

Human rights and social work: A study of two disciplines

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Abstract

The basic concepts underlying human rights offer little that is new to the social work profession. Social work profession indeed historically advocates for education, equality, health care, housing and fairness, all of which fit neatly under the umbrella of human rights. The social work profession, therefore, has a commonality with human rights that should guide the profession in both policy and practice. Human rights provide the social work profession with a global and contemporary set of guidelines. Human rights can elicit discussion of common issues by people from all walks of life and every corner of the world. One example where worldwide attention to a common human rights issue has led to effective action involves violence against women. It, however, does not mean that the other human beings or the social groups are not affected by the injustices committed against them. This paper attempts to address the concept of human rights and social work in detail and presenting the methods of social work intervention to address the challenges of human rights in the present century.

Keywords: Human Rights, Social Work, UDHR, Injustice, Inequality

1. Introduction

The concept of human rights and social work are as old as the existence of human beings in this world. Some religious ideologies have called for the fulfilment of rights of one by the other, by one neighbour to the other, by one relative to another and some ideologies promoted the concept of demand of rights by the people to the government authorities and the groups in power. The concept of Human Rights, however, was addressed mainly by the United Nations in the mid-20th century. The world wars witnessed a phenomenal number of casualties and psychological problems all over the world. The social work as a profession was also under the process of making. The efforts and professional practices were gaining grounds especially in developed world. Before the eruption of Second World War, in India social work as a profession was started by the Dorabji Tata Institute, Bombay. After the Second World War, a key starting point in understanding human rights is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948), which has been approved by every member nation of the UN (Reichert, 2001). The Human Rights and Social Work both have begun to gain ground in conceptual sense in 13th and 17th centuries in Europe and America. The paper is concerned with the challenges of human rights and the techniques of social work intervention to mitigate the problems of the world society.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Abdul Rahim P. Vijapur, 2010 ^[14]

In his book entitled *Human Rights in International Relations* scholarly deals with the concept of human rights in contemporary national and international perspectives, especially the United Kingdom, United States of America, France, Germany, Canada, and the socialist perspective of Human Rights. Besides, the author has also discussed the evolution of the concept of HRs and the HR traditions in Chinese, Indian, African and Islamic Cultures. The book has taken larger perspectives of HRs in the context of International organisations and Law.

2.2 Jeffery F. Addicott, et al. 2012 ^[1]

In his edited book entitled *Globalisation, International Law, and Human Rights* strictly viewed from an international legal perspective. The book is having 8 chapters. The authors in the first chapter explore a contemporary debate in relation to the safeguarding of certain human rights and the controversy between the State and non-state actors, i.e., corporate organisations. The authors critically examine and evaluate the associated corporate responsibilities with special reference to health, social welfare, and natural environment concerns, for instance, water, the article traces out certain human rights obligations emanating from national and international legal systems. In the second chapter, the author places the onus of his discussion on a region that may suffer greatly from 'climate change'. The author focuses that those responsible for economic development related to globalisation must mitigate the costs associated with the adverse environmental impact upon the said region. The third chapter examines the issues of religion and human rights from a territorial and cultural perspective and begin with the core emphasis of the basic tenets of every major religion-namely tolerance and pluralism. The fourth chapter of the book places before the reader a fundamental issued of debate- the mounting incidence of intolerance when it is not confronted in a pluralistic context. The fifth chapter explores the matter of the right to education as encompassing education in a formal sense and in an informal sense so as to address the cultural and pluralistic notions. In the sixth chapter the author examine the conflicting concerns of community survival verses community growth and development. In the seventh chapter, author contrasts first and second generation human rights as both 'negative' human rights and civil liberties, with third generation human rights which deal with 'solidarity', rights, requiring the State to provide things to people such as a clean environment, peace, education, healthcare, etc. In the eight chapter, authors examine the development of the Post World War II period and the impact of economic ideologies on the development of various societies.

2.3 Elisabeth Reichert, 2008 ^[10]

in her edited book entitled *Challenges in Human Rights* view that until recently the social work profession in the United States and other countries has been reluctant to integrate concepts of human rights within the social work policies and practices. Therefore, the objective of this book is to provide the social worker with provocative discussions to help understand the relevance of human rights to the profession. This book, a human rights reader comprised of chapters written by educators and professionals from around the world, addresses the large gap currently existing within social work literature. The various chapters focus on one primary theme: human rights within a social work context, with emphasis on economic, social, and cultural human rights, as these areas are most relevant to social workers today.

2.4 Madhusudan Pandit, 2011 ^[9]

In his book entitled *Human Rights and Social Justice*, the author explores the power of ideas to mobilize people against injustice and indignities. Human rights do not really resolve the tension between competing interests and various visions of how the world should be; rather, human rights ideas provide the vocabulary for arguing about which interests should prevail and how to achieve the ends we have chosen.

2.5 Debi Chatterjee, 2011 ^[2]

In the book entitled as *dalit rights/human rights* covers 10 chapters focusing the discourse of global human rights, human rights in Indian social scenario focussing upon the emergence of Brahminical social order, economics of the caste order, social hierarchy, British rule and the Indian democracy. The third chapter covers the definition of *Dalit*, untouchability, safeguards, data related to the dalit marginalisation and violence and dalits in globalised perspective. The fourth chapter addresses the dalit children their rights and related violence against them, the children's rights in United Nations. The fifth chapter covers the gender exploitation in historical perspective and the role of Jotirao Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar. The chapter six focuses over the conversion of dalits to Buddhism, Islam and Christianity and related matters. The Chapter Seven focuses over the contemporary issue of displacement of dalits during partition of India, dalits as the victims of displacement, displaced and the policies of the Indian government. The chapter eight addresses the dalit struggles for social justice. Under this chapter the struggles from early times till the independence of India and the present generation is being addressed for the readers. The chapter nine covers the trajectory of dalit struggle at the international level and the formation of National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHRs), National Conference of Dalit Organisations (NACDOR) were organised to address the issues of dalit human rights and the participation of dalit diaspora, the dalit issue was addressed at international level and the United Nations, as a result, the international human rights organisations and NGOs came forward for the cause of dalits. The chapter ten covers the concluding part of the book. The author concludes that the strength for fighting the violence against the dalits and enjoying the human rights requires a genuine commitment to human rights and the building up a strong democratic ethos capable of firmly combating all form of social exclusion and challenging the brahminical order.

2.6 Janusz Symonides, 2002 ^[13]

In the book entitled *Human Rights: Concept and Standards* divided it into four parts. Every part is sub-divided into different sub-parts. The main objective of the book is an analysis and presentation of the conceptual framework and adoption of human rights standards. The first part, comprising two chapters, deals with the concept of human rights. It presents the evolution and expansion of this concept and its philosophical formulations and theoretical reflection on the nature and sources of human rights. Parts II deals with the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, the part III deals with women's rights, the rights of the child, persons belonging to minorities, protection of the world's indigenous peoples and human rights and the rights of the migrant workers. The last chapter (Part IV) discusses the relationship between human rights and humanitarian law. The existence of armed conflicts, both international and internal, does not in any way liberate belligerents from respect for human rights. This volume does not give a comprehensive picture of the implementation and violations of human rights in the world. The author concludes that it is true that law has to reflect changing social reality and relations that the international community cannot close its eyes to new challenges, including those caused by the unprecedented progress of science and technology.

2.7 Jangambika, 2010 ^[7]

In the book entitled *Social Work and Human Rights* incorporates seventeen chapters. The book focuses over the two values and principles which are human dignity and worth, and social justice. Human rights are often categorised as first, second and third generations. In terms of social work practice, realising first generation rights means advocacy either on behalf of individuals or disadvantages groups. Whereas working to realise second generation rights is the bread and butter work of most social workers. Third generation rights are collective rights which intersect perfectly with the social work practice of community development. Social workers are facilitators for this process of change that occurs from the grassroots in a bottom-up approach. The book only touches the theoretical aspects of human rights and social work. In textual context, the book incorporates a lot of textual material on human rights as well on social rights but the book mostly fails to address the practical application of human rights and social work. The author has also wrapped up the book after lengthy chapterisation without any fruitful conclusion with future suggestions to make the world a place for healthy living.

2.8 Joshi, 2004

In the book *Handbook of Social Work* incorporates fourteen chapters. This book involves the concept of social work and social advocacy. The author focuses over the theoretical, practical, old and new trends of social work in the changing scenario. The growing importance of social work was also addressed by the author. He argued that the social work has been accepted as a separate discipline and social work research is contributory in the life of academicians as well as in fieldworkers.

3. Methodology

The study is based on the data collected from the secondary

sources. The secondary sources mainly involve books on human rights and social work. The discussion part incorporates the views of learned personalities i.e., government officials, retired professor,

4. Human Rights: Historical and Conceptual Development

The idea of human rights has a long history. John Locke espoused the concept of “natural rights” as the basis for life, liberty and property, residing with and individuals. These understanding were further developed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who supported the idea that individuals entered civil society and exchanged the right to life, liberty, and equality for civil rights which the government protected from violation on their behalf. These notions also shaped the thinking of participants in the French and American Revolutions and gave rise, respectively, to the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the American Declaration of Independence. These documents advanced the view that people had rights to liberty, equality, and self-determination. Adherents to these causes and their ideas often crossed the Atlantic to reach beyond the particular nation-state where they first arose (Gibney, 2003 quoted in Elisabeth Reichert, 2007:19).

The idea of human rights has developed very early in Chinese history. The right of the people to revolt against oppressive rulers was established in Chinese political thought in two millennia B.C. *The Book of History*, an old Chinese classic, equates the will of people to the will of Heaven. A ruler according to this classic, has a duty towards Heaven to take care of the interests of his people (Vijapur, 2010: 58) ^[14].

In the context of Islam which provided the most rational basis to ensure its primacy among other rights and to guarantee its protection. Even the other Islamic ethical norms prohibit the wasteful use of resources. With regard to gender equality Islamic precepts are worth commanding. Marriage is made as a contract, which can be dissolved for reasons of incompatibility and other valid reasons and not on flimsy grounds. Women are given inheritance rights, their consent in marriage is essential (ibid. 69-71) ^[15].

Human rights are those rights, which are inherent in our nature and without which we cannot live as human beings. Human rights and fundamental freedoms allow us to fully develop and use our human qualities, our intelligence, our talents and our conscience and to satisfy our spiritual and other needs (United Nations: 1987 quoted in Reichert, 2007:6).

The idea of “rights” and “duties” of citizens is as old as the concept of the State. One may find their origin in ancient Greek political system and in Roman law in Europe, Confucian System in China, the code of Hammurabi, the Islamic political system in the Muslim world and the “Panchayat” system in India (Vijapur, 2010: 20) ^[14]. It is true that some scholars trace the idea of human rights in ancient civilizations and religious doctrines, the term human rights became part of political and common usage only after the Second World War by the efforts of the United Nations.

5. Human Rights: Universal Declaration

The declaration, which provides a list of specific human rights, is not legally binding on any nation, but at the very least, a nation’s approval of the declaration indicates its commitment to satisfying the rights specified in the document. The Universal Declaration contains three distinct sets or

generations of human rights. The first, known as “negative rights”, lists political and individual freedoms that most people in the United States would recognise as human rights. These include due process, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom of movement and assembly, as well as guarantees against discrimination, slavery and torture. The other set of rights, referred to as “positive rights”, attempts to ensure each individual an adequate standard of living which means everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services. In addition, “motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance,” and everyone has the right to a free education at the elementary level. The third generation of human rights involves collective rights among nations. Although the least developed among the three, this set of rights indicates that solidarity among nations and individuals are a core value of the declaration. Under the 1948 declaration, everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the “rights and freedoms” listed in the document can be fully realised (UN, 1948 quoted in Reichert, 2008:6) ^[10].

6. Social Work: A Profession

The field of social work involves working actively to change the social, cultural, psychological and larger societal conditions that most individuals, families, groups and communities face. The helping process emphasises the use of advocacy to create societal conditions that lead to a stronger sense of person-in-advocacy to create societal conditions that lead to a stronger sense of person-in-situation or person-in-environment; this promotes the community good, which benefits all individuals (Colby & Sophia Dziegielewski, 2004:10) ^[3].

Social work practice is organised around two principal conceptual models, the generalist and the specialist. Generalist social work is more broadly defined and targeted toward a wider variety of clients and problem areas whereas specialist social work is more narrowly defined with a sharper focus on specific issues or a particular client population. Generalist social work follows a multilevel integrated process for addressing the interplay between personal and collective issues applying it to a variety of human systems, such as societies, communities, neighbourhoods, complex organisations, and formal groups as well as individuals and families (Miley, O’Melia, & Dubois, 1998 quoted in Colby & Dziegielewski, 2004:100-101) ^[3]. The specialist social worker provides a more focused, higher level of intervention. A specialist always possesses a social work degree and is prepared for advanced social work practice. Specialist social workers, therefore, are found in numerous settings: public and private agencies, public and private hospitals, clinics, schools, extended care facilities, private practice, private business, police departments, courts and countless other work-places, too numerous to name (ibid.:102).

Social work can be defined as an exercise in engaging with people to facilitate the telling of their story around a particular problem relating to their well-being, that is, to articulate what has happened to them and why. Its interactive base makes social work a relational profession. In this practitioners and clients become co-participants in elaborating other narratives in which new possibilities for action open up (Hall, 1997:

Cedersund, 1999 quoted in Dominelli, 2004:5) [4]. Social work is the practice of intervening in the lives of individuals who need assistance in the acts of everyday living. Even at the best of times, it is a deeply problematic practice, mediating as it does the relationship between an individual in need and others in society who may or may not be in need. That those privileged enough to have the welfare resources they acquire theirs is a problem for social workers. They have to address queries about entitlement to services and assume responsibility for their provisions in tricky and contested circumstances (ibid: 5-6).

Social work is concerned with the interactions between people and their social environment which affect the ability of people to accomplish their life tasks, alleviate distress, and realize their aspirations and values (Higham, 2006:9) [6].

7. Areas of Social Work Interventions

Social Workers from the inception have always tried to help people to realise their potential and participate in the development of their communities. Poverty is determined primarily by income because it is income that allows the purchase of necessary material resources (Coulton & Chow, 1995, p-1874 quoted in Dziegielewski). It is said that closely tied to poverty and income is the ability, or inability, to purchase or access high quality health care, decent and safe housing and an adequately nutritious diet (Dziegielewski, 2004:143) [3].

The universal belief is that children are central to society. They represent its continuation over time. They are our collective futures (Marade, 1993 quoted in Dominelli). Social work with children and their families, therefore, is a major area of practice. Child welfare work deals with complex and sensitive tasks. Coping with the demands of diversity in family forms, cultural traditions, lifestyle choices and a range of other factors complicate the work, especially in child protection, to a degree that is hard for outsiders to understand. Social work with children is highly contentious because practitioners struggle to balance a number of often competing interests (Dominelli, 2004:109) [4].

Besides universal importance to children, adult men and women have few social services that are directed specifically to meeting their needs. This situation improves to some extent once they reach old age. Challenges to dominant discourses on age arise from many quarters. Feminists have opposed negative configurations of ageing and redefined it as a time of opportunities for further growth and development (Friedan, 1993 quoted in Dominelli).

The authorities like police, prison officers, probation officers and social workers are involved in working with offenders. Their roles have varied over time, but until recently, they have revolved around two main themes: preventing the commission of further offences and through that, promoting community safety; and ensuring the welfare of offenders once the justices have passed verdicts on their behaviour and determined the appropriate sentences. However, they are also required to consider the welfare of victims (Dominelli, 2004:187) [4].

In such a situation of welfare and development, the practitioners have to develop new paradigms for practice in partnership with those who have a stake in their activities: service users, community activists, practitioners, policymakers, business leaders and academics. They will have to begin working from the assumption that clients, whether

marginalised or not, are citizens with social, political and economic rights that need to be argued for, defended and upheld. By adopting a humanitarian approach rooted in the realization of human rights and citizenship, social workers could work in ways that acknowledge the interdependence that exists between different groups of people in society and facilitate the implementation of reciprocity in their interactions with them (Dominelli, 2004:230-31) [4].

The profession of Social Work reflects the society that produces it. It is a profession that is conducted within a society riven by inequalities which are both produced and reinforced in and through social work itself. Social workers have to focus on critical reflexive practice in addressing the key question of why a profession that purports to look after people's welfare fails to do so. Its value base and commitment to taking the side of marginalised and dispossessed individuals and groups provides a way by means of which they can criticise the practices and a social order that thrives on the backs of poor people; challenge the legitimacy of unequal social relations and demand the personal and structural changes required to fulfil its mandate; alleviate hardship and suffering and maintain progress over time. Deconstructing inadequate policies and practices as these are reflected in discourses about their work and how it is done will engage social workers in profound change if they are to reorient the profession to fully promote well-being (Dominelli, 2004:248) [4].

8. Discussion

In Indian context, obligation is much more emphasised than the rights. The essence of Human Rights must be internalised in the character and personality of an individual. The declaration of Human Rights need to be implemented otherwise the declaration do not have meaning. Obligations among the youth need to be infiltrated inside the personality. It is obvious that at the earlier stages of discussion about rights in European countries was the guild which does not typically have strict or even clearly defined boundaries. Group rights came into existence only at later stages. The development at the time of industrialisation raises the demand of individual rights. Basically the demand of individual rights came into vogue at the time of American and French revolution.

It is in the discussions that India is a situation of major contradictions. The consensus level in India is very low. Inequality prevails in Indian situations at the individual, group and even strongly at the structural and institutional levels. For instance, the British government adopted the policy of honesty as the best policy. In contradiction to their policy the Indians are witnessed as habitual about the policy of dishonesty rather it has become a tendency of Indian to be dishonest and unjust. The policies, programmes are formulated and implemented by keeping in mind the relationship, capital, caste, geographical area and more. The Indian people are habitual about the sayings such as 'the dishonesty is the best policy'. This resembles in the persistent practice of corruption at institutional level. Our nation is not real democracy, as it is argued, rights here are earned and rights are never given. State is irresponsible; the principle of equalitarianism diminishes at almost all levels of structural hierarchy especially at the government level. Gokhale told Gandhi to travel in the third class in the Indian transportation system. One will find discipline level is very low even in the present scenario rather it has increased at the individual and institutional level. The

level of intolerance has multiplied at the public and professional life. In a book entitled "A Nation in the Making", Surendra Nath Bannerjee writes that India is a functional anarchy. A country is having narrow social base, caste inequality and more. In such a situation a land cannot be called a nation.

Right to live and live with dignity is the meaning of Human Rights. It is also argued that everything cannot be Human Rights. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and Jyotiba Phule both emphasised over the basic thing that is equality if we believe that state gives rights then the individual always found to be waiting to demand the rights. But if we believe that it is natural rights and need to be given by one individual to another will resolve the problem.

Others argue that Human rights are individual and societal rights. The resolution is the only obligation of state or individual. Culture, compassion among the states is required for the resolution of issues of human rights. The feeling toward human rights needs to be evolved amongst the students and teachers to arouse the compassion and keep it globalised this compassion.

9. Conclusion

The paper focuses that Globalization may mean that the world is getting 'smaller', but the emerging problems can only find solution within the framework of existing international laws. The attempt of the paper is to highlight a variety of thematic explanations under the title with the primary objective of examining the patterns of Human rights and Social Work responses to what have otherwise been seen as emerging notions in the realm of certain categories of human rights paradigms. This work demonstrate the indigenous efforts of the select group of authors to promote their vision of emerging developments in human rights related to government and corporate obligations to perform certain categories of actions, and also their zeal in promoting a wide range of trends in the relationship between the patterns of internationalized State responses and the innately fundamental rights of human beings and the social work interventions. The paper only touched the theoretical aspects of human rights and social work. The practical aspects need another research work so as to contribute in the process of practicing interventions and treatment of the human problems.

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