CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Setting the Stage

There is a growing interest to know and search for more authentic and socially deep-rooted social work practice both at the international and national levels. Social work existed from time immemorial because people in any society have problems. In tribal societies, social problems were solved within the context of a traditional system, which had always been an integral part of social life of tribes, including the Sümi tribe. This traditional system was a social institution, characterised by strong family ties, chieftainship, clan, and other traditional institutions, which assured the security of its members. The system dictated its social norms, safeguarded its moral values, and conserved its economic base.

Thus, this study explored the Social work practice of the Sümi tribe of Nagaland, looking back to those enduring traditional social work practices and beliefs that reflect a long-standing commitment in society as a whole and the changes taking place that draw attention to what is considered the mainstream practice in social work. Like any other society, among the Sümi tribe also, there is mutual support component in which the individual, families, kin, and other group have certain commitment to care and assist each other in culturally designated ways. It is essential to ensure the survival of people, particularly during the period of crises, as well as in different aspects of everyday life. Right from ancient times, individuals in every society were helped by others to solve their troubles.

Looking at the development of the social work profession, it also points its origin variously from humanitarian, religious, and democratic ideals and philosophies that have universal application to meet human needs, arising from personal societal interactions and to develop human potential (Hartman,1994). Even so, most of the time, this kind of informal help is dismissed as a large-scale charity. Over a period, social work educators have used diverse approaches, theories, and concepts, but these are being strongly challenged by a growing critique of the Eurocentric, hegemonic assumptions rooted in the traditionally established practice. Pawar & Cox (2004) also mentioned that the
systems that emerged vary from society to society, closely reflecting the culture of people and with the systems being closely integrated in those cultures. It has been argued that the nature of social problems and culture differs and social work needs different approaches. Looking at the different approaches in social work the researcher took the position of a tribal social work, which is seldom discussed in Indian Social work education and practice and to understand the position of the researcher, it is important to look at the variations and the issues relating to Social work practice worldwide.

1.1. Concept of Social Work

The term ‘Social Work’ is often difficult to define precisely. According to Mayadas, Watts & Elliott (1997), Social Work is composed of two important words, “social”, and “work.” These two words may mean different things in Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia, or Australia. Watts (1997) says that putting these two words together to form the term “social work” creates cross-cultural challenges, because social work may take on different meanings in different national and cultural contexts. Ife (2001) observed that, in some societies, most notably Australia and North America, ‘a Social Worker’ implies a narrowly defined group of workers who have high professional qualifications, and excludes many other working in the human service field.

In other societies, the term has a much wider application, covering human service workers from a variety of backgrounds, with varying levels of educational qualifications. According to the International Organization of Social Work, in Chile, the term Social Work means all efforts carried out in order to achieve social welfare which can be done by any person, whether professional or not. Ife (2001) also said that the concept of ‘Social Work’ is rather blurry in Finland. Social work includes the entire range of social assistance and social welfare. In other societies, however, such as in Latin America, ‘Social Work’ has much more radical or activist connotation. It is concerned with bringing about social changes, progressive movements for social justice and human rights, and opposition to the prevalent forms of bureaucratic and political domination. In Israel, the term Social Work is used to denote an activity, on the part of public as well as semi-public and private bodies, for the provision of care for those citizens who are, or consider themselves to be, temporarily or permanently, incapable of mastering their own
life situation in a satisfactory way. Social work is carried out by individuals who are professionally trained on various levels as well as by volunteer workers. The nature of Social work in countries like Finland, Chile and Israel somewhat resembles social work practice among the Sümi tribe because of their informal practice. According to Ife (2001), even in societies that might superficially seen very similar, such as Australia and New Zealand, there can be differences in how social work is constructed and what counts as a good practice. Given the importance of grounding social work in its context, its culture, social work will be constructed differently in different locations.

It can be seen that differences in the concept and practice of social work raise the question of the applicability and relevance of western originated social work theories and methods in the non-western context. Scholars, like Boss (1992), Nyan (1993) and Sanders (1982), have argued that the nature of social problems and cultures of non-western countries entail different theoretical models and practice approaches. Weaver (1998) talked about cultural competence in social work. He mentioned that Social work has historical roots in England, and this cultural legacy may lead social workers to operate from a professional belief system opposing the cultural values, norms, and beliefs of some clients. He believed that a social worker should have cultural knowledge, which includes knowledge of communication patterns, worldviews, belief systems, and values. Singh and Soodan (1986) opined that even the oldest definitions of Social Work bear testimony to the fact that Social Work is concerned with social amelioration. In a discussion with Burman, he mentioned that social work is also about political ramification.

In 2014, the two bodies representing international social work - the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) - agreed on the following global definition:

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective

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1 Discussing with Prof. J.J. Roy Burman on 26th Feb 2016
responsibility, and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance their wellbeing (Moriarty, Baginsky, Manthorpe, 2015. p.4).

However, some of the eminent scholars, such as Gray and Webb, who have been supporting indigenous social work, feel that the two leading international social work organizations have pushed the standard aim to establish homogenous guidelines for social work education internationally. They felt that, in doing so, they seek to formalize and standardize what is taught across diverse cultural, racial, religious, and ethnic contexts.

Indigenization raises challenges for universalization and the challenges are compounded by international efforts, which can quickly become imperialistic, depending on what is proposed as ‘universal’ or ‘global’ in social work (Gray, 2005; Gray, et al, n.d.). Internationalizing processes tread on the toes of indigenization or the adaptation of western social work to local cultural contexts. In densely multicultural societies, how does one include “the traditions and cultures of different ethnic groups and societies in the core curricula of social work education programmes” (Sewpaul & Jones, 2003, p. 10) modeled on international standards? Gray and Webb (2015) raised the question whether it is possible to be tolerant of diversity to the point of radical relativism in fashionable post-modern discourse and be able to argue for homogenizing, standardized, universal, global standards. They opined that professional social work bodies wants to straddle the divide of the global and local godheads, having a foot on both sides when cultural relevance, whether expressed as indigenization, localization or authentication, is a counter trend to universalization, globalization and internationalization, all of which strike of cultural imperialism. Grey and Webb (2015) also questioned how social work could accommodate these two irreconcilable positions.

‘On the one hand, social work takes the moral high ground critiquing homogenizing forces, grand narratives and territorializing forces like globalization, neo-liberalism, colonialism, and imperialism in the name of ‘difference’. On the other hand, it speaks for cultural relevance and sensitivity in local socio-cultural contexts most affected by these territorializing agendas’ (p.3).
The authors contemplated that Social Work is no different even today as it was in the last century as it spread from the west to the rest with its colonizing civilizing mission replacing local, indigenous healing practices and communitarian values. Grey and Webb (2015) feel that IASSW and IFSW is thoroughly contradictory because they seek to enforce a yardstick to bring diverse nations across the world, with varying levels of socioeconomic wealth and political stability, to a global ‘gold standard measure’ (p.4) which is primarily Western, Eurocentric, Anglo-American. It may be noted that a variety of theories and models of cultural competence and related constructs, such as ‘cultural sensitivity’ and ‘multicultural practices’, have emerged in social work in the United States

1.2. Multicultural and Culturally Sensitive Practice of Social work

Johnson (2000) described multiculturalism as ‘a movement whose goal is to elevate and celebrate diverse ethnic backgrounds’. Multiculturalism, as a concept, is both challenging and provocative. While the arguments for and against acceptance of multiculturalism, as an organizing and systemic principle for society, continues to be debated, social work values diversity and promotes cultural competence as important social work tools. The multi-cultural perspective emerges from a conception of culture as a “frame of reference” from which we “encounter the world, ourselves, and life” (Pedersen, 1985. p.6). This calls for diversity-inclusive theorizing and research have been met by unprecedented scholarly efforts directed towards conceptualizing “cultural competence” and formulating practice guidelines for working with diverse populations (McGoldrick, Giordano, & Pearce, 1996; Pinderhuges, 1989; Sue & Sue, 1990). Many standard textbooks follow this approach, presenting a wealth of culture-specific information and culture-specific practice recommendations organized under broad ethnic group categories, most commonly the four major American-designated ethnic groups of African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanic Americans (Green, 1995; McGoldrick, Sue & Sue, 1990; Sue, Zane & Young, 1994). Social work has had extensive experience relating to issues associated with diversity and multi-culturalism. The profession has been taught to understand and respect various cultures, and provide culturally relevant programmes and services. The NASW Code of Ethics, intended to
serve as a guide to the everyday professional conduct of social workers, includes the principle that “social workers should have a knowledge base of their clients” cultures and be able to demonstrate competence in the provision of services that are sensitive to clients’ cultures and differences among people and cultural groups” (NASW, 1999). In 2001, the NASW expanded further on its commitment to the issues of diversity and cultural competence by developing the Standards of Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice. In 2002, NASW’s Practice Update on Cultural Competence (NASW, August 2002) summarized the Association’s policies and guidance regarding culturally competent social work practice and described the efforts being made to help social workers become more effective in their practices. Multi-cultural practice theory not only offered a compelling critique of traditionally established practice, but also added a broadened theoretical orientation that gives full recognition to the importance of cultural dynamics embedded in helping processes. Multiculturalism, cross-cultural competence, and cultural awareness are all terms that have been used to describe social work’s efforts to acknowledge the areas of difference and to acquire knowledge in order to enhance service delivery for clients. The term cultural competence represents one of the latest efforts on the part of social work to explain the commitment to fostering social justice while working in culturally diverse environments (Lum, 2011).

Among numerous conceptual definitions of cultural competence in social work, Green (1982) first defined it as: “the ability to conduct professional work in a way that is consistent with the expectations which members of a distinctive culture regard as appropriate among themselves” (p. 87). The vast social and cultural diversity that forms the current context of practice has challenged the “myth of sameness” (Kadushin, 1990) underlying the historic social work tradition, a tradition rooted in the universalist assumption that practice theories are broadly applicable to all persons, because “deep down we are all the same” (Pinderhughe, 1989, p.24). Smith (1999) was critical of the ‘globalization of knowledge and Western culture, which persistently reaffirms the west’s view of itself as the centre of legitimate knowledge, the arbiter of what counts as knowledge and the source of “civilized” knowledge’. It has been observed that a common theme in almost all conceptualizations of culturally competent practice is the need for practitioners to gain a deep and profound understanding of the ‘worldview’, or ‘cultural
frame of reference,’ of the client. McGoldrick (1996) says that one must look at that most basic of social work questions: ‘How can we understand those who are different from ourselves?’ Among the various theoretical arguments and practical approaches advanced to develop culturally appropriate social work practice, one of the aspects is integrating the helping approaches of local traditional helpers into social work practice. While mentioning about the social work practice in Borneo, one of the states in Malaysia, Kee (2003) mentioned that organized social welfare and social work related activities have been carried out through Government Social Welfare Departments and various voluntary organizations since the 1920s. However, Kee also felt that it is important to recognize other forms of helping and social support that have been in existence much longer and to consider integrating of helping practice into the social work practice which include the family and mutual aid practices, the traditional and shamanistic healing and designated helpers. The aboriginal Canadian Model of helping is based on the cultural themes and values of indigenous helping approaches (Morrissette, McKenzie & Morrissette, 1993) and scholars like Green (1982) advised Social Work professionals to learn from indigenous helpers.

1.3. Indigenisation of Social work

Indigenization has become a popular term in social work literature recently. At an international level, there has been a lot of discussion around the meaning of indigenous and indigenization of social work. Walton and El Nasr (1988) identified that the notion of indigenization appeared in relation to social work for the first time in 1971, when the fifth United Nations International Survey of Social Work Training used it to refer to the inappropriateness of American social work theories for other societies. They emphasized the importance of the social, political, cultural, and economic characteristics of a particular country and pointed out that the indigenization of social work is a process from ‘importing’ to ‘authentication’. It means a modification of the western social work discourse in response to the unique social problems, needs, values, cultures, etc., of the ‘importing countries’ (Yunong & Xiong, n.d.). Yan and Cheung (2006) found it more meaningful to reinterpret indigenization as a process of re-contextualization, that is, of the selective appropriation and modification of the Western social work discourse on
values, theories, and practices, to frame a new local social work discourse. Midgley (1981) argued that indigenization has become little more than a cliché and that its usage has not been accompanied by any attempts at clarification. According to Nimmagadda and Cowger (1999), it is the process whereby a Western social work framework and/or Western practice technology is transplanted into another environment and applied in a different context by making modifications. Indigenization of social work practice is also evident in India, Ejaz (1991) conducted a study in Bombay and in her she interview with social workers, and she found that half of the social workers did not feel that their education was westernized. In addition, they believed that they had adapted what they had learned to suit their local needs. These findings fit Shawky’s (1972) simple definition of indigenization as ‘adapting imported ideas to fit the local needs’ to be useful. Law & Lee (2014) point out that critics of indigenization assert that indigenization is an inherent and basic requirement or assumption for social workers’, whereas the proponents tend to support the mainstream social thoughts, beliefs, and values in indigenous societies.

Yunong and Xiong (n.d) in their article ‘A reflection on the indigenization discourse in social work’, argued that the proponents of indigenization in social work (such as Cheung and Liu, 2006; Midgley, 1981; Nimmagadda and Cowger, 1999; Walton and El Nasr, 1988) blindly adhered to the existing indigenous cultural and social structure and questioned western social work’s values and principles. They did not examine indigenous social and cultural structures, by analyzing whether indigenous social and cultural structures could be changed to benefit indigenous people and whether such structures promote freedom, equality, justice, and dignity for indigenous people or might make many indigenous people suffer victimization and oppression.

Gray & Coates (2008) declared, rather forthrightly, that indigenization is a passé concept because there are other ways of overcoming professional imperialism or universalistic claims of the superiority of Western social work. They conclude that it would be more appropriate for the discourse on indigenization to move on and shift its focus from professional imperialism to the concept of cultural relevance.
1.4. **Indigenous knowledge of Social work practice**

While talking about Australian social work, Grey Coats, and Bird (2010), mentioned that indigenous knowledge has been seriously overlooked in the past and has been subjugated and given an inferior status alongside the privileged place given to ‘expert professional knowledge’. The disparity between the two knowledge systems is the crux of the problem of social work with indigenous peoples. As seen above, indigenization and indigenous social work hold different meanings and significance. Indigenization is a process of adapting western social work practice to the non-western world.

Hart (2015) while discussing about Social work in Canada, he mentioned that while social work is a well-established profession, and while it has addressed matters related to Indigenous peoples for over 60 years, it is only recently that Indigenous knowledge are being recognized in the profession. Indigenous knowledge has been defined as, "a body of knowledge associated with the long-term occupancy of a certain place. This knowledge refers to traditional norms and social values, as well as to mental constructs that guide, organize, and regulate the people's way of living and making sense of their world.

The terms indigenous and indigenous knowledge has often been associated in the western context with the primitive, the wild, and the natural. There is no proper definition of Indigenous People, but the term indigenous has been used in anthropology to describe tribal groups. Its use, however, has gone beyond the discipline of anthropology. In fact, social workers, missionaries, and political activists have been using it freely to refer to the tribal people since the turn of the present century. In India, different scholars debate the idea of ‘indigenous people’. Burman (2009) points out that tribes in India are not the only groups to claim indigenous status and that the Government of India itself refuses to grant indigenous status to the tribes. To Xaxa (1990), there are three aspects, which are central to the conceptualization of the indigenous people. *First*, the indigenous are those people who lived in the country to which they belong before colonization or conquest by people from outside the country or the geographical region. *Secondly*, the people from outside the region have marginalized them as an aftermath of conquest and colonization. *Thirdly*, such people govern their life more in terms of their own social, economic and the
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cultural institution than the laws applicable to the society or the country at large. Semali & Kincheloe (2011) say that for millions of Indigenous People of Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Oceania, indigenous knowledge, or the native ways of knowing, is an everyday rationalization that rewards individuals who live in a given locality. They also stated that indigenous knowledge reflects the dynamic way in which the residents of an area have come to understand themselves in relationship to their natural environment and how they organize that folk knowledge of flora and fauna, cultural beliefs, and history to enhance their lives.

While discussing about Indigenous Social Work, Gray, et al., (2008) feels that it is essentially about the development of culturally relevant social work for, with, and by indigenous people. Joey De La Torre (2004) defined Indigenous Knowledge as the established knowledge of indigenous nations, their worldviews, and the customs and traditions that direct them. Castellano (2000) described the characteristics of Indigenous Knowledge as personal, oral, experiential, holistic, and conveyed in narrative or metaphorical language. Maurial (1999) defined Indigenous knowledge as “the peoples’ cognitive and wise legacy as a result of their interaction with nature in a common territory” (p. 62). He identified three characteristics of Indigenous Knowledge: local, holistic, and oral. The narrower view of Indigenous Social Work, as represented by Sinclair rather than the indigenization of social work, gives a better picture. Sinclair, (2002), while discussing the context of an Indigenous Social Work practiced by indigenous Canadian social workers, said:

... A practice that combines culturally relevant social work education and training, theoretical and practice knowledge derived from Aboriginal epistemology (ways of knowing) that draws liberally on western social work theory and practice methods, within a decolonizing context (p. 56).

Sinclair suggests that this context is one in which indigenous epistemology is linked to land and nature, and hence to ecological survival and the fundamental living out of the knowledge that all things are related. Sinclair is convinced that all social workers in the Canadian context must have a full understanding of the Indigenous people’s context. Weaver (1997) puts forward similar arguments in the context of the situation in the US. Rigney & Cooper (2004), in the same vein as Sinclair, point out that, if non-indigenous
social workers are to work with indigenous Australian peoples and communities successfully, they must develop an understanding of the aforementioned experiences and context. Jinchao (1995), while pointing out the difficulty in trying to use material from the West in social work education in China, stated that social work in the Chinese culture aims to achieve a state of harmony and integration, rather than the provision of opportunities for one’s development and actualization, as emphasized in the West. Thus, indigenous social work is essentially about the development of culturally relevant social work from within and by the indigenous people. Almost all of these scholars emphasize on the need for practitioners to gain a profound understanding of the ‘worldview,’ or the ‘cultural frame of reference’ of the client. The most commonly offered approach to acquiring this kind of understanding has been what Dyche and Zayas (1995) call the cultural literacy approach. In this model, practitioners are encouraged to deepen their understanding of the client’s life world, by studying the history, backgrounds, and characteristic traits of diverse cultural groups (LaFromboise & Foster, 1991; Sue & Zane, 1987). Thus, in order to study the Social Work Practice among the Sümi tribe, it is also felt necessary to study the historical background and development of Social Work as it evolved from providing various social services informally to a more formalized and professional development.