



Let us be influenced but not dominated by the West: students' perspectives on social work development in India

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ABSTRACT: Despite decades of practice and development, social work education in India is still Western-centric. Social work in India is still not well recognised: it does not have an accrediting body or professional recognition within the country. This study gives voice to a sample of social work students regarding some of the challenges they face, including the curriculum, pedagogy, recognition of the profession and the practicum. The study is based on interviews with students from five universities in India and includes concrete recommendations for improving the professional training of social work students.

Keywords: social work education, fieldwork practicum, pedagogy, India



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Introduction

Social work education in India has seen eight decades of existence. Currently, social work is offered at both graduate and postgraduate levels in more than 600 universities and schools of social work across the country. Social work is offered as a discipline of study in university departments with state and central accreditation, deemed universities, colleges affiliated to state and central universities, and independent colleges. In India, social work courses are recognised and accredited by the University Grant Commission.

During the initial periods of social work development in India, the knowledge base was drawn from Western social work models. The curriculum, reading materials and references were

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directly borrowed from the West (Kuruvilla, 2005). Hence, the social work curriculum, teaching and practice witnessed a direct link between professional social work in India and the export of ideologies and philosophies from the West.

Social work education: growth and challenges

The first act towards the professionalisation of social work education in India started with the establishment of the Sir Dorabji Tata Graduate School of Social Work in 1936. Starting with one school offering professionalised social work education, today we have a network of more than 600 schools/colleges and departments across the country. The faster growth in the number of schools reflects the emerging need for social work education and training in the globalisation era. However, despite setting many milestones in the past eight decades, social work education in India has failed to develop an indigenous knowledge base that addresses the Indian reality. In the initial introductory days, the components of social work education and practice in Indian schools of social work were heavily borrowed from the West. Perhaps social work in India for decades has primarily relied on Western models to analyse the Indian reality and formulate intervention paradigms. In participating in the discussion on the westernisation of social work in India, many scholars noted that the ideologies and models of social work education practised in India were heavily influenced by Western ideologies as they originally emerged from Western dominance (Bodhi, 2014b; Johnson Bailey, K.-R., & Padmore, J., 2012; Kuruvilla, 2005). Further, scholars also argued that it is not possible for Indian schools of social work to develop Indian social work literature even after its inception and development of eight long decades. Bodhi (2014b) noted that a major part of the content of social work education was borrowed from American conceptualisations of professional social work practice. Kuruvilla (2005) argued that the literature that is used by Indian schools of social work shows the direct link between professional social work in India and the 'export' of ideology and philosophy from the 'West'. It is evident from the above arguments that there is a need for Indian social work academia to develop and produce their own Indian social work literature, and social educators and practitioners should document their experiences and experiments to develop a comprehensive knowledge base. In fact, Bodhi (2014b, p. 28) supported this argument by stating that 'the more recent challenge in India for social work education has been to indigenise social work theory and practice'. The central aim of the present study was to outline the challenges of social work education in India using students' voices. The next section maps out the challenges.

Challenges

Even after eight decades of its inception and practice, there are many unresolved issues and concerns in Indian social work education. Reinforcing this, some literature notes that social work in India is still in search of an identity (Bodhi, 2014a, b; Nagpaul, 1967; Siddiqui, 2001). The more recent challenge in India for social work education has been to indigenise social work theory and practice (Bodhi, 2014a). Social work discipline in India is in the midst of a moral and political crisis (Bodhi, 2014b). Social work professionals are confused about its identity, where the old is nearing death and the new is far from being born (Bodhi, 2014b). Nearly four decades ago, Nagpaul (1967) pointed out that the existing system of education was largely unrelated to Indian conditions; social work education needed a radical change and drastic reconstruction.

As informed by the literature and noted by researchers, the westernisation of academics is one major challenge in the social work education in India. Despite the development of social work over the last 80 years, social work in India has failed to achieve a standardised social work curriculum representing country-specific characteristics. In addition, a wide gap continues to persist between the schools of social work and there is a lack of coordination and cooperation among social work educators with respect to teaching, research and practice. Singh, S., Gumz, E. J., & Crawley, B. C. (2011) noted that social work educators in India face substantive challenges in designing curricula to prepare students for social work practice in the 21st century. However, the debates and discussion on the indigenisation of social work literature is not a new concept. Since the academic institutionalisation of professional social work in India, several attempts have been made by practitioners and educators to indigenise the professional social work knowledge base, by drawing on perspectives (Banerjee, 1972) and methodological issues (Dasgupta, 1968; Desai, A., 1985; Desai M, 2004; Gore, 1965; Saldanha, 2008; Siddiqui, 1987), with a view to formulating a context-specific 'Indian social work'. Also, social work educators have made an effort since the 1950s to articulate a distinct Indian social work. In this process, social work educators such as Mehta (1952), Gore (1965), Dasgupta (1967, 1968), Bannerjee (1972), Desai, A. (1984), Siddiqui (1987), Ramaiah (1998), Narayan (2001), Desai, M. (2004), Kuruvilla (2005), Andharia (2007), Saldanha (2008), Akhup (2009) and Bodhi (2011b, 2013) have contributed considerably.

Despite the efforts of academicians and practitioners to develop indigenous contents in the social work curricula, social work education in India continues to rely greatly on received theories and content from the West. The reason for this is that the education materials that are used in India's community-dominated context are shaped by the United States individualism-dominated

context (Singh et al., 2011). Hence, clashes between these two different contexts result in the slow growth of the indigenisation process and delineate the efforts of the Indian social work academia.

The high turnover rate among the student graduates of social work is one the major challenges for social work education in India as noted by literature. Ranjana (2009) argues that low salaries and job stagnation, high turnover and easy burnouts are some of the crucial issues that need to be addressed in Indian social work education to bring standardisation to teaching and practice. These efforts will also help the profession to represent the advantageous image of the social work profession in the country. Thomas (2010), in another observation, suggested that Indian social work needs to have a national-level council to maintain and promote uniform standards of education and give accreditation to institutions as well to practitioners. However, considerable efforts have been made in this direction to form a national council along the lines of the Medical Council of India through discussions between eminent social work educators and practitioners at various forums. Interestingly, in 1965, one committee recommended the establishment of a national social work council, and then another committee in 1978 supported this recommendation. Unfortunately, no action seems to have been taken on this so far. The need to establish minimum standards for social work education is another major recommendation of the social work scholarly community. This is because of the diversity in curricula, course patterns (generic course versus specialisation), activities, foci, duration and training inputs of fieldwork activities, and the need for minimum standards that need to be followed by all the schools of social work has been expressed by many scholars and educators (Thomas, 2010). The following section discusses the theoretical approach and research methods.

Theoretical approach and research methods

The study is based on epistemological assumption. Epistemology is a philosophical belief system that examines 'who can be a knower' (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Harding, 1987; Hesse-Biber & Leary, 2004). Epistemology is also 'a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know' (Crotty, 2003, p. 3). It is also 'concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate' (Maynard, 1994, p. 10). Adopting an epistemological approach in the present study, it is possible to say that the social work students in India are knowers of the challenges faced by social work education in India. Through their experience and participation in teaching, learning and practice, they discover the challenges and the constraints for social work education in

India. Further, documenting and understanding these experiences of the students through in-depth interaction in Indian schools of social work helps the researcher to understand the challenges faced by social work academia in India. This approach helps the researcher to understand the phenomenon more clearly rather than merely discovering the challenges from a researcher's point of view.

The central aim of the study was to understand Master of Social Work students' perceptions of the challenges faced by social work education in India. In view of the limited knowledge available on this topic and its exploratory nature, a qualitative research method was chosen because it enables a researcher to understand the perception of student social workers along with the challenges faced (Creswell, 2008). A grounded theory approach was used to enable the researcher to generate concepts to understand the perception and challenges of social work students (Charmaz, 2006).

Data collection

The data required for the study were collected from five schools of social work covering three regions, i.e. Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata. In-depth interviews were conducted with social work postgraduate students in the selected schools of social work. A semi-structured interview schedule was prepared, and the questions were updated after each interview.

Table 1. Brief profile of the social work students in the study

City	Institutions*	Respondents**	Age groups of the respondents	Gender	Study Grade***
New Delhi	A	07	22 years – 2 23 years – 3 24–25 years – 2	Male – 3 Female – 4	First Grade – 2 Second Grade – 5
	B	06	22 years – 1 23 years – 4 24–25 years – 1	Male – 4 Female – 2	First Grade – 1 Second Grade – 5
Mumbai	C	08	22 years – 2 23 years – 3 24–25 years – 3	Male – 4 Female – 4	First Grade – 3 Second Grade – 5
	D	06	22 years – 2 23 years – 2 24–25 years – 2	Male – 3 Female – 3	First Grade – 2 Second Grade – 4
Kolkata	E	06	22 years – 1 23 years – 3 24–25 years – 2	Male – 3 Female – 3	First Grade – 1 Second Grade – 5

*In order not to identify the students, we used synonyms to signify the institutions of study.

**Number of respondents interviewed in each institution.

***The grade represents the year of study of the respondents during the interview.

Source: Field data.

Respondents' characteristics: 51.5% of the respondents reported being male, and 48.4% female.

24.2% were in the 22-year-old age group, 45.4% were in the 23-year-old group and 30.3% were

in the 24–25 group. 27.2% of the respondents were in the first grade and 72.7% in the second grade.

Participants

In each institution, the participants for interviews were selected via a recommendation by the educators. Also, if students in any institution took an interest in the topic, they were also interviewed. Students from diverse groups were recruited for in-depth interviewing. Students from different specialisations were interviewed in those institutions that follow a specialisation-based curriculum.

Data analysis

The interviews were recorded electronically and then transcribed and translated by the researcher. The transcripts of the interviews were read and analysed first. Then a line-by-line review of each transcript was conducted and coded by one researcher, who highlighted the keywords, before another researcher cross-checked these. The themes were determined based on the highlighted keywords and were established through phrases, sentences and segments of text. Based on the principles of saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), data were analysed for each respondent until no new theme emerged. Quotes representing the themes were selected from the transcripts.

Findings

Four emerging themes were developed from the transcripts of the interviews with 33 participants: (1) Western concept: Indian context; (2) Grass-roots intervention: lack of global perspectives; (3) Lack of professional recognition: identity crisis; and (4) Teacher-centric pedagogy: lack of students' perspective. These themes and data within them describe a number of challenges that are faced by social work education in India.

Western concept: Indian context

As indicated by the literature, the westernisation of social work education is a major concern of contemporary Indian social work. All of the 33 students interviewed for the study expressed their difficulties with Western concepts in the social work curriculum. Out of the five schools selected for the research, four were in metro cities and one was in a rural area. Being in metro cities, all four schools attracted many rural students, and all those students who were part of the study stated that they find it very difficult to understand the reading materials provided by the educators. As respondent #S27 said:

I come from a rural background with no grasp of the English language. Here, in the

institute, everything is in English and teachers provide study materials that are published in the West. Understanding and comprehending these readings and theories become difficult, as we do not get literature developed from the experiences of our educators.

It is observed that in many schools of social work, the educators collaborate to some extent with researchers and educators from the West. The research and knowledge sharing happens in the process of academic development. Even though these international collaborations are contributing to the development of social work education in the country, the social work educators are directly utilising Western concepts and Western theories without reorienting them to the Indian societal conditions. Most of the concepts are directly borrowed and applied to the Indian context without any form of alteration, meaning that social work students lose interest in their studies and find it difficult to understand the concepts. Respondent S#1 reported:

We have highly qualified and well-educated educators who give us most possible knowledge in the field of social work. However, as all the teaching materials are derived from Western perspectives, we are unable to make use of the lessons in a more effective way. This is not only the problem that I face, but many other students who also come from a vernacular background face the same difficulties.

The graduate students in social work also highlighted that it is high time for social work in India to develop its own knowledge and practice base. The educators and practitioners need to come together and start documenting their experiences and learning from the last few decades. Further, it is also expected by Indian social work academia to develop its own model of education, which addresses the needs and requirements of the developing countries. The social work education in India needs to reconsider the knowledge base underpinning the theories and practice learning. The educators and the practitioners together need to work to develop context-specific contents and lessons for the Indian schools of social work.

Grass-roots intervention: lack of global perspectives

It is observed that both social work education and practice in India are at the grass-roots level and lack global perspectives in their approach. Even though social work needs to be local in its every aspect, there is a need to develop some international understanding as social work graduates in the globalised and interconnected world. The majority of the respondents interviewed for the study reflected that the curriculum under study is regional and international aspects of the

curriculum are completely missing. Concepts like human rights, peace, security and welfare need an international approach to enhance understanding, and there is always an opportunity to learn from the models developed by the other developing as well as developed countries.

We hear many debates on indigenisation of the literature and social work readings that are happening across the country. However, as social work students, what we feel is we are good with theories that are borrowed from the West without transcribing them according to the Indian realities. Apart from this, there is nothing like a global overview of the social work course provided by the institute. (#S5)

Another respondent, #S9, remarked:

Currently, we are in a globalised world, and the globalisation process influences everything within the society. The problems and the issues faced by one particular society and community of people in a country have some or other connection with the people and system associated with another country. To solve these social issues, which are interdependable, we need an international approach to social work education as well as social work training. Unfortunately, this aspect of social work education is missing in India.

It is interesting to note that the majority of the students interviewed for the study agreed that internationalisation of academic and practical social work is what is needed today. At the same time, most of them were not in a position to define what international social work is for them. Respondent #S5 defined international social work as follows:

International social work is bridging the collaboration between the different contexts and learning from others; adopting Western theories to Indian social work and making them relevant to the Indian context.

Respondent #S24 said: 'I don't have any clear idea.' However, respondent #S 30 commented:

For me, international social work at the moment is experimental. I think it is a very good experiment to see if the Western skills, Western theories and Western practice fit into the Indian context and we can combine the Western theory with our practice to develop our indigenous practice; this is very important. In addition, this is what we are doing here; we are developing our indigenous practice.

Nevertheless, it is clear from the discussions that the international approach is missing in the schools of social work. A senior social work graduate student reflected on the need to integrate the globalisation concepts in the social work curriculum. He said:

If the social work academia believes that the world is one, and it is a global world, and we live by collaboration and cooperation, then the same academia should also accept that the social work profession needs a global approach within its practice and education. In the present world, the academia is talking about economic globalisation; we also need to start thinking about the impact and the effects of the economic globalisation of the world societies and population. Hence, the need for social work is to address globalisation and its impact on the social life of the community and the people, both in urban and in rural parts of the country.

In summary, the students felt the need to develop international collaborations and exchange programmes, both for students and educators across all Indian schools of social work. The majority of the students further opined that exchange programmes enhance their knowledge by broadening their ideas about how much and in what directions other countries are heading, thereby helping them to capture global perspectives. In addition, they will provide an insight into what improvements are needed and what changes are required in Indian schools of social work and social work education.

Lack of professional recognition: identity crisis

The 33 respondents interviewed for the study agreed that social workers suffer from an identity crisis. This is largely because the state is yet to mandate or support social work as a profession. The position of social work or the social worker is not yet defined in any of the public programmes or offices. Yet, social work is an in-demand profession in the country. Social workers within a democratic setting help people deal with their problems as well as helping the government and non-governmental organisations to find out about the needs of the community. The reasons for the unrecognised status of the social work profession in India are: (i) the absence of a professional body to mandate professional ethics and values; (ii) the absence of licensing for practitioners; and (iii) the lack of standardised education.

I think licensing for social work practice in India should happen. When I support licensing I am not worried about the credibility, and because of that, I want myself to be licensed or I

want a name or something else. Irrespective of this credibility's licensing, the profession will help us work in our respective fields. It will give us some directions like 'ok you are a social worker'; 'you are a licensed social worker' – you can do things that are very specific to your skills and knowledge. (#S30)

Respondent #S1 commented:

The issue of standardisation of social work education in India is not only related to licensing professional practice but also interconnected with many other aspects. In contemporary Indian society, social work academia in most cases fails to accept the change and adapt to the social realities of the changing world. The educators and the practitioners themselves do not have a consensus about the growth and development of their profession. The practitioners and the educators are in the dilemmas of ethical and unethical aspects where they themselves create confusion and chaos among young practitioners and graduates.

It was observed during the interactions with the students that the majority of them pointed out the need for a curriculum with some similar concepts throughout the schools of social work in the country. Currently, every school is unique in its contents and approach to social work education. The concepts, ideologies and training differ across the country, and this particular aspect is creating huge dilemmas in social work education. There is a general agreement, however, that creating and imposing a single curriculum based on certain parameters that needs to be executed in all the schools of social work across the country is not feasible, as social work as a service profession needs to evolve and feel its existence within the community, taking into consideration the cultural, political, economic and other societal aspects. Hence, the uniqueness and differences in the curricula amongst the schools are acceptable. Respondent #S27 commented:

We too agree it is difficult to teach social work like engineering or political science, but five things that are similar and stable across the social work departments in India need to be included and governed by a professional body. When the students graduate from their Master's programme, there should be some similarity among them with respect to skills and theoretical knowledge based on which they build their context-specific practical knowledge.

And another respondent, #S4, commented:

Looking at the origin and growth of social work in India, we can see that social work was introduced in India without any prior planning. It was an immediate response to the crises that people were undergoing in that particular period. Then, social workers were expected to assist the population in the need to develop and strengthen their capacities to cope with life. Unfortunately, even after eight decades of practice, both social work academia and practitioners have failed to set a defined role for the social work profession or even for social work practice.

It is important to note that over the past 80 years, despite all the efforts, India has not been able to develop a council for social work education. As a profession, social work in India needs to start developing a democratic structure and establishing some minimum standards for schools of social work in their functioning and awarding of the degree of social work. Unfortunately, part of India's social work problem is that it has huge diversity within the curriculum and minimum standards are yet to be laid out. At the same time, the number of schools offering social work at Master's level is increasing considerably.

I strongly feel the need for a professional council for mandating the social work programme in India. At present, every new college coming up with a course in social work might fail to have even subject-specific expert educators. Apart from this, a social work department is being established in engineering colleges and medical colleges across the country because social work has become a fashion and it is looked upon as a profitable course for private players. (#S8)

Despite the increasing demands for the establishment of a national council for social work education, many students expressed their concerns about the effectiveness of such a council in its functioning, if it were to exist. Throughout the discussion, students described the dilemmas related to the effectiveness, credibility and authenticity of a council for social work education if it were established in India. Despite these dilemmas, some educators were confident about the functioning of such a council in the right direction. Respondent #S30 reflected:

Even if there are possibilities of corruption within the councils that are already in place, the situation of not having a council to mandate the profession looks more harmful and

derogatory. There is uncertainty as sometimes the council may get a good official to lead it and sometimes it may get a corrupt person at the top. Nevertheless, despite its drawbacks, Indian social work urgently needs to get a mandating body at the national level for social work education and practice.

Another respondent observed:

The social work education and practice fraternity should think of developing a council in line with the Medical Council, the Council for Technical Education, the Council for Teacher Education, etc. The need for a council is strongly felt to maintain the standardisation and the credibility of the programme. Despite the corruption in the Medical Council, it still has some professionalism in its approach. The absence of the council would have damaged the profession much more and delimited the development of medical education. Hence, for the development of social work education too, there is a need to establish a council and the council has to have the power to certify practitioners as trained social workers and paraprofessional practitioners. (#S14)

In brief, all the students interviewed for the study expressed their hope about social work being recognised by a professional body of the state and social workers being licensed by the state-mandated authorities. This provides hope that social work in India has a great future as many new and emerging areas are not yet defined by the social work practice and need interventions and studies with a social work perspective. Both social work academia and practice need an enduring developmental path over the future course of time.

Teacher-centric pedagogy: lack of students' perspectives

Some 26 student respondents felt that, in general, the teaching processes in the schools are predominantly teacher-centric. The majority of teachers come to the class and deliver a lecture. In this process, teachers see themselves as the subject experts and the students as the learners. In this type of teaching, students hardly get time to express their views and debate the issues that need further clarification. As respondent #S25 said:

The faculties teach from books written by many authors, but the point is that we are in our postgraduate degree, but we are not given an opportunity to reflect on our knowledge. As postgraduate students, we expect our educators to give us some time to discuss and clarify the doubts that we encounter during our lessons.

Another respondent (#S3) remarked:

I am placed in a hospital for my fieldwork practicum, and I face many ethical dilemmas while conducting this fieldwork practicum. I expect my teacher to address these dilemmas by allowing students to share their concerns and the problems they face in the practicum. However, none of our teachers think in this way, and they just come, teach us the theory and disappear.

It is also observed that teaching methods change from teacher to teacher, as no schools of social work have a single teaching method that is defined by the schools and has to be followed by all the teachers. The curriculum of each school defines the objectives of the course, and it is up to the teachers to adopt any teaching methods that they find suitable for the concepts. Interestingly, respondent #S2 reported:

We have some teachers who use different innovative methods of teaching. Some of the teachers make us read books related to the subject and write a review as a part of some evaluation. Some other teachers show us interesting movies and ask us to write a review. We find these methods are contemporary and relevant to the subjects.

Whereas respondent #S24 said:

It depends on the teacher. Some teachers are very good at teaching. They use media and activity-based methods. Also, we find that some of the teachers do a lot of hard work in preparing their lectures and make it interesting. There are also some teachers who just come in, teach the theory and they are unable to give practical examples in between their teaching. Many of the educators also do not have current practical work experience, so they give examples that they practised a long time ago. Only five teachers in our institute follow a good methodology of teaching.

Some teachers give opportunities to students to share their experiences, but the number of these teachers remains limited. The rest of the teachers follow teacher-centric methods or old teaching methods where the teachers speak and the students listen. All of the 30 students reported that they expect their teachers to first teach the concept and then link it to the activity, where they can test the theory learnt in class.

During the discussion, the students pointed out that many social work educators do not know how to use modern teaching aids. They still adhere to the old methods such as the use of blackboard and oral explanations. It is not that these methods are not effective or useful, but students are of the opinion that if these methods were used along with modern technology, it would be more effective and learning would become an enjoyable task. As respondent #S6 said:

The majority of the teachers use only the classroom approach – they use only the blackboard; none of them try using PowerPoint, which I feel is a good approach to effective learning. But unfortunately, many teachers do not know how to use PowerPoint effectively. Many of them may come and put PowerPoint on and they may either read it or may ask us to read it.

Of the 33 students, 28 expressed the opinion that teachers should integrate theory and practice in their teaching.

When you look at the theory and the practice, you cannot compartmentalise them; they have to be integrated. Doing this will help you not only to learn naturally but also to apply the subject to practice in the field. Nevertheless, unfortunately, many of the teachers cannot link their lessons to the practical setting, and the examples given by some teachers do not look like very relevant to the context. (#S28)

The respondents also noted that no schools are completely teacher-centric. Out of the five schools studied, three schools had very good student-friendly teaching methods. Students described them as 'contemporary teaching methods' in which teachers allow students to interact freely and more of the lecture comprises discussion and debate rather than lecturing on a topic. Other teachers used to raise contemporary issues related to social work and ask students to present on those issues. In some schools of social work, film screening, debating on a particular issue, book reviews, article reviews, field visits and agency visits were also part of theoretical teaching.

The student respondents also pointed out that the social work educators themselves do not follow the philosophy that they teach in the classroom. As respondent #S5 said:

What they say and what they themselves practise has a lot of impact on our learning. Because we have no one to guide us except the teachers. So when they teach us and when we see them, we feel the thing is not reflected back. So at times, we get

demotivated and demoralised.

In brief, the teaching methods followed by the educators have both negative and positive influences on the students. The teaching style of the teacher has a lot to do with the students' learning. Some 24 students reported that they chose a particular elective course because they liked the way the teacher delivered the course.

Discussion and implications for pedagogy, practice and research

The stories of these 33 graduate social work students cannot be generalised to the entire Indian social work academia. As an exploratory qualitative study with a conveniently selected sample group, the findings of this study cannot be generalised to all social work students or programmes in India. However, the results of the present study will help the social work academia to understand the students' perspective on social work education at the postgraduate level and the challenges faced by social work students in India. As highlighted by the respondents, social work education in India needs to develop its own professional identity and indigenous knowledge base. Social work as an academic discipline involves the application of social theories and research methods to study and respond to social problems and improve the lives of the people and the community. In the process, social work incorporates learning from other social sciences to improve the human condition and respond to the chronic societal problems. The notion of indigenisation of the social work literature in India first appeared in 1971, when the Fifth United Nations International Survey of Social Work Training used the term to refer to the inappropriateness of American social work theories for other societies. This intellectual movement against the use of Western models started throughout the Asian, South-East Asian and Middle East countries. These movements emphasised the need to recognise the importance of the social, political, cultural and economic characteristics of a particular country in its region (Walton & Abo El Nasr, 1988). Moreover, Yip (2007) noted three important aspects related to indigenisation, i.e. intervention, ideologies and cultural contexts. Further, social work educators need to document their experiences to develop the indigenous knowledge base and indigenous literature that are based on personal and professional experiences (Thomas, 2010).

As the majority of the students reported that the teaching related to method courses, such as group work, case work and community work, takes place within the boundary of the classroom, there are hardly any chances to integrate the real fieldwork experiences within these method courses. This type of theory-centric teaching pedagogy makes students less interested and innovative in the practical aspects of social work. The majority of the students interviewed

reported that they concentrate on method courses only to achieve the pass marks and qualify in the course and they enjoy listening to courses other than method courses as they can be linked to real-life experiences. As regards the teaching methods, 28 out of the 33 students are of the opinion that teachers should integrate theory and practice into their teaching. Students also referred to some best practices, such as students' presentations, agency visits, group discussions, movie screening and guest lectures by eminent scholars, that can be incorporated in their departments as they are used by some other schools of social work in the country.

In regard to evaluation and assessment, the majority of the students across the schools expressed their unhappiness. The evaluation of both the theoretical and practical components of the course is not very transparent, and in many schools, it is not explained why one particular student has such high marks while her/his counterparts have failed to do the same. The students expressed their unhappiness that even after writing the expected answers, they feel that scoring is based on bias and not on the performance in the examination. According to the students, the scoring of some teachers takes into consideration their attitude towards the teacher and her/his class and also the overall appearance of the students and their personal relations with the educators. Many students reported that this kind of differential treatment demoralises them and makes them unable to concentrate on their studies.

The lack of public recognition of social work as a profession is an important and much discussed critical shortcoming among Indian social work academia. This identity crisis may have a lot to do with their prospects in Indian social work. In the present study, all of the 33 respondents interviewed for the study agreed that identity as a social worker is in crisis in India. Social work as a profession is neither mandated nor supported by the state. The position of social work or the social worker is not yet defined in many of the public programmes or offices.

To conclude, the results of this study cannot be generalised to social work education across the globe. However, the findings of the study present us with a picture that is somewhat incomplete but clear on how students perceive the future of social work in India and the challenges that need to be addressed by social work academia. The voice of the students strongly depicts the need for collaborative and focused work among educators and institutions. The study provides insightful reasons for social work educators and practitioners to professionalise social work education in the country.

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