanding social workers and administrators are placing strong emphasis on the need for reconceiving curricula of schools of social work in terms of world needs. In such a process, Gordon Hamilton of the New York School of Social work, believes it is necessary that the subject matter, philosophy and technical skills be related to a positive programme for an adequate standard of living to a world point of view, and to a philosophy of racial and cultural democracy. Students must assimilate the concepts of rights, of needs, of responsibilities, of tolerance, of self-direction and participation and translate them all into skills.

All of this seems to indicate that the social worker is again willing to be a reformer—not in the sense of uniformed zealot or bigoted missionary, but in the sense of combining a knowledge of facts with a faith that a better world can be achieved and doing something about it. There need not be a separation between good professional practice and earnest striving for a good life—what Harold Laski calls "the divorce between scholarship and life." In his words "The objective which separates the intellectuals of the main world of scholarship, above all the academic world, from the main problems of their time is as grave in its implications as it is wide in its extent." Carr-Saunders and Wilson in their book, *The Professions*, regret that the professions make progress but only in their own grooves, that they do not grasp the essential features of social and economic situations, that they treat superficially the remainder of life outside their special activities. The remedy, they believe, for this lack of vision in the use of their own organizations, not only for the consideration of particular professional group in society. This is not being done by number of social work groups.

Secondly, the next development, and directly linked with the first, is the alliance of labour and social work. This is the language of Dr. Ellen Potter, President of the National Conference of social Work in 1944 "From the point of view of the



incoming president the most profoundly significant development (at the Cleveland meetings) was the presence of organized labour in strength, the people registering as members, attending meetings, speaking from the floor, asking pertinent questions and speaking formally from several platforms.” The joint committee of Trade Unions in Social Work and the National Social Service Division of the United Office and Professional Workers of America are strong forces, especially in the east, in welding closer this relationship. A strong participating factor in this process was joint participation in war-relief campaigns, although the depression hastened an inter-group consciousness.

Labour and social work share an interest in the common man – in his economic, social and political welfare wherever he may be. It is inevitable that labour and social work organizations increasingly work together and often in the face of opposition from politicians, boards of directions, and vested interests. It is quite possible that some such heckling group as the old Dies Committee will come forth with the accusation that the labour movements is “the left wing of social work or social work the right wing of labour”. The truth of the matter is that because of similarly the objectives there must be a close tie-up between these two large organized groups. It is even possible that from these two groups will come the main pressures for directed social change.

Thirdly and fourthly, since these next two developments, adaptation of social work to new situations and acceptance of social work as a desirable and necessary function. The various methodologies of social work, have made and are continuing to make striking adjustments to changing conditions. The tremendous amount of attention that has been given to social work skills and to the broad social services since 1930, means that there is less resistance today to the profession, in part because social workers are not so technique minded and, paradoxically, have become better technicians and in part because the people who need the social services understand them and want them. Even the army found itself using case workers, whom it ambiguously called field agents, to gather mental, physical, and social histories on potential inductees! Although social workers are still ridiculed or berated, and although relatively few people have much insight into their purposes and process, there is general acceptance of their indispensability, and the war greatly increased both acceptance and understanding.

Fifthly, every profession goes through painful period of determining the basic content of its educational programme. Expensive and exhaustive studies of the most desirable preparation for the professional practice of medicine, law, dentistry, nursing, and engineering have been made in the not very distant past. The major results of these studies have included: raising the standard of instruction in the schools, modification of curriculum content, more adequate financing of the schools, more careful selection of student admitted to the schools, etc. studies like these are the results of many factor, not the least importance of which is that practitioners came to realize that many of them are not rendering the quality of service that the public is encouraged to believe it is guaranteed. Social work education is at the stage where scientific analysis of its objectives, its content, its direction is needed and wanted.

This most recent significant development in social work is immensely heartening to all social workers, perhaps particularly so to those who have observed the stereotypes of thinking and practice among so many social workers. Many of them are technicians with little orientation of their practices to a world whirling faster than at any time in its history. We do not wish to minimize the importance of competent performance. We do want to point out the dangers of stand-point, let-the-world-goby kind of thinking. Most social workers like most human beings are not very original or creative. It should be part of their philosophy, however, to recognize places where creative thinking is needed and encourage it when it is found. How many times do we see pulling back rather than pushing forward by the practitioners of our profession, the characteristics of which require adaptation to change. It is one of the strange paradoxes of social work.

In a speech entitled “Social Workers: Stand Up and Be Counted” given at the annual meeting of the American Association of Schools of Social work in Chicago When he was elected 1947 president, Benjamin Youngdahl took members of his profession to task for types of thinking and acting. One of the offending types was the stereotype about which he has the following to say:

He is myopic type of person who does little if any thinking and whose end is mechanics and techniques. He hardly knows that world is changing and he therefore doesn't see the danger of losing liberty. He is the type of person whose emphasis on the individual approach to human problems is so great as to preclude a glimpse of the larger and broader problems of human relations. On the other hand, he may be the person who, in administering a mass programme, puts all the emphasis on the norm or the typical and fails to see that individuals constitute the masses. He is nearsighted; he doesn't see the broad cause of distress and wants to think and practice under an old economy rather than make any effort to build a new one or to better an existing one. It is a signal of stereotype. He is not a bad person as such; he is not criminal with intent. He thinks of himself as a professional person, but rarely as a citizen.



One of the main reason why the profession of social work needs an exhaustive study of its practices and professional requirements is to help correct this kind of fault. Stereotyped thinking is a hindrance to growth and progress. Social work needs an educational programme with high standards but a programme capable of changes of tomorrow if that change is indicated.

Thereby looking at the historical perspectives of the development of social work as a profession in the nineteenth and twentieth century the trends of the twenty first century can be set by the social workers keeping in mind, the needs of the modern people and the social, economic, cultural, emotional and moral problems related to such needs and the cotemporary times.

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