Chapter 4

Conclusion: Towards a Praxis Model of Social Work Practice
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In this chapter, we attempt to locate the Praxis Intervention in the current schemata of social work practice. To understand the present schema of social work we explore the definitions given to it, its concerns, its modes of practices, and its critiques. We explore the alternatives for the mainstream practice of social work and examine whether praxis intervention could offer an alternative method. The implications of praxis intervention, its extension possibilities and its limits are explored towards the end of the chapter. The chapter ends with a discussion and a plea for further researches in this direction.

Social Work Defined (?)

The social work having a history of uncertainty and constantly changing identities makes it 'notoriously' difficult endeavour to pinpoint what forms a professional social work practice [Munday 1996:7]. In this regard, Catherine McDonald views:

Social work has always been a difficult entity to pin down precisely. It encompasses an extremely diverse set of activities (for example casework, case management, counselling, group work, community
development, policy development, advocacy, and activism) undertaken in diverse contexts (including hospitals, community correction offices, youth shelters, aged care settings, child welfare departments, juvenile correction facilities, local communities, local government authorities, schools, and so forth). Whatever the activity undertaken and in whichever context, social workers mediate between institutions and individuals, in particular between the state and the people it governs. The range of activities social workers undertake, the multiplicity of locations in which they practice, and the variety of techniques they deploy are held together by a collectively articulated commitment to individual and social well being and justice. The diversity of practices organized under the rubric of 'social work' can accommodate the differences, ambiguities, and contradictions that inevitably arise in the pursuit of these commitments.¹

According to the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), the social work is a profession, which in its various forms, addresses the multiple, complex transactions between people and their environments [IAASW 2002: 9; Ramsay 1999]. The mission of Social work according to IASSW is ‘to enable

1 McDonald 2003:124
all people to develop their full potential, enrich their lives and prevent dysfunction. The 'professional' social work is focused on the problem solving and change. As such, social workers are change agents in society and in lives of the individuals, families and communities they serve. The Social work is an interrelated system of values, theory and practice [Ibid]. The International Federation of Social Work [IFSW] after years of research with extensive review of literature adopted a version of social work definition in its general meeting held at Montreal, Canada on 25 July 2000 stating:

The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships, and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilizing theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points

2 In explaining Social Work values, the IASSW newsletter points out, 'Social work grew out of democratic ideals, and its values are based on respect for the equality, worth and dignity of all people. Since its beginnings over a century ago, the social work practice has focussed on meeting the human needs and developing human potential. Human rights and social justice serve as the motivation and justification for social work action. In solidarity with those who are disadvantaged, the profession strives to alleviate poverty and to liberate vulnerable and oppressed people in order to promote social inclusion. Social work values are embodied in the professions' national and international codes of ethics.' [IASSW 2002: 9]

3 The IASSW newsletter states, 'The social work profession draws on theories of human development and behaviour and social systems to analyse complex situations and to facilitate individual, organisational, social and cultural change' [Ibid].
Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.

The broad definitions given to social work such as above lack both in precision and exactness as it hardly captures what social work is from what it is not.

The difficulty in defining what constitutes social work has much to do with the profession’s formative history. Historically the social work as a profession is a response to the depleted human condition, consequent to the ‘industrial revolution’ [Shanin 1998; Ramsay 1998]. Social work as a voluntary service is said to have begun with the sympathy expressed by the socialite women who wanted to do some ‘good works’. The ‘Social’ in social work meant the “facelessness” of the poor who were destined to be consumers of the charity work of the socialites. The ‘work’ in social work initially meant the ‘work’ that involves in ‘aiding the indigent’ [Wooster 2002]. In its origin, social work as a practice emerged owing to socialite commitment to Christian morality rather than its obligation to social problems and its effects on individuals. It is only since 1970’s poverty, unemployment, poor housing, homelessness and other
such 'secular-social' issues were the focal points of social work practice partly as a resultant of the economic crisis followed by the shooting prices of the oil [Grimwood et al. 1995: 35, 39].

The Social Work Concerns

The major concerns of Social work had been the lessening of the effects of poverty, social exclusion, hunger, illness or disability, homelessness, the frailty of old age, family breakdowns, domestic violence, mental illness, environmental damage, inequality, unemployment, injustice or violence, child abuse, learning difficulties: in fact with issues related to the 'quality of life' of individuals, groups and communities [Lyons 1999: 10, 46; Davis 2002]. According to Ramon the Social Work Profession today, stands in majority of its practices to restore its client's ability to act independently within the given social context [Ramon 1991]. Lyons remarks that Social Work is mostly concerned with:

amelioration of social problems, and support and empowerment for the individuals, families, groups and communities affected by them; with advocacy and negotiation about policies and practices ... and sometimes with intervention aimed at reconciliation between individuals and groups.
IASSW deliberating on the social work concerns points out:

Social work addresses the barriers, inequities and injustices that exist in society. It responds to crisis and emergencies as well as to everyday personal and social problems. Social work utilises variety of skills, techniques and activities consistent with its holistic focus on persons and their environments. Social work interventions range from primarily person focussed psychological processes to involvement in social policy and planning and development. These include counselling, clinical social work, group work, social pedagogical work and family treatment and therapy as well as efforts to help people obtain services and resources in the community. Interventions also include agency administration, community organisation, and engaging in social political action to impact social policy and economic development.4

Since the social work has its origin in the socialite work practiced in era of the 'industrial revolution,' the clientele of social work had traditionally been the factory workers. These days, the clientele of the practice consists of broken families, abused children, abused women, destitute, physically or mentally challenged, persons affected by the natural, social or cultural disasters, marginalized,

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4 IASSW 2002: 9
unemployed and the emotionally disoriented. Social work assistance is also sought as a paid service by the people under medical treatment, psychiatric treatment, correctional administration, deviation control, socialisation of children and so on.

The mode of Social work Practice

Social work being a practice bereft of academic rigour and professional autonomy, the issues themselves mutually related, had always been carried out by the dominant paradigms characterising the ages it had passed through. It has been identified that there has been three broad periods in the 'development' of social work: as a moral enterprise, as a therapeutic endeavour and finally as a managerial project [Gregory and Halloway 2005: 35, 37]. Within the managerial schema of social work practice, the model presently popular in community social work, intended to 'empower' people concerned, is Participatory Rural Appraisal [PRA] and its varieties. It has been claimed the PRA methods provide participatory methods for data extraction for planning [Oxaal and Baden 1997; Uphoff 2001: 35]. PRA is presented as a set of participatory tools that 'enables rural poor to influence the research agenda, thus leading to an increased capacity to act in their own interest' [Koning 1995].
Being critical of the claims made by the PRA professionals that PRA essentially empowers the poor, Rosemary McGee comments, “In any case, participatory approaches do not necessarily empower, and are not by definition non-extractive” [2001: 85].

One recent forms of PRA promoted by World Bank, in which the social work skills are sought, is Participatory Poverty Assessment [PPA] in which the toolkits of PRA are used to promote self assessment of poverty to be addressed through projects meant for poverty eradication. The PPA is presented as “primarily a research project directed at improving policy analysis” [Attwood and May 1998: 121]. The PPA is designed to be an instrument of planning that integrates the qualitative data participatorily collected with the quantitative data already collected to ‘manage’ poverty from the centres of governance. [Chambers 2001:26-28; Uphoff 2001: 33-37].

Another argument forwarded to re-invent social work profession is called “The Evidence Based Social Work Practice” [Moren and Blom 2003; Mullen 1978; Mullen 2002]. The idea of ‘evidence based’ work is taken from the field of clinical practices in
The method emphasized the generation of evidence through empirical research and on the dissemination of such evidence to enable practitioners to incorporate it in practice. In principle, this means that the social work should follow empirically proven knowledge and method regarding the intervention and its effects on the clients. The underlying assumption is that there exist permanent and empirically observable regularities between the problems faced by the clients and the specific intervention; and finding out the relation with empirical studies would contribute to the knowledge base of the intervening profession. Once the relationship is found all that is necessary is to develop a 'package' of social work practice that could be administered with the systems of management meant for that. It is taken to be similar to the practice of finding the relationship between a medical treatment and its effect. In this

5 It has been observed that even in the medical field the 'off the peg solutions' of the evidence based medical practice has not met with success in handling complex cases. According to Page and Hamer: What is clear, however, is that approaches to practice change that are more easily categorized and measured, such as the dissemination of research evidence or the use of clinical audit cycles, have met with relatively little success despite their widespread promotion and substantial resources. The reason for this is most likely to be found in their failure to recognize the complexity of practice settings. Practice development, on the other hand, as defined here, is an approach which explicitly recognizes and seeks to match this complexity. [Page and Hamer 2002: 4-5, 15].
approach the social problems and its manifestations are treated as if the society is an object similar to a sick body requiring treatment.

Malcom Payne notes that there are three 'general perspective' on social work: individualist reformist, socialist collectivist and reflexive therapeutic [Payne 1996:2]. According to him, social work contains the element of these perspectives in different degrees with one or another being influential at different times [Lymbery 2001:371]. Taking a cue from Payne's classification of Social work Martin Davis claims that in the present day the practice of social work shows more of a tendency of 'individualist reformist' subsumed under a 'general theory of maintenance' [Davies 1994: 54]. It has been pointed that the 'profession' had even been a handy tool for 'social engineering' in the regime of pre-war Nazi Germany [Lyons 1999].

Critique of Social Work Practice

Any field of activity that claims to be a profession is expected to have a coherent body of theory and practical skill to apply the theoretical knowledge in a given context. Social work has problem in both these fronts [Parton 2000a]. It does not have a well developed theoretical base; it has no special skills to apply whatever little
knowledge base it has. Hence, as the critics rightly point out that it is 'heavily under-theorised discipline and profession, less acknowledged as an academic discipline among academics, and less accepted as a profession among the established professions' [Shanin, 1998; Toren 1972].

The 'professional practice' in social work these days just refers the practice of handling some prefixed varieties of problems with prefixed solutions and a set of mechanical procedures. Karen Healy and Gabrielle Meagher in their recent article complaint that the social work with the advent of managerialism is deeply fragmented and routinised, concomitantly reduced the opportunities for the profession to exercise creativity, reflexivity and discretion in direct practice and invite the profession to be re-professionalized [Healy and Meagher 2004: 244]. The social work, with its lack of theoretical body informing its practice and vice versa, destined it to remain a profession with no autonomy; neither capable of having academic autonomy nor an autonomy of its practice [Lymbery 2001a: 369; Giarchi and Lankshear 1998:27]. Some social work scholars remark that autonomy was never a serious possibility for social workers as the professionally autonomous social work
practice never had a ‘market’ [Parry and Parry: 1979: 47]. There should be caution applied on the meaning of the word autonomy here. By the expressions ‘loss’ or ‘lack’ of ‘autonomy’ it is not meant ‘autonomous decision making, unhindered by pressure from both managers and clients, may well be an ideal closely defended by public sector professionals’ as some scholars take it to be6. Rather, the loss of autonomy of the academic / professional field is regretted. The loss of the academic/ professional autonomy of the field is implied by (a) the profession being succumbed to powers elsewhere and not the knowledge base that informs its practice and (b) the creation of a knowledge base to itself being bent to similar power equations rather than guided by scientific methods of knowledge production. In other words the loss of autonomy means that the guiding philosophy of social work practice is lost to some other fields like management or state craft [Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 177-178].

There are reasons internal to the social work profession for its loss of autonomy [Wilensky 1964:148; Healy 2001a] as also external

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to it⁷. The reason according to Nigel Parton is, ‘social work does not have a core theoretical knowledge base, and that there is a hole at the centre of the enterprise’⁸; and the external one is the increasing claim over people and their resources for ‘governmentality’ [Foucault 1979] and ‘profit’ as desired by the fields of statecraft and market. In other words, it is not the social workers’ power over its clienteles and their employers but the field of social work being succumbed to ‘marketocracy’⁹ that is regretted [Noble 2004:293-299]. Each field has its own premise. The premise of statecraft is to rule, and that of the market is to accumulate monetary profit; the premise of

⁷ Fisher 1996; Fisher 1997; Shanin 1998; Dominelli, 1997; Ife, 1997; Rees, 1997
⁸ Parton 1994: 30
⁹ Madhu: The logic of capital with the help of bureaucratised regulation could alienate work, social relations, relation with nature and speculative faculty of Human lives from themselves and commodify them systematically. Without the emergence of bureaucratic rationality the universalisation of division of labour would not have been possible. Bureaucratic rationality is formal tending to be universal, atemporal and hence by its nature it hardly relates to the rich and diverse everyday reality but rather stereotype and alienate human relation with themselves and with their social and natural environment. The bureaucratic rationality by its formal nature not just aids the alienating logic of capital but also replaces substance with form constraining the creative faculty of substantive rationality. Capital and bureaucracy reinforcing each other alienates human life from itself and from its relation with natural and social environment. The alliance between capital and bureaucratic rationality at the abstract level emerges as the alliance between bureaucracy of the governments and market forces entangling the expression of life in the public domain through politics. The age-old association of the rationality of the market and the bureaucracy culminates into the marriage of market and bureaucracy resulting in marketocracy [Madhu: 2003].
management is to manage and that of social work is to care. Not letting the field 'free' in its professional endeavour in pursuing its cherished values is its loss of autonomy. The loss of freedom could happen either through violent aggression or an imposition of ban on certain kinds of radical social works as it happened in the Nazi Germany and during the MeCarthian USA in 1950s and 60s [Zahl 2003; Andrews 2001] or through imposing or stealthily replacing a field's value orientation with the another's and an ideological assault on the professional or academic values.10

Social work is criticised for its being "soft' yet repressive tool of the state. For the marginal populations, the social work functions as their defender and at times the organiser of their resistance (as well as, time and again, their only voice)" [Shanin 1998]. Many scholars have endorsed this view.11 Samir Amin In this regard remarks:

To wish naively, even with the best of intentions, for specific forms of "community development"-which, it will be claimed afterwards, were produced by

democratically expressed will of the communities in question (the West Indians in the London suburbs, for example, or the North Africans in France, or the Blacks in the United States, etc.)-is to lock individuals inside these communities and to lock these communities inside the iron limits of the hierarchies that the system imposes. It is nothing less than a kind of apartheid that is not acknowledged as such... The argument advanced by the promoters of this model of "community development" appears to be both pragmatic ("do something for the dispossessed and the victims, who are gathered together in these communities") and democratic ("the communities are eager to assert themselves as such"). No doubt a lot of universalist talk has been and still is pure rhetoric, calling for no strategy for effective action to change the world, which would obviously mean considering concrete forms of struggle against the oppression suffered by this or that particular group. Agreed. But the oppression in question cannot be abolished if at the same time we give it a framework within which it can reproduce itself, even if in a milder form.

Being critical of using the participatory techniques for governmental purposes Uphoff also observes:
When we evaluate [participatory] methodologies ... we need always to ask: for what purpose, or better, for whose purposes, will they be used? For academics for whom precision and elegance bring professional and personal rewards? For bureaucrats or policy-makers who need to make decisions about resource allocation? For the poor themselves, so that they understand their situation better and can act more effectively on their own behalf?12

Social work being reduced to an instrument of managerialism is a highly felt concern in the social work academia13. It has been broadly identified that social work has entered its third period characterised by managerialism. The other two broad periods identified were those of moral social work and therapeutic social work. [Gregory and Halloway 2005: 37]. It has been observed that managerialism, ‘evidence based social work enterprise’ and the ‘professional project’ of the social work goes hand in hand [Meagher and Parton 2004: 10-11].

12 2001: 36
Managerialism is a set of beliefs and practices, that presumes better management alone would solve the social and economic problems; Under managerialism, the clients are customers; efficiency is cutting cost; social workers are ‘staff’ carrying out the managerial designs; professionals are employees; quality social work is that which complies with the pre-fixed standard. The complexity of the phenomenon ‘social,’ its status of being open to plethora of mindsets and multiple values people hold, cultural variations, varied contexts etc., are reduced here to a neat object responding to uniform treatment.

The practice of managerialism is well linked to the ‘evidence based social work practice’ wherein the management is not just a tool, rather the fundamental philosophy that overshadows the social work practice. The evidence-based practice is also ‘result-based social work practice’, wherein the results and means to achieve them are prefixed and standardised. The evidence based social work practice with its Humean premise “if x then y” neglects that the social world is ‘open’ and ‘necessarily peopled’ [Morén and Blom 2003]. It underestimates the complexity of the social world’ [Rescher 1998] its dialectics, [Young 1981] and the fallibility of the fixed packaged
solutions [Rescher 1998: 165]. The perspective is little humble in realizing that our purported scientistic knowledge about the social world is incomplete and potentially incorrect [Rescher 1998: 127]. In its overenthusiasm to make social world and social work practice manageable it simplifies complex social reality and expects the social world amenable to prefixed formulas. Its neglect of the folk reality, indexical settings, interactional process and multiple hermeneutics that is ordinarily found in the social settings amounts to becoming a mechanistic social work practice of un-care and unconcern. The world view of the evidence based managerial social work is too simplistic and can be explained in terms Herbert Simons' critique of administrative man:

Administrative man recognises that the world he perceives is a drastically simplified model of the buzzing, blooming confusion that constitutes the real world. He is content with the gross simplification because he believes that the real world is mostly empty - that most of the facts of the real world have no great relevance to any particular situation he is facing and that most significant
chains of causes and consequences are short and simple\textsuperscript{14}.

Working towards a prefixed agenda, is more of a tactics of governmentality [Foucault 1979] rather than that of the social work. The tactics of governmentality have the violence inbuilt in it as it trespasses into all aspects of life with ‘judgementality’. Therefore, the evidence based social work or the result based social work is morally weak. The evidence based social work practice bases its epistemology on empiricism and logical positivism according to which the proper ground for knowledge is observation and experience of the world, rather than either abstract rational or introspective ideas, or unobservable causes and theoretical entities. Since empiricism itself is a theoretical stand, it cannot claim to be theory neutral\textsuperscript{15}. More over, the process of selecting certain values and not certain others to be fixed for empirical observation is itself theory laden of which unfortunately the empiricist would be hardly aware [Kuhn 1962:110,112,117,149]. The practice of ontology being

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} Quoted in Seeing Like State, Why Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed, J.Scott, 1998, Yale University, p 45.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Kuhn: What man sees depends both upon what he looks at and also upon what his previous visual-conceptual experiences has taught him to see [1962: 112].
\end{itemize}
reduced to epistemology, real reduced to actual in fact is an ‘epistemic fallacy’ [Bhaskar 1997:16; Bhaskar 2002:8-9].

It has been criticized that social work’s adoption into the managerial schema and evidence-based project is part of its ‘professional project’. In this regard McDonald comments:

The idea of the professional project builds on the Weberian conception of society as an arena in which social entities compete for economic, social, and political rewards. In particular, it develops Weber’s nomination of the occupational group, in some cases holding specific educational qualifications from which a living is derived, as one category of competitor. Such entities, in this case the professions, work to bring themselves into existence and to maintain or improve the groups’ relative standing. In this way, the group pursues a project16.

The professional project is political in the sense that it is fundamentally concerned with erecting boundaries that exert a distinction and create a border between insiders and outsiders [McDonald 1993; Larson 1977; Abbot 1988; Johnson 1972]. The professional project is a claim to a monopoly of competence. It is

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16 2003: 126
pointed out that the absorption of social work practice into the managerial schema is a win-win situation seen from the marketocratic need for social control and from the 'professional project' point of view of social work despite what is lost is the spirit of social work profession. The win-win schema in fact has removed the heart of the social work practice and replaced it with an automated machine.

**Alternative Perspectives in Social Work**

The present scenario of social work profession dominated by managerialism is countered by various critical perspectives [Dominelli, 1997; Ife, 1997; Rees, 1997]. The alternative perspectives give prominence to theory with a qualified understanding of theory as contemplative and systematic thinking in process. As the critical thinking is the guiding principle of the alternative practices, they can be collectively labelled as 'critical social work.'

Healy maintains that, the core mission of social work is promotion of social justice through social work practice and policymaking. Tracing the *canon of critical social work* since 1960's Healy is of the opinion that the threat for critical social work emerged more from the inadequacies within the tradition than from proponents of conservatism, economic rationalism and, more
recently managerialism. For Healy critical social work refers to a broad range of practices that share: a recognition that large scale social processes, particularly those associated with class, race and gender, contribute fundamentally to the personal and social issues social workers encounter in their practice; the adoption of a self-reflexive and critical stance to the often contradictory effects of social work practice and social policies; a commitment to co-participatory rather than authoritarian practice relations; and working with and for oppressed populations to achieve social transformation [Healy 2001]

The canon of critical perspectives in social work was prevalent from the late 60s. Though one can find them still being practiced marginally in countering the racist, gender, economic and social discrimination in many of the countries, in the western world the conventional critical canon has come to demise. Some authors blame the unfriendly policy environment, the insensibility generally growing with the spread of mercantile neo-liberalism, neo-conservatism, economic rationalism and also the managerialism [Dominelli 1997; Ife 1997; Rees 1997]. It has been observed that social work in general has increasingly become a cold, passive,
bureau profession of form-filling type. For Ife, the deterioration of the critical perspective in social work is due to the social control functions of social work; the limited commitment of social workers to radical transformation and the lack of political sophistication of social workers [Ife 1997: 169]. Differing with Ife and others, Healy points out that more than the external threat or lack of commitment the internal threat from within the critical social work practice due to their unsophisticated claim to 'truth' following the vulgar varieties of Marxism, feminism, anti-racist and communitarian perspectives [Healy 2001; Fook 2002: 17]. Their non-compromising position that sprung from their belief that their theoretical position explained the truth, Healy observes, in fact made dialogue impossible. The complex uncertain contextual dimensions of social work demanded a flexible and reflective interchanges between theory and practice rather than rigid truth claims. He further argues that theories look unattractive to social workers as they are not immediately relevant to their practices. For them theory appeared at the best, as an

intellectual curiosity, and at the worst, as authoritarian and esoteric. Further, the conventional critical perspective claim that through rational thought and action people can change the way they live [Fay 1987:4] was also challenged from ethical foundations. It was commonly believed that a radical analysis will necessarily lead to actions that are ethical, socially just and progressive. Healy points out that such an assumption appears naïve to the inconstancies of human action [Healy 2001]. Indeed, history provides us with examples of the use of utopian theories, whether it is Marxism or Nazi ideology or the neo liberal utopia, to justify oppressive social practices. In explicating the role of theory in the new critical practice, Healy observes that the theory could serve only as a resource rather than a blue print for practice [Foucault 1991:84]. In this regard, Fook remarks that theory in a critical social work practice is essentially that the clients and the workers jointly or individually reflect upon in the practice of social work in progress on the issues of critical concern [Fook 1996; Fook 2001; Schon 1983].

For Richard Pozzuto 'Critical Social Work' has something to do with making the world we live in. We could consider creating the world "critical". Pozzuto further observes:

It has to do with looking at something and not taking it solely as a given but also imagining what it could be. In this sense critical work is not work that duplicates the present but work that imagines possible alternative futures, and strives for them.21

For Rossiter, the questioning the innocence with which social work is taught and practiced is critical social work. To be a critical social worker from her point of view is to be deeply critical about the project of social work itself. The term 'critical social work' for her is only a euphemism for her suspicion of the very project [Rossiter 2001]. Social workers, she points out, are often involved in a 'messy' job of 'civilizing mission' that produces the 'other' in need of help, thereby sustaining the identity of the helper as good, innocent, and helpful. Such relations, she further adds, obscure the problem of power and privilege in the relations between helper and helped. Critical social work is maintenance of ethical vigilance of the work and its nature. It is the openness to the questions about the

21 Pozzato: 2000
constitution of practice that helps us to 're-examine our value commitments' [Rossiter 2005]. A non-critical social work is a trespass for her. To make her point clearer she narrates an incident:

The example involves recently received money from the Ministry of Health to expand the Centre's outreach to Homeless people. One of the projects is to make sure that homeless people have health cards with which to access the regular health care system. I participated in a meeting with the Ministry of Health where officials were teaching us to use a computerized system for tracking how many health card applications had been made so that we could be “accountable’. The process of computerization necessitated creating a formal definition of a homeless person and slotting that definition into the computer software. Here is an example of the trespass of every initiative. In order to get health cards, a number of different and disparate people are turned into a category of sameness - the homeless. Only the creation of that category can get them the service they need. But the trespass is that people are inserted into a category through which their identity and personhood is marked by lack - they are “the homeless”. The "homeless" once non-existent in Toronto - are being created as an identity and my work to get health cards is part of that construction process.
This is a trespass against the complex identities of people with housing problems.

In her later article she qualifies the critical social work as ‘critical reflective practice’ and defines it as:

My view of critical reflective practice is that it must promote a “necessary distance” from practice in order to enable practitioners to understand the construction of practice, thus enhancing a kind of ethics – or freedom, in Foucault’s terms [Foucault 1994:284] – which opens perspectives capable of addressing questions about social work, social justice and the place of the practitioner.22

**Praxis Intervention as an alternative social work practice**

The *Praxis* intervention carried out with the *adivasis* of Attappady is a test project. Here, the term *praxis* connotes the reflexive potential of human beings in making sense of themselves and their environment. The term *intervention* in the phrase refers to human beings intervening with the constructed sociality around and their *habitus*. Social work is taken here as the imperative action carried on the social and the self from the nodal point where history, culture and moments of individual life meets [Rossiter 2005]. Acting

22. Rossiter 2005
Upon the nodal point is pertinent as it is where the past through present to future, structure and agent, settled meanings, fresh sensuousness, also the other, and the self meet. It is an action research and research action characterized by interpretation of one's life-world in action and a research leading to knowledgeable action. It is a praxis intervention and a reverse praxis as it could act on both the adivasi participants and the project-organizing participants. It is a project of participant objectivation as it involved layers of participant objectivation; it is a participant objectivation exercise for the adivasi researchers, hamlet residents and the project undertakers as all the three kinds of participants reflectively and reflexively objectified themselves [Taylor and White 2000: 199].

The intervention could take the participants a long way from the initial chart they made in objectifying themselves [table 15 and 16]. The project could also bring significant changes in the project undertakers as they could realize their biases that blind folded them in understanding their practices and preferences. It had removed some of their presuppositions on gender relations, labour relations, and even that of their practice of social work.
For Healy, a critical social work should be self reflexive critical stand; for Fook, it should be a collaborative enquiry, for Pozzuto, it should be a critical work on the world around and for Rossiter, it should be a practice of self objectivation. In all these senses, the practice could meet the critical standards. Even to look from the evidence-based perspective, it could give evidences that the project of praxis intervention works.

The project objectified self, history, the present life-world and the future trends of the adivasi life. It is not the project undertakers but the adivasi participants themselves who interpreted their life-world. The project could initiate a process of gaining historical competence and for the first time in their life the adivasi participants wrote their history collectively. The adivasi participants did not just chronologically arranged what had happened to them rather they could interpret it. For example, they could trace the reasons for their ill-health through their research action and work on it through action research. The RAPs could interpret the changes brought into their gender relations and respond to their findings in their personal life. The RAPs could critically evaluate the futility of the formal politics.
and at the same time they could bring policy changes however minor, using their space within that.

The present venture is not to evaluate the project but to draw some generalizations from the specific experience. The project revealed, however poor people are however much so ever they were culturally, politically or socially deprived, so long as they can have a grip on their sensuousness they can draw resource from their praxis potential. It could also bring to light that oral history and its interpretations could be given at the community level which itself could be a tool to invoke their praxis potential. The method also proved that a combined research with the affected people works immediately on the people's mind. This opens up the possibility of undertaking a research with the marginalised instead of performing a research on them.

The theoretical assumption that it is possible to guide oneself and one's client community towards critical praxis suspending the otherwise dominant routine praxis is proved right in this experiment. The project could fix a reflexive eye on the social process of self-construction and the social construction.
Implications for Social Work Practice

The practice of *praxis* intervention for the social work could be extended to the social work situation such as helping people to help themselves. The *praxis* mode of social work depends on the sensibility that could be provoked in a given context: sensible towards one's own biography, historical locatedness, spatial positioning and the interaction setting. It could be a model for providing companionship to people in need of self-exploration. *Praxis* intervention as a practice can be carried on to the extent it is possible for people to take care of themselves and to the extent people require professional companionship of the social work practice. *Praxis* intervention practice requires the professionals and the client participants to be self-reflexive and self-critical. The model provides opportunity for the social worker to undertake a reflexive inward journey to get rid of biases that affect her practice. The context that is not suitable for self-reflexivity or self-criticism is not suitable for *praxis* intervention practice either.

The method could be fruitful in working with the marginalized people as marginalisation is usually a historical phenomenon. This would avoid people losing self-respect and dignity under the
conditions of marginalisation. The method could be applied in other conditions of marginalisation such as working with people discriminated on the basis of gender. It can also serve as a model for opportunity scanning. The praxis intervention can be used as a method to initiate and implement participatory project provided the project has sufficient flexibility inbuilt for effecting a change from its pre-designs. A project management from praxis perspective should not have full-fledged blue print before hand, rather the projects should be flexible enough to wait till the participants themselves research and come out with a project plan. In the new practice, the experts could be facilitated to work with the participants. While a project is designed and carried out with this method, there should be options to change the course of project or even to suspend some projects according to the collective findings and evaluations of the collaborative research. Similarly the praxis method could be used in the planning process provided sufficient flexibility is allowed and reflexivity is tolerated. It has to be further tested whether the model works with socially, economically, and culturally heterogeneous set of people.

The praxis intervention practice has its implications for social work education. A social work education based on praxis model
could shape the students and teachers self-reflexive, sensible. Through this method, it may be possible for students gaining theoretical and practical skills. However, the praxis model would be yielding better results if sufficient flexibility is maintained.

The praxis practice could also be extended to social work practice in the medical setting, AIDS care, psychiatric social work, management of juvenile delinquency, school social work, correctional administration practices in prison social work, gender related social work practice, geriatric social work, nursing, etc.

The praxis intervention model of social work may not be applicable in all the social work contexts. There are sections of people who cannot take care of themselves and hence require absolute external care. For example, persons suffering from progressive, irreversible diseases characterised by degeneration of the brain cells such as Alzheimer's disease would require complete external care. The praxis practice would be inappropriate for the people who do not need care. The approach could be helpful in accompanying people who can be helped to care for themselves. Praxis intervention practice is appropriate for working with the
people who can be helped to care themselves with in a scale of caring (fig 11).

![The Scale of Caring in Social Work](image)

**Figure 11 Scale of Care**

**Concluding Discussion**

The thesis presented theoretical arguments from various fields of social sciences and related philosophical discussions on the possibility of provoking the *praxis* potential through an intervention strategy in the first chapter. There, we argued that the indeterminacy of meaning and the *praxis* potential human beings are endowed with could be resourceful in invoking human sensuousness towards
creative praxis. We also argued that interpretation is action. In that chapter we were exploring the possibilities for habitus praxis. In the second chapter, we provided information of the fieldwork setting. The chapter gave a descriptive account of the location from which RAPs performed their fieldwork. In the third chapter, in an attempt to reflexively recapture the praxis intervention project we have critically explored the project. The present chapter has positioned the praxis model of social work within the critical schema of social work.

As the sufferings in the world increases, no doubt there should be institutions and methods facilitating people to overcome suffering. Praxis intervention is an initiative towards enriching the social work practice in its companionship with the sufferers. The praxis intervention project is one of the initial attempts in making this companionship fruitful.

The present world is fast transforming. The change happening is significantly social. People living in the world are expected to be spatially global and temporally futurised. Within the transforming world the social work field cannot afford to be static. The social work has to grapple with the transforming sociality. Social work has to converse in social theory and more to work on the social
and the individuals affected. It requires continuous assessment of social theory and social science practice from the social work context. The social work can also offer vigilant critique of the social science perspectives from its practice environment.

The social is necessarily peopled and hence it is open ended. Therefore, no social intervention perspective can offer a complete closed precise prescription. In this thesis, a sample situation is dealt with — and a general framework for praxis intervention social work practice has been offered. For specific conditions new methods could be evolved to inform praxis intervention social work practice.

Though the perspective of praxis intervention sheds its doubts on empiricism it does not question the value of empirical approach to data collection and analysis. Retaining 'objective' approach to data collection for background knowledge that informs the facts of local history and local conditions that influence people's lives is necessary for a rigorous practice. In this regard objective research is important. Within the praxis method etic and emic approaches can be intermixed. The emic view proposes that reality is best understood in terms of the subjective meanings that people attach to their roles, relationships, material possessions, and the
like. The etic view holds that reality is best viewed through the "optics" of concepts with cross-cultural relevance, like marriage or property or gender [Harris 1990: 48]. What emerges important in the praxis approach is not just the precise explanation of the social reality in accordance with the established practices in science rather the exact grasp of the relevant social reality akin to existing complex life patterns. Precision devoid of complexity appears more of a demand from the perspective of governmentality [Young 1981]. People living in their dialectical social context face-to-face with their interaction setting, with their competence in 'practical consciousness' and 'logic of practice' [Bourdieu 1990] and [Giddens 1986] coping with their life situation, in fact, are more capable of understanding their social reality in its complexity and exactness than a social scientist far removed from the local context. Hence, a praxis intervention practice requires being more akin to the exact complex life patterns and its assessment from the practical competence than to the precise theoretical or empirical findings. Praxis research is an intimate research practice that brings theory and methods of social science closer to people in its endeavour to accompanying them and not an alienating practice that intends only
to extract information from them and present it devoid of complexities on behalf of managerial interests.

The thesis as a whole is an attempt to provide a praxis model of social work practice and initiate an informed debate in this direction.

However, caution should always be applied in acceptance or rejection of models. Models necessarily simplify and the social is essentially complex. Thus, models inherently misrepresent. Modelling is the extension of the human potential to impose structure through abstraction. Hence, like the other solid human conceptions models too, despite solidifying abstractions, can lead to misrecognitions. Approaching social work, with the adequate cautions applied, with the praxis framework would be a fruitful exercise in enriching the caring profession.