CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

Aims and Purposes of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to make an attempt at indigenising professional social work, by making use of the philosophical knowledge of India. Indigenising social work has been a felt need of the social work practitioners and educators. The profession originated in the USA, and has been adopted in many countries including India. It is a feeling among social workers that social work profession having its origin in an alien country and culture needs to be modified to suit the socio-cultural context of India. In addition, social work is a young profession, which has existed in India only for about fifty years. Social work transformed into a profession in the early years of the nineteenth century. As a young profession, which is growing and developing, social work needs to better its content, in terms of theory and practice. Using Indian philosophy in social work would be one method of Indianising and thus, indigenising social work. Such an attempt also would contribute to the growth of the profession's content. Thus, the attempt of the present thesis would hopefully serve the double purposes of indigenising social work and providing an additional dimension to it.
The first task of this thesis is to clarify the very title of the thesis. Philosophy and social work are two words which perhaps have the maximum possible number of definitions and explanations. Given the variety of definitions and number of conceptions about these two words, it becomes imperative to clarify at the very outset the meanings of these two terms as they are used in this thesis.

Definitions

The definition of "philosophy of" as the critical study of the basic principles and concepts of a particular branch of knowledge especially with a view to improving or reconstituting them is adopted in this thesis.

Throughout this thesis, the term social work refers to professional social work defined as "a form of professional service comprising a composite of knowledge and skills, parts of which are and parts of which are not distinctive of social work, which attempts on the one hand to help the individual satisfy his needs in the social milieu and on the other to remove as far as possible the barriers which obstruct people from achieving the best of which they are capable."¹

Nature of Professional Social Work

As the earlier definition indicates, professional social work is different from charity or any service
activities. Social work as commonly understood as a helping or charitable activity is not new to human experience. History is replete with instances of individuals helping one another or the group assisting the individual. Cooperation has always been an inevitable social imperative, necessitated by economic and environmental factors. The basis for this help and charity is the ethical impulse in the individuals; the ethical impulse itself arising out of the awareness of the needs and problems of one's fellow-beings. With the onset of industrialism, the traditional patterns of societies were disturbed and new patterns emerged creating complex challenges. Consequently even the charitable activities became more structured and formalised and the responsibility of the state increased to a great extent and was shared by voluntary agencies. Professional social work also emerged out of such structuring and formalisation of charitable activities.

The characteristic features that attribute professional identity to social work are as follows:

a) It involves use of intellectual operations with a higher degree of individual responsibilities.

b) It is learned.

c) It possesses techniques capable of transmission though the specialised educational discipline.
d) It tends towards self-organisation for promotion of standards and advancement of interest.

e) It is not merely theoretical but practical in aims and goals and

f) It is responsive to public interest and to public welfare.  

According to the working definition of Social Work Practice, the purposes of social work are to:

i) assist individuals and groups to identify and resolve or minimise problems arising out of disequilibrium between themselves and their environment,

ii) identify potential areas of disequilibrium between individuals or groups and the environment in order to prevent the occurrence of disequilibrium and

iii) In addition to these curative and preventive aims, to seek out, identify and strengthen the maximum potential in individuals, groups and communities.  

Social work derives knowledge from various disciplines; the most important of them being sociology, psychology, public administration, legislation and economics. In
addition it has also developed its own theory. Social work has developed its own distinct methods of working with people, the methods being social case work, social group work, community organisation, social action and social welfare administration. Each of these methods include the use of several techniques, supported by and evolved from experience as well as allied professions.

The Philosophy of Social Work

Social work being a helping profession with the aim of ameliorating human suffering has to operate from a firm basis of values and a framework of beliefs, which form the philosophy of social work. The philosophy of social work comprises three major beliefs. Firstly, every individual human being, by the mere fact of being a human has certain worth and dignity and every individual person has the right to fulfilment according to each one's capacity. Secondly, the society has to provide the necessary conditions that will help towards this fulfilment. Thirdly, while the individual has a right to one's own fulfilment, the individual also has certain obligations towards the society. In essence, the philosophy of social work emphasises the individual's right to fulfilment, the individual's obligations to the society and the society's responsibility of providing the conducive atmosphere for the individual's
functioning. These beliefs that constitute the philosophy of social work, have been generally accepted. The most exhaustive work on the philosophy of social work has been done by Herbert Bisnow. Bisnow presents a comprehensive account of the philosophy of social work in terms of the nature of the individual, the relations between groups, groups and individuals and between individuals, the functions and methods of social work and finally social maladjustment and social change. No other author has spelt in such great detail and an exhaustive manner the basic philosophy of social work. The social work educators and practitioners often do not discuss the theme of philosophy of social work. The literature is quite limited. Since Bisnow's is the most exhaustive, it may be accepted as the authority of philosophy of social work. Furthermore, working out a philosophy of social work to suit the Indian context being the primary objective of this thesis, it is necessary to be aware of the existing philosophy.

Hence, Bisnow's statements under different headings, constituting the philosophy of social work is presented in the following section.

The Nature of the Individuals

- Each individual by the fact of his existence is of worth.
- Human suffering is undesirable and should be prevented, or at least alleviated, whenever possible.
- All human behaviour is the result of interaction between the biological organism and its environment.
- Man does not "naturally" act in a rational manner.
- Man is amoral and asocial at birth.
- There are both individual and common human needs.
- There are important differences between individuals and they must be recognised and allowed for.
- Human motivation is complex and frequently obscure.
- Family is important in the early development of the individual.
- "Experiencing" is an essential aspect of the learning process.

The relations between groups, groups and individual and between individuals.
- Social work rejects the doctrines of laissez-faire and survival of the fittest.
- The rich and/or powerful are not necessarily "fit" while the poor and/or weak are not necessarily "unfit".

- "Socialised individualism" is preferable to "rugged individualism."

- A major responsibility for the welfare of its members rests with the community.

- All classes of persons in the community have an equal right to the social services; there is a community responsibility to relieve adequately and without discrimination all members of the community.

- The federal government is thought to have an important responsibility in providing for health, housing, full employment, education and various types of public assistance and social welfare programmes.

- Public assistance should be based on the concept of need.

- Organised labour makes a positive contribution to community life and should be accepted as a constructive, rather than destructive force.

- There needs to be complete social co-operation of all race and ethnic groups on the basis of equality and mutual respect.

- Freedom and security are not mutually exclusive.
Functions and Methods of Social Work

- Social work has a functionally dualistic approach.
- The scientific method is considered to be the essential instrument for the study of human behaviour.
- The normally competent individual is the best judge of his own interests and he must make his own decisions and work out his own problem.
- Social work relies on the "development" of insight and/or environmental manipulation for the purpose of modifying behaviour or furthering social growth rather than on ordering and forbidding or exhortion.
- Social work accepts democracy as "the method"

Social Maladjustment and Social Changes

- There are serious political, economic and social maladjustments in our culture.
- Evolutionary type "reform" is both possible and desirable in our society.
- There is need for social planning.

Changing Contours of Social Work

The emphasis of social work in India has enlarged from individual help through welfare to development. This is a
reflection of changes that have taken place in the understanding of help and assistance.

The global perspective of service and charity have undergone definite modification. In the earlier stages individual charity was emphasised. Altruism and accruing religious merit, were the two major motivations for charity. Charity implies two types of people, firstly, those who have the means and heart to be charitable and secondly, those who are the recipients of the charity. Thus there is the giver and the receiver, the former at an elevated level and the latter at a lower level.

The nineteenth century saw the birth of Welfare State.8 The idea of 'Welfare' took strong hold in the British and Scandinavian countries. The welfare approach concentrated on the individuals or group of individuals who for various reasons were not able to be self-dependent and needed help from outsiders in relation to their problems in life. The unemployed, the aged, the unorganised labour are some of the groups who were reached through welfare.

With several Afro-Asian and Latin American countries which were colonies under the British or other European countries gaining freedom, the emphasis became development. These countries constituting the third world, had the major
task of improving their economy and providing sufficient opportunities to their citizens to raise their living standards. Thus, development became the focus.

In the recent decades the failures to achieve development and the inherent inadequacy of the development approach have begun to be analysed and a few thinkers like Schumacher have highlighted the inadequacies of the development oriented approach and the alternatives to the development orientation.⁹ A major thrust of these analyses is the creation of a no poverty society. As Sugata Dasgupta states the no poverty society implies "there will be enough in such a world for everybody's need but not for everybody's greed."¹⁰ Practically the 'no poverty society' negates the development approach and having the goal of increasing living standards since the results of such increased standards are not enjoyed by all people equally, but only by a few. Thus, development itself leads to inequality, increased poverty and tension. The alternative therefore should be to opt out of development which simultaneously creates affluence as well as poverty. Instead to organise equitable distribution of available resources, not to overexploit the existing natural resources and to achieve this goal the affluent opting for a simpler level of living.
In India similar trends of change can be observed. Nineteenth century witnessed several reform movements and the working of several reformers. Within a few years of gaining political freedom the Constitution of India was formed and adopted. Democratic Socialism was accepted to be the political ideology. The constitution paved the way for the Welfare State in India. At a slightly later stage with the initiation of the planning process development became the thrust.

These events at the national and international levels have had their impact on social work. The first training programme which was started in the U.S.A. was termed as a course in Applied Philanthropy. The term social work began to be used later. The concern of social work in the initial stages in the West as well as in India was the individual with a problem. Medical social work with a curative orientation was the first field to be developed, while case work as a method of working with individuals was the first method that was developed. Group work, the next method to be developed also had as its major objective, helping the individual through the group process. Community organisation as a method of working with communities was a later development. Social action as a method of social work is rather a recent development.
The early definitions of social work tended to emphasise the individuals adjusting to society. The recent definitions have a definite focus not only on the individual with problems, but also the society in which the individual lives. The shift, thus has been from focusing on the individual per se, to focusing on the individual as a part of society and therefore their reciprocal responsibility. The changes in the definition are a reflection of the shifting of emphasis with regard to the purpose of social work. In the initial stages the purpose of social work was considered to be, to help individuals to solve their problems by adjusting to their situation. The purpose as envisaged now is not only to help the individuals, but also to work towards changes in the society. So social work has shifted its purpose from individual help to social change, and social work has grown from philanthropy to social action.

The shifting of focus is particularly noticeable in India. Community development as a special field of social work was evolved in the fifties itself. Several social workers have been employed in various development oriented jobs for the past three decades. A list of seminars, workshops, summer institutes organised by the Association of Schools of Social Work in India during the seventies
clearly indicates the emphasis. The most frequent theme that these programmes have considered include one or more aspects of development oriented topics like urban poor, the rural poor, youth and development and so on.  

The changing emphasis of social work has resulted in two consequences with reference to the clients of the profession. Firstly, the dichotomies of a 'giver-receiver', 'donor-donee', 'benefactor-beneficiary' disappear. Secondly, individuals are viewed as parts of a larger entity, namely the society and the problems of the individuals are not attributed exclusively to the individuals' inadequacy but to the society which is not able to nurture the potentials of the individuals and offer sufficient opportunities as well as the necessary requirements for the individuals to grow, develop and achieve. In other words, the clients of the profession become individuals with rights towards welfare and development. To illustrate, the poor, happen to be poor not because of their inability to earn and live better. On the contrary the inability of the poor itself is a consequence of a unjust socio-economic system, which deprives the poor from gaining the right opportunities like sufficient education to enable them to come out of their poverty. The poor man therefore is no more an 'indigent poor' who should be given cash and kind in charity. Helping
the poor man would go beyond such token efforts and would involve providing the appropriate opportunities. At an extreme, such efforts would even call for changes in the structure of the society itself.

**Philosophy and Social Work**

As the emphasis of social work enlarges from the individual with a problem to the society at large, social work has to be concerned with certain basic issues. Instead of merely being satisfied with the description of the nature of the human beings and nature of the society, which are offered by the social sciences, social work has to seek the ideals that ought to be. It must begin to identify the ideal human being and the ideal society: The social sciences, being empirical and pragmatic do not offer answers to such questions. As Kohs points out "We cannot depend completely on the sciences to give us all the premises and principles necessary to dynamic Social Work."\(^14\) Towards the task of identifying the ideals, social work has to seek the assistance of philosophy.

It is inevitable that "when it is a question of understanding the general nature of man - and in consequence of human society - men must turn to philosophy."\(^15\) Because, one of the major concerns of philosophy is with the true nature of reality. Apprehending the true nature of reality
leads to a thorough knowledge about what everything is for. "To understand the true nature of man for example is to know, toward what ideal it is man's nature to strive."^16 The knowledge about the ideals in turn results in knowing how man ought to live. Thus, for the ultimate understanding of the real nature of man and the society in which man lives, one has to 'turn to philosophy'. Where social work is concerned not all areas of philosophy have a bearing on social work. As Kinduak states, the basic questions that require "mature philosophical discussions by social workers" relate to the nature of the human being, the sanctity of the individual in social work, the relationship between the individual good and social welfare and so on.^17 Social philosophy, as a branch of philosophy which deals with issues like interrelationship between individuals, and individuals and society has considerable material to offer, with regard to these matters.^18

Sofar, philosophy in general or social philosophy in particular has not been given its due place in the curriculum in social work. Nor has the profession drawn inspiration from these subjects in its practice. In its efforts to remain secular and humanistic social work in India has almost ignored philosophy. It has not made serious attempts at identifying the possible contribution by philosophy to social work.
Further more, the nature of Indian society and the need to indigenise social work in order to make it more suitable to the Indian social context also require that social work make use of philosophy. In Indian culture dāna - gift giving is a salient principle raised to divine status in the Rg Veda.¹⁹ The joint family through the ages took care of the needs of those less capable and less fortunate. The Jains and Buddhists included even the birds and animals in their scheme of welfare. Given this situation, the professionalisation of social work becomes a difficult task in India. Strangely enough the permeation of charity and concern through religion and tradition has made the acceptance of professional social workers difficult. The average person cannot completely understand the substitution of dedication and spiritual values such as merit and sacrifice by the diagnostic and problem-solving approach of the trained social workers who actually use social work as a source of livelihood. Therefore, the consequence is the non-acceptance of the trained social workers. Thus, the trained workers are doubly charged to establish their credibility and seek the acceptance of society. This can happen only when the profession itself is firmly rooted in the native soil and its practitioners have sharpened insights into the Indian psyche. ²⁰
A conceptual approach which takes into account certain special features in the Indian psyche is necessary if social work is to take its proper place as a service system in the process of enclosing a social order with sufficiency and contentment as its goal. Such an approach can be developed by analysing philosophical knowledge available in India.

Nature of Indian Philosophy

Indian philosophy, whose major content is the Hindu philosophy, has as its source the vast religio-philosophical literature of India. This includes the Vedas, Upaniṣads, Purāṇas or mythologies, Rāmāyana and Mahābhārata, the Dharma Śāstras, and the six systems of philosophy or Śatārāṣṭras. To this may be added the works of Śankara, Rāmānuja, and Madhvacārya and the works of the nineteenth century social reformers and thinkers. The Buddhist and Jain philosophies are also included in Indian philosophy. It may appear that the literature available is vast and that too many individuals have contributed to the religio-philosophical thoughts, but the base of their thinking is common. Excepting Buddhist and Jain philosophy, all the others accept the Vedas as their authority and all the teachings and thoughts arise from the Vedas. Thus, though the interpretations and explanations may vary from person to person through the ages, the basic ideals are common. This infant is what is unique about Indian thinking.
Spirituality has been the foundation on the basis of which all philosophical knowledge was developed. Spirituality has been the driving force of Indian philosophy and society. It has been the nucleus around which all other factors were built. Having spirituality as the sum and substance, Indian thinking adopts a synthetic and unifying approach rather than an analytical and specialising approach. A study of Indian thinking would reveal that knowledge belonging to various branches was synthesised and unified into one category of knowledge. Perhaps a special nomenclature of spiritual philosophy would appropriately describe it. So, the apparently sacred Indian philosophy included within it various fields of knowledge. Spirituality has been the fabric on which all other patterns were woven – be it sociology, psychology, economics or science. Thus, Indian philosophy with its spiritual basis has become very comprehensive capable of forming a suitable basis for deriving a systematic theory in terms of social work also.

Another unique feature is the continuity of the society and culture in which these thoughts are evolved and established. "No land on earth has such a long cultural continuity as India. In respect of the length of continuous tradition China comes second to India and Greece
makes a poor third." In Radhakrishnan's opinion, the Indian civilization "has stood the stress and strain of more than four or five millenniums of spiritual thought and expression" and it has had a unbroken course, though at times the course was slow and even static, possessing a vitality which is denied to more forceful currents.

Yet another well established feature of Indian thinking is its comprehensiveness. Apparently the emphasis of the Indian thought seems to be sacred and philosophical rather than secular; abstract, not relating to the 'now and here' of human life. But even a little analysis particularly of the ancient works of Vedas and Upanisads reveals considerable sociological and psychological insights. This has been a major area of research and scholarly interest in the recent decades. Much documented material is available as Dandekar's Vedic Bibliography indicates.

Motwani, Prabhu, Gardener Murphy, Safaya, Sinha, Sachdeva and Chakraborty are some of the pioneers, who have either identified and systematised sociological and psychological knowledge ingrained in Indian philosophy or have applied Indian philosophy to different fields like psychology and management.

Interestingly, Indian philosophy has not remained an abstract transcendental affair. It has percolated down to
the daily life of the ordinary person. No individual in India has been untouched by its philosophy. This has been possible because philosophy was considered to be a serious and practical affair. In the words of Ananda Coomaraswamy "In India philosophy is not regarded primarily as a mental gymnastic but rather and with deep religious conviction as our salvation (moksha) from ignorance (avidya) which forever hides from our eyes the vision of reality. Philosophy is the key to the map of life and the means of attaining it's goal. It is no wonder then that Indians have pursued the study of philosophy with enthusiasm for these are matters that concern all." 33

This review of the nature of Indian philosophy amply justifies its use in social work. Obviously Indian philosophy in its very comprehensiveness contains much knowledge that can be of use to social work. An additional valuable reason is also there for use of Indian philosophy in social work. Both of them have as their common concern the human person, the goal of human life and the achievement of this goal by the person. Social work also looks at the individual as a member of society whose potential should be fully developed and that the individual should lead a physically and mentally healthy life. Indian philosophy conceives of the individual as a potentially divine person
and the goal of human life is to discover this divinity and the process of discovery would involve a physically, mentally, ethically and spiritually positive and healthy life. Thus, both have the human being as their common concern. Their concern being common, it is possible to find similar thoughts and theories in both these disciplines. The identification and systematization of such similarities would constitute a major effort at indigenising the profession of social work in India, and providing a broader frame work for its functioning and thus assist social work to develop a "broader epistemology, one that is capable of encompassing all the dimensions of what it means to be a human being." 34

Review of Related Research

The earliest attempt to use Indian philosophy in social work has been by Dr. Gouri Rani Banerjee. 35 Much of Banerjee's writings explain the possibilities of utilising the relevant Indian philosophical concepts in the practice of social work.

Frances Yasas 36 has done a study on Gandhian principles and professional social work. She analyses the Gandhian thought and various incidences in Gandhi's life from the social work perspective. Thus her study establishes similarities between social work values and principles and
Gandhian life and thought. Her study also identifies material that can be borrowed from Gandhian thoughts and life for use in social work.

Vimala Thangavelu, presents some basic Indian cultural variants and analyses cases that have been handled by Indian social work practitioners and students against the background of the cultural variants. Thus, she evolves the new model called Samsar Model for Social Work Practice.37

Ammu Menon Mazumdar has studied the philosophy of the Gandhian approach and the contributions made by Gandhi to the various fields of social welfare. She discusses Gandhi's contribution in terms of Harijan welfare, rural welfare, women's welfare and so on.38

Vijaya Mukund Rao's study focuses on the implications of Bhagvad Gita for social work. Her study analyses the values in the Gita, identifies the cultural elements and their relevance to social work.39

A recent study by Indira Patel40, focuses on understanding Swami Vivekananda's approach to social work and suggests the possible use of this approach in social work.
The Present Study

The nature of the present study is expository. It tries to establish the relevance of Indian philosophy to social work.

The major themes which the study tries to analyse are:

i) individual;

ii) individual in society;

iii) society and its welfare; and

iv) the tradition of service.

These are the fundamental topics which give rise to the formulation of the theory and philosophy of social work. This being so, the specific objectives of the study are as follows.

Objectives

i) to identify concepts and theories relating to the topics of individual, individual in society, society and service, which are of relevance to social work.

ii) to synthesise material thus identified and arrive at a philosophy of social work that is applicable in the Indian context.
Method of Work

The method adopted in this thesis is to analyse specific philosophic literature relevant to the different themes, through library research. The first phase of work consisted of identifying the major sources in relation to each of the themes mentioned earlier. Thus, the Upaniṣads, the Bhagavad Gīta, and the Yoga Sūtras of Patanjali were identified as the major sources for arriving at the concept of the individual; with regard to the themes relating to the individual in society appropriate sections from the Dharma Śāstras have been discussed. In identifying the ideals of society certain Vedic hymns are referred to. Kautilya's Artha Śāstra, the Sukranīti, and the Mahābhāratha are the major sources used for arriving at an understanding of the political organisation of the society. The tradition of service is traced by adopting a historical approach, and the thoughts and approaches of Swami Vivekananda and Gandhi are highlighted in particular as they have had great impact on society, as social reformers and thus their approaches are of considerable significance to social work.

The second phase of the work consisted of analysing and synthesising materials from each of the above mentioned sources. The materials have been analysed in such a manner that they become operational from the social work
perspective. Though these matters are capable of being subjected to intensive philosophical analysis, the attempt has not been to adopt such intensive analysis, but to examine them from the point of view of the need of social work.

Chapter Arrangement

The first chapter which discusses the background and the need for the study as well as the methodology is followed by the second chapter which presents an analysis of the theme of the individual. The third chapter discusses the individual in society, the organization of the society, and its ideals and welfare. The fourth chapter traces the tradition of service. The fifth and final chapter is a synthetic attempt of the deductions derived from the early chapters.
References:


