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The Practice of Anti-Caste Social Work in India
Towards a Theory of Dalit Social Work

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The Indian Journal of Dalit and Tribal Social Work which articulates Perspectives towards Emancipatory Practice, aims to critically examine key academic components in professional Social Work. The thrust of analysis is located within an anti-oppressive perspective, contextualized to caste and tribe realities in India. Articles focus on professional social work issues such as history and ideology, perspectives, practice-paradigms and social work's political role.



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THE PRACTICE OF ANTI-CASTE SOCIAL WORK IN INDIA TOWARDS A THEORY OF DALIT SOCIAL WORK

bodhi s.r

Abstract

Social work discipline in India is in the midst of a moral and political crisis. Having accepted overwhelmingly and thus fallen trapped to a western formulated / elitist caste orientation of social work education; its free fall in both the above stated domains is currently being experienced. Within these difficult times however, noteworthy though, is the recent emergence of new organic theories, one of which is Dalit Social Work. Formulated around an Anti-Caste Social Work premise envisioning people as agents of change, it veers towards an anti-oppressive formulation encompassing a more critical stance of structure and power as experienced in India. For social work, these efforts signify a significant shift away from the top down 'pathology oriented' perspective that dominated social work conceptualizations for decades. Envisaged as an attempt to unravel these processes, this article endeavours within three bounded conceptual domains to: (1) flesh out social work history from a critical perspective; (2) map political positions among social workers on caste in India; and (3) draw out the theoretical contours of a proposed practice framework of Dalit Social Work.

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Laying the Concept and the Frame

As much as it is exciting to feel relevant to real people and realities the profession espouses to stand up for, Social Work discipline in India is degenerating both morally and politically. Currently we observe traditional dominant social work discourses losing relevance while progressive alternative discourses are yet to acquire any concrete shape. Too often social work education and its educators have been criticized for not producing graduates certified to possess demonstrated competence. Even while the profession lay claim to possess a body of knowledge and set of values which combine to arm its trainees with skills and attitudes needed for competent and compassionate engagement; rumblings within the profession about its role and efficacy are becoming shriller. It has been pointed out in a number of occasions that within the profession, though the intellectual awareness is high, the emphasis in actual training and practice continues to be remedial and individualized in nature; this being identified as the fundamental reason for the discipline's stagnation in the advancement of its theory and practice.

Within such a context, an understanding is dawning among many social work educators who conceive themselves as critical, that there is an impending need to confront worldview of 'traditionalist', generally accepted as the norm in social work education. This, they believe will allow and create needed theoretical space to develop alternative liberatory discourses and concomitant practice paradigms. In this context, one observes that for many critical social work educators in India today, their foremost struggles seems to be positioned around the need to redeem social work education from the gripping clutch of western formulations and upper caste

commonsensical charitable conceptions and practice.

Political contestations and theoretical debates among and within Social Work educators in India are generally locked between the 'traditional school' versus the 'critical school', which was initially identified as being between the remedial (individual) and the development (community) perspectives (as pinpointed by the second UGC review committee 1985). The 'individual focus' position is theoretically located within an overarching dominant hegemonic frame couched in a somewhat acritical, ahistorical and atheoretical (common sense) language, fundamentally seeing social work as a profession of clinicians and service providers whose primary role is the 'correction of deviancies', augmented deeply by a skewed collective sense of moral responsibility to engage and deliver charity for the 'excluded'.

The community perspective, on the other hand, seems critical of the structurally oppressive elements embedded in the clinical/individual perspective. It resents the hijacking of social work education by 'clinicals' (read as clinical mindset) who rarely see anything beyond the 'individual'. The community school, beginning around 1970s had as their agenda the shifting of social work foundations towards more emancipatory and liberatory epistemologies. Over the years this 'perspective tussle' however has been reformulated, repositioned and rearticulated more sharply as being a political contestation between the 'clinical' (individual focus) and 'structural' schools of which the community perspective is only one among many.

Drawing threads from these political contestations, one witnessed since the early 2000, new ideas and analysis beginning to emerge as perspectives from 'rights based social workers', 'political social workers', 'feminist social workers' and 'pro-equality social workers' methodologically converge (bodhi, 2012). The latest of these organic formulations and the most politically sophisticated by any methodological measure are those that are emerging from the realities and perspectives of 'erstwhile untouchables' popularly known by the endonym 'Dalits' and from indigenous peoples, popularly known by the exonym 'tribes'.

Social Work Discipline: A Critical Historical Overview

The Sir Dorabji Tata Graduate School of Social Work, initiated in 1936 much before India became an independent nation is accepted by many as the first act towards professionalization of numerous social work efforts in India. In the post-independence era, the notion of professional social work education immediately began to be perceived as education meant for "training of personnel" who would work in welfare agencies of the state and non-state institutions. During this time the thrust was generally 'remedial' and the envisaged role was that of professional delivery of services within institutions of the state and philanthropic organisations. The profession of social work was perceived and formulated in a manner that would facilitate the fulfillment of the needs of the citizens of the nascent Indian nation state (Indian Conference of Social Work, 1947, 1959); (Mehta, 1952) (Moorthy, 1961). In these initial years, social work educators, many of whom were participants and/or sympathisers and/or leaders of Indian freedom movement, were apprehensive of questioning the state-driven strategy of development as they presumed it would be considered unpatriotic on their part to question the State's wisdom. Hence, most social workers assumed the roles of co-producers in the project of the welfare state.

During this period, social work education while operating in Indian soil, drew its knowledge source from American and British conceptions. The Dorabjee Tata Trust, the holding trustee of the SDTGSSW, at the same time also donated towards the setting up of a Chair in Social Administration at the London School of Economics where it was proposed that the purpose of the chair was to inquire into the causes of poverty, and that social work in India should then apply such knowledge that evolved measures for eradication of poverty in India. As it progressed into 1947, in the midst of a struggle against British rule fanned by Indian nationalist, social work started changing its route by aligning more with the ideas thrown by the nationalist struggles as articulated by M.K.Gandhi. By the year 1941, when the first ideas of M.K.Gandhi came out under what is now known as his Constructive Programme, many Indian social workers adopted them into social work education in bits and pieces. However by 1945 when the Gandhi Constructive Programme (also known as the eighteen point programme) became more conceptually solidified after an enlarged edition of the same was published, social work education veered closer to these ideas.

However the mindset of the Indian elite and social work educators during this time continued to be colonial in its essence; in the absence of what was considered 'indigenous social work knowledge base'. A major part of the content of social work education was borrowed from American conceptualisations of professional social work practice almost in entirety. 'The curriculum was built closely along the lines of British and American schools of social work, and the bibliography was prepared by the University of Chicago Library. This shows the direct link between professional social work in India and the 'export' of ideology and philosophy from the 'West' (Kuruvilla, 2005). On this count some educators also point to the fact that the establishment of the Dorabji Tata Graduate School of Social Work and the training of TISS faculty in the Chicago and Columbia schools in those initial years was conceived as a deliberate intervention to undermine the solidarity of workers' union(s) in Mumbai by the colonialist-capitalist consortium. This is read in the light of the fact that three schools of social work were started; one in Rio Brazil, Cairo Egypt and Mumbai India in the year 1936. These years also coincided with the hegemonic rule of the American social work model beginning around 1930, exported to many parts of the world that lasted till the 1970s.

Nevertheless, since the academic institutionalisation of professional social work in India began, several attempts have been made by practitioners and educators to indigenize professional social work knowledge base, by drawing perspectives (Banerjee, 1972) and methodological issues (Gore.M, 1965), (Dasgupta.S, 1968), (Desai.A, 1985), (Siddique.H, 1987), (Desai.M, 2004), (Saldanha.D, 2008) for formulating a context specific "Indian social work". However, all these efforts remained scattered and not many attempts were made by social work academics to consolidate the knowledge base. Interestingly, some of these indigenous initiatives and efforts itself could not be furthered as they were perceived by more critical educators as anti-progressive and hegemonic, and adding to these already existing ontological complexities is the overbearing heterogeneous and fragmented Indian social reality that made theoretical consolidation all the more difficult.

Currently, social work education in India is degenerating no-end, confused about its identity and seems to be in an interregnum crisis- a state where the old is nearing death and the new is far

from being born. As early as 1967, Nagpaul pointed out that 'as the existing system of education is largely unrelated to Indian conditions, social work education needs a radical change and drastic reconstruction' (Nagpaul, 1967). However, the core constitutive elements of the indigenisation debate were inserted and laid down by the second UGC review committee (1980). It argued for a positional shift from a remedial focus to a more emancipatory development thrust in social work education. It argued that 'Social work education in India should be tailored to respond to the needs of the majority suffering population and not merely to a peripheral group'. As a strategy to achieve the same, it was felt that one way of overcoming and expanding social work beyond the remedial thrust/focus is to offer two streams of training, i.e. developmental/reform perspectives and the clinical/remedial approach. Unfortunately debates on the said issue, which began post second review committee UGC, has got lost in the narrow traditional alleys of social work schools and in an 'idea starved' conservative dominated social work academics.

Participating in this debate, Desai (1984), a protagonist in social work education in India, posits that 'professional social work needs to move away from too much dependence on provision of service towards organising people to promote change,...from institutional to non-institutional programmes, from remedial to those that confront the cause of poverty, from private concerns to public issues, from research with a problem focus to one of action oriented research.... The profession has made a shift but not significant enough' (Desai A. 1984). In another article 'The Foundations of Social Work Education in India and Some Issues', she argued with a great degree of humility, 'another issue of importance, to a third world country, is the emphasis in the curriculum on poverty and social change, or, the remedial and rehabilitative model of social welfare. Unfortunately, our models have been the latter, borrowed as they were from the first world countries' (Desai.A, 1985).

Currently the biggest challenge posed to social work education today is to free itself from its atheoretical and ahistorical certainties generally accentuated by the fact that traditional Indian social work does not seem to have the intellectual capability of generating new ideas or practice paradigms. Rarely showing or displaying any academic ability, even of the most basic kind, imperative for knowledge generation, that is, the courage for a grounded and rigorous self-introspection, it has rarely taken any initiative to engage in the politics of 'theory generation'. Over the years it has done nothing more than reproduce cultural prejudices of the dominant groups (selling it as knowledge)and strengthen the deeply entrenched unequal structure of Indian society consciously, albeit unconsciously. Ironically, even its most radical theoretical formulations, which are sometimes to be found in debates surrounding 'social action' arguing vehemently for change, have deep roots within a status quoits, functionalist episteme.

As natural as it may seem to any critical eye, traditionalist in Social Work education suffers from three methodological diseases; one; they cannot tolerate difference, two; they are soaked in the past and rely too heavily on ridiculous traditions and three; they have no capability for self-introspection. For traditionalist the definitive ideas of justice and rights, the touchstone of the social work profession, are only catchy concepts that attracts humane attention and respect from others but remain so only at that level.

Fortunately, even within such a constricted environment, efforts to insert liberatory and emancipatory elements into Indian social work education were quietly made by those who stood against conservatism. Such knowledge are currently being articulated in the public domain with greater frequency and visibility. As is expected, most of these efforts are emanating from critical social workers who were always wary of the perils and hypocrisy of traditional social work and its role in fuelling and maintaining the status quo, coupled with traditionalist's disturbing lack of insight into the oppressive nature of its practice and theory, the lackadaisical attitude adopted towards any critical introspection into existing practice lacunae and the reluctance exhibited towards truthful 'soul-searching' for seeking meaningful and emancipatory alternatives.

To summarise the above, one may conclude that the poverty of professional social work practice in India is argued to lie in its near total intellectual impoverishment. Paradoxically suffering from a theoretical naivety that is devoid of any organic linkage to its own social reality, kept afloat only by irrelevant worn out 'received theories', and where efficacy of practice is greatly determined by 'who does it' rather than 'what is done'. Celebrated notions such as self determination, acceptance, objectivity, non-judgmentality, empathy; oft-repeated and sometimes overused foundational social work elements, are nothing more than soulless categories.

Mapping Social Work Educators and Practitioner's Politico-Ideological Positions on Caste

Social work educators and practitioners in India can be politically situated in one of five overarching theoretico-ideological frameworks, fundamentally differentiated by their socio-religious and politico-economic position on caste. Clear demarcations can be made among those who accept and those who reject caste. Among social workers who overtly espouse the acceptance and glorification of caste as a socio-religious necessity, conceived as important to uphold religious values and traditions, whether by self-acceptance or social--imposition, such social work educators and practitioners could be identified as being 'conservative traditionalist'. Some key characteristics easily observable among such social workers includes their rigid adherence to caste and caste roles, high religiosity, ubiquitous dislike for progressive ideas, non willingness to problematize history and above all; an utter distaste for any kind of critical engagement towards change. Professional social work for such educators and practitioners is conceived and defined as being a commonsensical voluntary activity manifested in charity, focussed at delivering services to 'weaklings' in society. Most of their 'struggles' are towards greater degree of professionalization of social work through methods such as 'case' work, seen as an extension of their naturally endowed 'rationality' and 'sympathy' firmly rooted under their control and supervision.

Diagram1. Conservative Traditionalist Indian Social Worker

- Caste as an unchangeable reality
- Rigid adherence to caste and caste roles assigned but sometimes negotiate to expand paternalistic attitude of dominant upper caste towards lower caste
- The struggle is restricted to increasing and professionalizing charity under the control of dominant upper caste groups
- Anti Historical, anti critical, anti progressive
- Social work is voluntary & charity-driven to serve the weak. High degree of paternalism

Among social work educators and practitioners who reject caste as a socio-religious

institution and see the same as the fundamental reason for the ubiquitous practice of discrimination and exclusion in Indian society, one observes a variety of political positions, ranging from those who could be considered as liberal at one end and those who could be conceived as radical-spiritual on the other. The 'liberal traditionalist' among Indian social workers are those who reject caste, but mostly in the realm of beliefs and ideas. While covertly practicing caste and drawing heavily from the privileges it bequeath, seeing no incongruity and difficulty in doing so, they keep on with the system, living in a contradiction of sorts. While at one end they believe caste is wrong, they however, in their daily lives, keep following its mandated practice. Nevertheless, overtly they somewhat disagree with the caste structure and its manifest. However whilst theoretically disagreeing with caste, these social workers are generally ahistorical and acritical. They conceive social work practice as the struggle for enlarging and even creation of economic and cultural spaces for excluded groups without too much discussion and reference to caste, its structure and concomitant implications. For them caste arises only when one talks about it. Following this, they believe that when one stops talking about caste, it becomes non-existent. The struggles of liberals are generally in the socio-educational, socio-cultural and socio-economic domain, putting special emphasis on an upgraded conception of charity (sometimes called welfare) through shared responsibilities of group oriented service delivery under their guidance and supervision. While showing sensitivity to the realities of the marginalised, they often run shy when the issues of caste are raised and discussed, creating tremendous uneasiness and discomfort within them.

Diagram 2. Liberal Traditionalist Indian Social Worker

- Anti-caste as an idea
- Anti-caste as a perspective standpoint
- Creation of economic, political and cultural spaces for excluded castes without a change in caste structure
- Struggle in the socio-educational domain. Focused on welfare, and responsibilities of service delivery are shared yet under the guidance and supervision of upper caste
- Ahistorical and Acritical

Among other educators and practitioners who stand against caste, are those who invest effort to carry the anti-caste position into the realm of daily practice. This is in sharp contrast to those who only hold the same merely as a perspective (as in the case of liberal traditionalists). For these social workers who could be identified as being the 'critical Indian social workers', caste is rejected at a deeper level, that is, both in the domain of idea and in the domain of practice. The anti-caste position that such social workers uphold is at the realm of perspective as well as a determining lived-principle in their daily life. Most of these social workers believe that caste must be challenged, erased and overthrown and probably replaced by a more modern system formulated on grounds of rationality and egalitarianism. Social work education and practice for such educators and practitioners is conceived as critical, progressive and a political activity whose main objective is to confront the brutalities of caste, seen as a system of iniquitous power distribution. The need to challenge the caste structure (forcefully if needed) towards realising a more egalitarian system that guarantees equal rights, especially to those who have been historically disempowered by such a system is conceived as fundamental. Most of the struggles of critical social workers are waged in the politico-historical, socio-economic and socio-political domain, with a thrust on power redistribution, envisaging a fundamental need to strengthen people's collective agencies. The

deepening of the service delivery system, conceiving 'service' as 'rights', that empowers the recipient to take charge of their own welfare, constitutes their fundamental practice.

Diagram 3. Critical Indian Social Worker

- Anti-caste as a perspective and determining principle
- Complete overthrow of the caste system and replacement of the same by a modern, rational, egalitarian system/state
- External confrontation against caste and capturing Political Power on behalf of oppressed and excluded caste
- Struggle in the socio-political domain
- Responsibilities for service delivery in the hands of excluded caste
- Focused primarily on a Dalit centred practice
- Critical, progressive and recognition of excluded caste (Dalit) history

Among other educators and practitioners who espouse increased criticality, there are also those who not only reject caste at the realm of idea and daily practice but also conceive their acts of confrontation as a 'value' that is essential to persistently uphold. Most of such social workers upholding this position, display very critical and progressive traits, and are generally seen to overwhelmingly adopt a critical stance against any imposition of a 'history of the dominant' on the dominated. They celebrate 'histories from below' and conceived themselves as revolutionary in contrast to being mere reformist. Their struggles are waged in the realm of the politico--historical, politico-cultural, politico-religious and politico-economic domains, seeing a fundamental shift of power from 'oppressor' to 'oppressed' as essential. It is observed among such social workers, that there is a deep-seated reverence for this power shift in the practice of social work, and together with their head-on confrontation with caste in other varied socio-sectoral domains, there is also a constant effort to confront one's own subjectivity in the realm of one's personal location in relation to power. One observes a strict adherence among such social workers of their almost persistent cry for liberty, equality and fraternity in their practice. These educators and practitioners espousing such characteristics, could be identified as being located under what is generally identified as the 'radical' position among Indian social workers.

Diagram 4. Radical Indian Social Worker

- Anti-caste as a determining principle and value
- Political and Revolutionary
- External confrontation against caste and internal restructuring of values and principles at the level of self. Strict adherence to persistent demand and practice of liberty, equality and fraternity
- Struggle in the politico-cultural domain under the leadership of oppressed and excluded caste yet intervenes with all stakeholders
- Critical, Progressive, articulate and celebrate invisibilised organic history

Finally, one also observes another breed of social workers in India among those who are fundamentally anti-caste. These could be identified as the 'Spiritual Indian Social Workers'. For such workers, their confrontation against caste not only include challenging it in the realm of idea/practice or even holding the struggle against caste as a cherished value; their fight against caste is conceived and exercised as an absolute norm permeating every part of their lived reality. The struggle among many of these social workers is generally in the domain of the psycho-cultural, psycho-political and philosophical levels. They veer greatly towards struggles that dilute their

‘conditioned self’, conceived as a dynamic energy operating within an all encompassing vast and infinite universal space. ‘Transcendental’ and ‘spiritual’ are the key words among such social workers, and the practice to transcend a mind dependent dialectical reality, seen as an impediment to real social work practice, as fundamental in all their actions and struggles. For such educators and practitioners, social work is generally conceived as an outflow of a radical subjectivity with stress on a (Godless) being, premised on an acceptance of reality ‘as it is’ and not ‘as one want it to be’. Although seeming paradoxical to a socially conditioned mind, their social work intervention is only to the extent that it allows an individual's plus one's own progress beyond a mind dependent and mind directed reality.

Diagram 5. Spiritual Indian Social Worker

- Anti-caste as a norm
- Transcendental and Spiritual
- Transcendence of material reality and merging the self with the universal whole
- Struggle in the psycho-political-cultural domain where the concept of the individual is diluted to merge with the ultimate whole
- Dilution of opposites premised on the universality of reality
- Social work is an outflow of a radical subjectivity and stress is on ‘Being’

While the above formulations of political positions made are by no account exhaustive, they do resemble to some extent the varied positions held by professional social work educators and practitioners within the Indian context. Efforts to draw these political boundaries are important in the light of the emergence of new social work theory in the form of Dalit Social Work. However for the limitations set by this article, one would only dwell so much as to flesh some of these fundamental issues in order that other social work theorist would postulate newer and more refined theoretical proposition.

Towards a Theory of Dalit Social Work

Currently Indian Social Work education is slowly but surely emerging out of its cocooned state of slumber and new practice paradigms, perspectives, ideas and processes are being formulated and articulated. We see a number of scholarly endeavours by social work academics to indigenise social work practice and develop theories and intervention models that are *from within*, organic and relevant to the Indian reality. The first of such efforts was initiated by A.Ramaiah (1998) who fired the first salvo and provided the initial arguments for an Anti-Caste Social Work paradigm (Bodhi, 2011: 298, 2013). In the article “The Plight of Dalits: A Challenge to Social Work Profession”, A.Ramaiah (1998) castigated Indian professional social work for ignoring caste for decades on end and argued that most professional social workers were inherently caste prejudiced. He suggested that the first thing that Social workers need to seriously consider doing is to de-caste themselves as no social work practice paradigm could contribute meaningfully and make any real dent on the marginalised till the same is first accomplished.

These and other endeavours provided the initial arguments that went into laying the foundational base of what manifested as a course titled ‘Dalit and Tribal Social Work: Issues and Perspectives’ within the Masters of Arts in Social Work programme in Tata Institute of Social

Sciences (TISS) beginning 2007, that included six other courses with a Dalit and Tribal focus within the same framework. During the course of the years beginning 2005, these efforts have further culminated into a Masters of Arts in Social Work in the TISS in the form of a new social work specialization titled 'Dalit and Tribal Studies and Action' (DTSA) in 2012 with Dalit and Tribal Social Work becoming the epistemological premise that informs the teaching of the Master's programme (TISS prospectus, 2012). It is important to note at this juncture that compared to other social work schools across the country that operate within the specialization format, TISS, the first school of Social Work in India currently offers ten separate Masters of Arts in its Social Work programmes, with intention of indigenising social work education, especially in the area of Dalits, Tribes, Women and the Disabled.

The Masters programme; Dalit and Tribal Studies and Action offered by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, is argued to be formulated around an anti-caste premise. Presently the Anti-Caste premise is understood to be a politico-theoretical position that rejects the structure of graded inequality based on purity and pollution closely linked to caste and descent and proposes an emancipatory paradigm that liberates people from this inhuman and discriminatory system. In the words of *Shaileshkumar Darokar(1)*, one of the pioneers of the teaching of the said subject in the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, while in a discussion with the author on the same (2014) states,

'Anti-caste struggles have a long chequered history within the Indian sub-continent. However, anti-caste as an epistemological premise was made theoretically sophisticated by Dr.B.R.Ambedkar and then later by many struggles following him. Among the many regions and context specific post-Ambedkarite movements, special mentioned may be made about the radical socio-political formulations against caste proposed by the Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra. Drawing from such articulations, any formulation towards a theory of Dalit Social Work cannot, but be formulated only on such premise/premises'.

Dalit Social Work (DSW), taught in the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai since 2007, is one of the social work formulations emanating from the anti-caste premise. It has become a pioneering indigenous social work theory that advance social justice and equity by taking into account systemic inequalities and discrimination based on caste as it intersects with gender, disabilities and class rooted to the realities of India. This perspective is indigenous, holistic and growth-oriented, supporting the development of fraternity among a skewed fragmented caste reality and a rebuilding of a fractured 'self' as manifest of an exclusionary caste system. Dalit Social Work is also a celebration of the strength and resilience of the Dalit Community in withstanding years of oppression and discrimination and using these strengths to reconceptualise helping professions that would further the process of empowerment. It is a paradigm shift in the identification of causal factors, where the problem is conceived as lying deeply embedded in dominant Caste groups rather than the excluded caste.

Within the Indian context, this Dalit attempt to construct a world-view for themselves from their differential epistemic positions, have given birth to a new social work that is critical, progressive and ethically humane. DSW resonate with the need to express, conserve and consolidate people's and social worker's emancipatory anti-caste struggles. These theoretical

formulations and articulations in the form of Anti-Caste Social Work/Dalit Social Work could be considered as the first genuine efforts towards the indigenisation and resurrection of a 'theoretically starved' and 'conceptually satiated' social work education in the India.

While DSW succeeds in at assuaging the poverty of social work theory and strengthen indigenous social work theory, unfortunate as it may seem however, is that current dominant traditional Social work paradigm stands antithetical to it. Traditional Social work's subtle abilities to give legitimacy and sanction processes that rigidifies oppressive structures, condones it through non-action, or do minimal to confront or challenge oppression, subjugation and exploitation has made it difficult for the acceptance of DSW among majority social workers. Thus mainstreaming DSW within social work curriculum could only be postulated as being extremely difficult and thus a challenging endeavour. Nevertheless with the aim of Dalit Social Work being to unravel basic premises underlying multiple oppression, interactions of systems, its sources and forms of discrimination towards developing emancipatory intervention models and practice seeking to challenge and break caste oppression we could argue that the discipline has entered a new phase of theory building. Without doubt the emergence and addition of this organic emancipatory perspective to existing social work knowledge regarding practice contexts, practice-related issues, practice theories and models of intervention are both theoretically exhilarating and politically liberating.

Across the world the genesis and acceptance of bottom-up and ethno-specific social work practice are now widely recognized and taught in social work education, training and practice. In the context of India the views held by many critical social workers is that DSW is the Indian equivalent of anti-oppressive social work as formulated in other regions of the world like Canada and the United Kingdom¹ which encompass Anti-Racist, Black, Feminist, Critical and Structural Social Work. DSW having endogenous roots and deep organic linkages to the Indian social reality because of its critical and aggressive conceptual deconstruction of the structure and practice of 'Caste Oppression' is an addition to existing emancipatory frameworks in social work enriching social work theories further as the profession struggles to be more meaningful and efficacious to the people it envisions to stand up for.

Conclusion

In final summation, the author submits that an empowering paradigm of intervention that could make any positive systemic and structural dent must first proceed with an in-depth critical analysis of the caste structure. This would clarify the formulation of key premises in which professional social work struggles and action are waged. This process however, must begin from a thorough deconstruction and critical overhauling of social work curriculum and content across the schools of social work in India. The profession must have the courage to subject itself to a closer scrutiny of its role and its overall contribution to Indian society.

It's much celebrated mission of 'promoting social work education that is democratic, liberatory, egalitarian to develop a critical perspective in students towards preparing professionals who can respond to rights-based, development and welfare needs of the people, together with facilitating redistribution of power and resources, especially of the marginalised and vulnerable, in

order to realise the goals of democracy, social justice and sustainable development” (TISS, 2006) must be realized in letter and spirit.

The challenge for social work education in India is clear. It can no more neglect and pay lip service to those who it overtly professes to stand up for. It must face the Indian reality head on and shed its elite skin even at the cost of having to let go of what is most dear to it. As *Suryakant Waghmore (2)*, one of the pioneers in the teaching of Dalit Social Work noted in an email exchange,

‘rhetorical assurances that social work intervention is aimed not only at delivering services to the ‘needy’ but also at bringing about social change has exposed the social work double speak’ (Notes 15th, January 2014).

From the perspective of those arguing for an anti-caste social work, social work ‘professional’ practice and education has betrayed excluded caste groups. This challenge (both moral and political) has been justified on the basis of social work’s vision- that of a casteless society’.

END NOTES

1. Dr. Shailesh Kumar Darokar is an Associate Professor in Tata Institute of Social Science, Mumbai. He formulated and taught in 2012 the course ‘Adivasi and Dalit Movements-Theory and Practice’. This course is the first such course in any social work programme in the country. This course, located within the Dalit and Tribal Studies and Action Master’s programme offered by the TISS is premised on an anti-caste episteme.

2. Dr. Suryakant Waghmore is an Associate Professor, TISS, Mumbai. He formulated and taught in the year 2007 the first course on Dalits within a social work programme. The title of the course was ‘Political Economy of Dalit Development’. Later in 2012 he offered one more course in addition to the above, titled ‘Caste, State and Politics in South Asia’ for the Post Graduate students of the Masters of Social work with specialization in Dalit and Tribal Studies and Action.

ⁱ See **Campbell, C. (2003). *Anti-oppressive social work. Promoting equity and social justice. Halifax*, in <http://aosw.socialwork.dal.ca/index.html> “Within Canadian social work, the term “anti-oppressive practice” is generally understood as an umbrella term that encompasses a variety of practice approaches including, but not limited to, radical, structural, feminist, anti-racist, critical, and liberatory frameworks (Bailey & Brake, 1975; Dominelli, 1988; Dominelli & McLeod, 1989; Fook, 2002; Leonard, 2001; Moreau, 1993; Roche, Dewees, Trailweaver, Alexander, Cuddy & Handy, 1999). Therefore, rather than being seen as one “practice approach”, anti-oppressive social work can be more accurately understood as a stance or perspective toward practice. The term ‘anti-oppressive social work’ represents the current nomenclature for a range of theories and practices that embrace a social justice perspective”.**

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