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Social work education in South Asia: diverse, dynamic and disjointed?

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Social work, claiming to be a global profession, is struggling for its legitimate identity in South Asia. South Asia is home to over one-fifth of the world's population, making the region one of the most populous and culturally, economically, socially and politically diverse geographical regions. Like the variations across the region, there exist key differences in the growth, establishment, nature and practice of social work education which is dynamic, diverse but also disjointed. Imparting social work education in countries of South Asia is a challenging task due to political instabilities, multicultural issues and low professional recognition. Using a comparative approach, this chapter analyses the initiation, growth and knowledge base of social work programs and addresses key epistemological challenges. By doing so, it suggests revisiting social work curricula and teaching practices in the region. Divided in to five sections, this chapter provides a regional view of the status of social work education and argues for crafting indigenous social work knowledge and practices, teaching and practice innovations, and human resource development of social work educators and students in this vast and diverse region.

South Asia as a distinct region

South Asia is home to over one-fifth of the world's population, making the region both the most populous and most densely populated geographical region in the world. South Asia is a distinct geographical entity comprising eight countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives (situated in the Indian Ocean). The countries of South Asia are very diverse and are part of global flows of people, goods, services and ideas. Different forms of governance, language, religion, culture and markets make this region a vibrant one in global political, economic, social and cultural affairs.

About 40% of the world's absolute poor live in this region. It also contains nearly 400 million or half of the world's non-literate population. The modernisation of education in South Asia started after the end of World War 2 in 1945 and has continued over successive decades, but the process is far from complete.

Out of eight countries of South Asia, three are land locked (Nepal, Afghanistan and Bhutan) and six are included as the least developed countries (LDCs) currently in the world. The LDCs represent the poorest and weakest segment of the international community. The political, economic, social and cultural milieu of the South Asia region offers vast potential for social work. The cultures and philosophies of this region are rich and diverse. Social work, like the diversity of people, is not a homogeneous entity in the region. Different models of social welfare and social work have developed over the past decades.

Despite the existence of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), there is a lack of a regional human rights mechanism to protect and promote human rights in the region as a whole. South Asia region has the world's largest conflict-affected population – around 71 million. Given the vast population of the South Asia region subjected to exploitation, natural disasters, and marginalisation induced by the various structural inequalities and less resource entitlements, social work plays a crucial role in providing a range of services leading to crafting of robust families and communities in the region. Professional social workers can play a vital role in helping children and youth to access education, health care, entitlements to food and shelter, and empowerment and protection of elders, people with disabilities, the poor and vulnerable, to name a few.

South Asian social work and global influences

The changing nature of social problems and new threats to the wellbeing of individuals, families and communities are not only common to South Asian countries. Social work education has enjoyed respect and recognition in the West, especially for the first half of the 20th century. Unfortunately, in a vigorously changing South Asian region, it may take a few more years or decades for social work to be recognised as a full profession by the respective states, though it has much to offer to the wellbeing of citizens. As practice and extension of remit are basic essential elements of professional social work, educating young people in social work is not a difficult task as ample opportunities are available for practice and extension of remit in the region.

Abraham Flexner in 1915 raised a critical question: is social work a profession? Since then, many social work academics, institutions and practitioners have contributed their working lives to the development of the social work knowledge base, skills development and practice standards that ultimately transformed social work from the status of a vocation to a profession that is globally relevant. However, Social Work continued to receive internal and external criticisms and self-reflection making the profession more resilient. The South Asian region is no exception to this phenomenon.

In the Asian region, departments/schools of social work began under missionary leadership, mainly originating from influence and patronage of Western countries. As a result, indigenous methods of social service were largely ignored and emphasis was laid upon using Western concepts, theories and techniques. South Asia was no exception to this trend. One of the early such 'transplants' was the Tata Institute of Social Sciences established originally as the Sir Dorabji Tata Graduate School of Social Work in Mumbai, western India, in 1936. The initial dependence on foreign materials and concepts continued to dominate and led to the application of Western notions in local practices. This historical neglect also resulted in non-inclusion of indigenous materials, case studies, and social action techniques in the social work curricula and training.

In the period after World War 2, the profession was globalised, as schools of social work proliferated across the South, invariably with cultural assumptions originating in the North (Healy 2001; Midgley 1981). The second wave of influence came right after World War 2 in the form of United Nations assisted social work education and training with an objective of strengthening social work education in South Asia. As a result, American models of social work and values travelled and were transplanted into schools of social work initiated in Pakistan and Bangladesh. This led to the further US influence on the ethnocentrism of social work training in the South Asian region. Scholars like Nagpaul (1972) termed this as cultural imperialism and Professor James Midgley of the US called it 'professional imperialism', the term used to characterise the way in which social work on the Western model has been introduced to Third World countries (Midgley 1981). The profession's growth has been characterised as 'academic colonialisation' (Atal 1981), mirroring political and scientific colonisation (Clews 1999).

A third factor that influenced South Asian social work education is the dissatisfaction with social workers trained in India and other countries because their skills and knowledge are not US-specific. These schools lacked insights into Asian problems and lacked suitable staff for training students of social work from developing Asian countries. After completion of their studies a number of them did not return home; among those few who returned, they became ambivalent about their role and relevance. As a result, many returned to America and have contributed to social work education there.

Social work education in the region: diversity

India

Social work in India has a long history, originating from a pre-modern charitable response of individuals or groups of people to address the problems of society, and evolving to the more modern professionalisation of social work underlined by formal training in theory and practice (Palattiyil & Sidhva 2012). Social work was introduced into India in the 1930s by North Americans eager to share the new treatment methods that were proving successful in helping many Americans to handle personal problems. India, receptive to new approaches, then began under American leadership the development of schools of social work based on the American model and adopting all its basic principles (Howard 1971). These social workers came to colonial India with a sense of adventure and excitement in introducing their ideas into a new culture. As a result, in 1936, the first school of social work, now known as Tata Institute of Social Sciences, was established. The first undergraduate degree in generic social work was started in 1974 in the Nirmala Niketan College of Social Work in Mumbai.

Prompted by domestic as well as global demand, social work education in India is said to be on an expansionary route. In the last 25 years the number of departments offering social work under private colleges has increased due to demand for social workers in India in the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and private sector. The increasing marketisation, outsourcing, and Western-style human resource policies are impacting the world view of Indian social workers.

Major schools of social work are teaching structural social work within the radical paradigm, but practice occurs within the community arena, thus lacking the depth and vigour

that social activism strategy entails (Palattiyil & Sidhva 2012). Despite its 75 years of the social work education history, India has not been able to come up with national standards for social work education, coherence in curricula, or implement a licensure procedure; nor could it form a national association of social workers to implement and regulate the professional standards. The enactment of a National Bill on social work is necessary not only in the contemporary scenario of the unregulated and haphazard growth of social work profession (without any uniform norms of education and practice) but also to get social work to a respectable, deserving place in the mainstream of professions in India. Despite the efforts by eminent social work educators, formation of a national association of schools of social work with regulatory powers and resources remains a challenge given the lack of statutory recognition of social work as a profession. A national network of schools for quality enhancement of social work education in India was launched at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) during May 2012, with an aim to address some of these quality issues (IFSW 2010, 2012).

India is currently witnessing a sea change in the attitudes and aspirations of its one billion plus population. In all this, social work education could not be left unaffected. Contemporary social work issues in India cannot be addressed without a shift to a more politically aware definition of the profession, guiding both national and international goals for social work (Alphonse, George & Moffatt 2008).

Pakistan

In Pakistan, the first in-service training course, sponsored by the government of Pakistan and the United Nations Technical Assistance Administration (UNCTAA), trained its first 65 Pakistani social workers in 1953 (Rehmatullah 2002, 1). After the in-service training courses, a degree course in social work started in Punjab University in November 1954 and a postgraduate degree in 1956. From 1954 to 1962, Punjab University continued the professional training requirements for the then West and East Pakistan. In East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), however, the University of Dhaka started an MA course in social work in 1958 and admitted candidates from Karachi and other parts of Pakistan. Subsequently from 1958 onwards, the Universities of Dhaka, Karachi, Peshawar, Hyderabad and Balochistan started master degree programs (see Graham et al. 2007).

Rehmatullah, a pioneer of medical social work, was one of the members of the first in-service training course that began on 2 October 1952 and lasted till 2 April 1953. Thereafter she studied at Columbia University New York and obtained her master's degree in social work with a major in social administration. She described in her seminal book *Social welfare in Pakistan*, the country's 50-year history with social work as one of lost promise. The profession 'started [in the 1950s] with high idealism and a desire to practice new unconventional methods'. But it 'became victim of political and bureaucratic designs of the powers that be at a given period in time'. In the process, some of its programs and services survived, others fell by the wayside. The profession continues to have 'Western oriented methods of problem solving', and 'it still falls short of the original ideal of developing indigenous social work literature of our own and developing Pakistani methodology' (Rehmatullah 2002, 180). It must, in short:

> rise again into a scientific program, to review the achievements as well as its failures, and inject new blood into it [and it must] reshape the practice of social work in the context of

our strong family system as advised by the first UN advisors who came to Pakistan fifty years ago . . . It is time to recover the sense of reality. Crutches like those offered by the 'development experts' have served their time. Now we should walk on our own feet, on our own paths, dream our own dreams, not the borrowed ones from the West. (Rehmatullah 2002, xiv, 457)

Currently, social work is taught as a two-year bachelor program (BA) in several colleges affiliated to universities and a four-year BS program in selected universities. The master and PhD programs are available in few Universities: presently, the University of Punjab Lahore, University of Sargodha, Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Bahauddin Zakariya University in Multan, and Government College Faisalabad located in Punjab province. The University of Peshawar (KPK province), University of Quetta (Balochistan), University of Karachi and University of Jamshoro (located in Sindh province) are offering the MA in social work. There are private colleges that are also offering Master's in Social Work, for example, Greenwich University (Sindh province), Punjab College, Joharabad Khushab (Punjab province), in addition to many government universities. Commenting on the past, current and future trends of social work in Pakistan, Mohamad Jafar, a lecturer at the Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, noted that

sixty years of social work history in Pakistan could not achieve the status of full profession. The NGOs are focusing on community development and the government sector focusing on institutional practices such as child and women welfare, prison reforms etc. Despite the rich history, social work education is still struggling for achieving quality standards. There is a need for creating further opportunities for higher training i.e. Master's and PhD in the country. For a population of 180 million a handful of colleges and universities that are offering social work are not able to train enough and quality human resources to bring desired changes and make an impact in the society. (Personal communication, 20 November 2013)

Bangladesh

Social work education also travelled to Bangladesh when it was given independence from Pakistan. The advent of academic social work in Bangladesh has arisen from the recommendations made by UN experts on welfare for the establishment of a program of professional welfare practice. The recommendation highlighted the need for scientific knowledge in the solution of acute and large-scale social problems (Watts, Elliott & Mayadas 1995). In response to the proposal for the establishment of a school of social work, the government established the College of Social Welfare and Research Center in 1958, and it commenced its educational program in the academic year 1958–59 with 15 students registered for an MA degree in social welfare at the University of Dhaka (Ahmadullah 1986; Taher and Rahman 1993). The College of Social Welfare and Research Center, the first social work school of Bangladesh, was merged with the University of Dhaka (DU) as the Institute of Social Welfare and Research (ISWR) in 1973. Currently, the Institute of Social Welfare and Research at Dhaka University runs a two-year MA degree in social welfare and a three-year BA Honours degree in social work. The College of Social Work under Rajshahi University also runs a three-year Honours degree in social work.

Currently, several more universities have started social work programs. To produce local knowledge, the institute at Dhaka University has now set up the Bangladesh Social Work Teachers Association for developing indigenous materials. Efforts are also being made to translate the standard foreign textbooks to make learners familiar with basic social work concepts in the Bengali language.

Sri Lanka

The Department of Social Services was set up in 1948, under the recommendation of a Royal Commission headed by Sir Ivor Jennings, and the department was entrusted with implementation of social welfare schemes for disabled people in Sri Lanka.

The Institute of Social Work was thus created in 1952 in Colombo, the first formal attempt to establish professional social work in the country. Dr Dorothy Moses, first principal of the YWCA School of Social Work (later the Delhi School of Social Work under Delhi University), provided the initiative to create the Ceylon Institute of Social Work in 1952. The School of Social Work has become part of the National Institute of Social Development (under the Ministry of Social Services and Social Welfare).

In 2005 the National Institute of Social Development became a degree granting authority (BSW) (Chandraratna 2008). The master programs in social work (MSW) were established in 2008 (Zaviršek and Herath 2010). The National Institute of Social Development (NISD) is an institution of higher learning in social work education in Sri Lanka established by the National Institute of Social Development Act No. 41 of 1992. It is recognised by the University Grants Commission of Sri Lanka as a degree awarding institution in Sri Lanka. After the tsunami disaster of 2004, the need for social workers became greater, and the University of Colombo started to develop a stream of social work within the Department of Sociology together with the University of Ljubljana (Lešnik and Urek 2010). Recently the University of Ruhuna has started a Community Development Diploma Programme and the University of Kelaniya and University of Perdeniya are planning to introduce courses in social work (Zaviršek and Herath 2010). According to expert estimates there were some 800 practicing social workers, while the country would need 'about 30,000 trained social workers' (Lešnik and Urek 2010, 273).

Nepal

Nepal is relatively young when it comes to introduction of social work education compared to India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Only in 1996 was the first department of social work with Kathmandu university affiliation started with the support of Nirmala Niketan, an Indian social work school. The initiation of social work education in Nepal was largely under the purview of affiliated colleges of the universities (Nikku 2012a). Almost all of these colleges providing social work are located in Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal, resulting in restricted access to social work education for students from poor and disadvantaged rural areas of Nepal.

One of the main issues for social work education in Nepal is the lack of coherence and focus on promotion of social work values. The social work training of the three different universities that currently exist in Nepal promote different values and methods of social work. For example, Purbanchal University promotes rights-based values, Kathmandu Uni-

versity focuses more on clinical social work and Tribhuvan University bases its approach more on generic social work (Nikku 2009).

Another important issue is crafting indigenous social work in Nepal and bringing coherence into the social work curricula that is suitable for the current needs of Nepalese society. The evidence suggests that the social work curricula developed over a period of time (1996–2005) under three different Universities in Nepal had signs of indigenous efforts in developing social work curricula suitable to train social workers relevant for Nepal and its growing needs.

The Nirmala Niketan School of Social Work in India helped St Xavier's college in Nepal to prepare a three year bachelor of social work program that was subsequently approved by Kathmandu University in 1996. Similarly the Tribhuvan University curriculum development centre renamed one of the courses titled 'Social Service' to 'Social Work' and added supervised fieldwork hours as a requirement (Nikku 2011).

In 2005, Purbanchal University constituted a subject committee to prepare the social work curricula for both bachelor and master programs. The subject committee (the author of this paper is a member of this committee) is aware of the discourses on indigenous and Western models of social work and utilised the opportunity to reflect on the models of social work. Over many discussions and debates a curriculum that is suitable to the country's current needs has been prepared and approved by the university. An analysis of the three social work curricula shows that Purbanchal University, as mentioned previously, adopted a social development model grounded in rights-based social work, Kathmandu University focuses on clinical social work and Tribhuvan University is focused more on social service (Nikku 2010).

The social work curriculum of Purbanchal University shifted from a clinical social work focus to a rights-based model. This social work curriculum would serve as the first comprehensive resource available in the country for other colleges, training centres, and government and non-government organisations for planning and programming of rights-based training in Nepal and beyond. The course structure includes relevant principles, guidelines and references that could be easily adapted to the specific situations on the ground and target groups to be trained (Nikku 2010, 2011).

The title 'social worker' is rather loosely used and abused in the context of Nepal. Anyone in social service work, including politicians, claims that they are doing social work. There is no clear formal definition stated and adopted either by the University Grants Commission of Nepal or by any government agencies such as the Ministry of Social Welfare. However, the Department of Social Work at Kadambari College, initiated in 2005 (an affiliate of Purbanchal University and a founding member of Nepal School of Social Work), together with other like-minded agencies, came up with the following definition:

> 'Social Worker' in the context of Nepal refers to new graduates and current practitioners (both Nepalese and other nationals) with recognised social work qualifications, i.e. Degree in Social Work (BSW or MSW) or a Graduate Diploma in Social Work or a recognised Social Work qualification. These qualifications should be recognised or acceptable to associations like the Singapore Association of Social Workers and or International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), until a formal definition of social worker is adopted by the Nepal Association of Social Workers which is not yet formed.

The Nepal School of Social Work came up with another definition for social service practitioners who are already involved in providing direct services to clients and working in NGOs and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs). This is to make the public aware of the different roles and to protect the rights of the trained social workers in Nepal. Currently, the Nepal School of Social Work with other likeminded people and institutions is also lobbying for accreditation and registration systems to be introduced in Nepal. It states:

> 'Social Service Practitioners' are those who are working in the capacity of social workers performing social work functions for the major part of their work but are without relevant social work qualifications like BSW and MSW. Executive directors, program executives, youth workers, field social workers, case workers, who are not formally trained in social work per se but are performing social work functions for the major part of their work can qualify to be accredited as Social Service Practitioners if they meet the entry requirements for Social Service Practitioners. They can become accredited Social Workers if they go on to acquire a recognised Social Work qualification and also fulfill the other entry requirements for accreditation.

To sum up briefly, among many professions in Nepal, social work professionals can play crucial roles in response to Nepal's post-conflict problems. Unfortunately the state of the Nepalese State is so weak that the social work profession has not been recognised formally by the government. The case of Nepal shows evidence of a country where social work education is at the nascent stage, with a need for a critically reflective framework based on student-centred practices that is crucial to professional development (Nikku 2012a).

Bhutan

The review suggests that there are no opportunities available for professional social work education in Bhutan to date.

Maldives

The Ministry of Gender and Family of Maldives and the University of Newcastle, Australia, supported by UNICEF, helped the Maldives College of Higher Education to offer a one-year Advanced Certificate in Social Service Work in 2007 (Plath 2011).

Afghanistan

The country has a history of turmoil and conflict, especially in the past 30 years. These conflicts have had a dramatically deleterious impact on the education system within Afghanistan. University campuses became relative war zones, which resulted in a shattered infrastructure and forced many faculty members into exile and/or intellectual isolation. Some faculty members were even killed for their commitment to education (Tierney 2006). The relevant ministries are trying to introduce social work education. In May 2006, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MoLSAMD) launched the National Strategy for Children At-Risk (NSFCAR), supported by UNICEF. The government recognises that professional social workers are critical to the effective delivery of

family support and child protection services in Afghanistan. One of the key tenets of the NSFCAR is the development of staff trained as child protection social workers. Social work does not yet exist as a 'profession' in Afghanistan. There is no school of social work or other accredited training program. There are no standardised tools, quality benchmarks for service delivery, or established minimum standards of care. Relevant legislation and policy is outdated at best, and is absent otherwise (UNICEF Afghanistan 2009).

Social work education in South Asia: dynamic and disjointed

Throughout its rather young history, social work has been marked by extensive disputes and self-criticism about its role and identity in the global North and South (Hugman 2008). From Flexner (1915) and Greenwood (1957/1976) to Fisher (1973) and beyond, social workers have heard criticisms of social work and social work education. In addition, a series of invited papers and rejoinders from Stoesz and Karger, Brij Mohan, Sowers and Dulmus in *International Social Work* journal in 2009 is a valuable source of historical material for social work educators such as the current author from South Asia to understand the development and dynamics of social work education in other parts of the world. In this section, I further show how social work education in South Asia also reflects these contradictions and conflicts evident elsewhere.

Kendall in 1950 argued that in each country, social welfare, social service, social work, social development, whatever you name it, is a dynamic activity. The report stated, 'no definition of social work can be formulated that would be accepted in all countries and might be put forward as an "international definition"' (Kendall 1950, 88). These observations apply equally well to this region. Taking into account social work development across the globe, there are abundant opportunities for social work to grow in the South Asia region. The fact is that there are countless challenges due to the variations and differences of educational systems and standards within the region.

Hammoud (1988) also documented the possible value conflicts across social work in different countries due to cultural and political differences. The South Asia region is no exception to these views. The social work educators in the countries of the region have argued that global social work definition and global social work standards might be of help but difficult to implement due to the local needs and diversity. Nadkarni (2010) in her editorial for the *Journal of Social Work Education* highlighted the nature of social work in Asia that applies to South Asia too:

> Social work education in Asian countries today faces several challenges and opportunities. Social work education in Asian countries also needs to address problems arising from untrammelled growth accompanied by ecological destruction and climate change. Development itself has thus become a generator of conflict because of competing land use issues involving the haves and the have-nots in these countries . . . The recognition of professional social work and the need for quality social work education in Asia has been moving at a slow pace. (Nadkarni 2010, 15)

Levels of social work education

The general objectives of social work education, which provides students with the value system and ethical standards of the profession, providing basic knowledge and developing skills and competencies to perform the social worker role, have remained across all the countries within the region with some modifications in order to suit to a particular country's religion and other requirements.

Social Work education is found at different levels in the countries of the region. India has all levels of education at bachelor's, master's, postgraduate and PhD levels and even distance education, compared to Bhutan (for example) with less than one million people that does not even have one bachelor's program in social work in the entire country. In Nepal (30 million people) there are two bachelor's programs (BA in social work and bachelor's of social work) and one master's program is available.

In Sri Lanka (20 million people) there is certificate, bachelor's and master's level available at one institution. Both Bangladesh and Pakistan offer both bachelor's and master's level of training but are facing competition from other courses and lack of educators and resources for the department to offer social work. Currently, the four social work schools, namely the Institute of Social Welfare and Research of Dhaka University, and departments of social work in Rajshahi University, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Jagannath University and National University, have been offering courses at four levels: four year graduation with honours, one year master's, MPhil and PhD.

The Maldives (0.4 million people) is currently offering a certificate level whereas Afghanistan (30 million people) is trying to develop a curriculum for special training of social work officers. This suggests that at present there is a wide variety of levels, and quantity of provision, that exists in the different countries.

Educational opportunities at the PhD level in social work are lacking in all the countries except in India and Bangladesh, and this has affected the training of social work educators and researchers. The doctorate education in social work provided in Indian schools also needs scrutiny as the quality varies. The doctorate education in social work is to prepare students for leadership roles in administration and policy, more advanced and specialised practice, research and teaching. So there is a need for developing such programs using international experiences in the region for renewal of social work education.

Licensure and professional social work organisations

In none of the countries in the region, irrespective of the history of social work education and its development, has a licensure procedure been adopted, nor are strong professional bodies such as national associations of social workers functioning. The exceptions are Sri Lanka and Bangladesh which claim some form of associations, but they are not strong and therefore able to influence the social work trajectory in their own countries. The Sri Lankan Association of Social Workers was founded in 1962 and the Association of Social Workers in Bangladesh seems to not be functioning anymore. In India some States have formed state level associations, but again to date a national association could not be formed due to regional differences, lack of national legislation and social work leadership.

International social work

Is there any need for international social work teaching and practice in the South Asia region? This question seems pertinent especially when social work is disjointed in this region. Communications with colleagues from the region, especially from India and Nepal at the 2010 joint world social work and social development conference at Stockholm, and email exchanges suggest that there is a significant need for, and interest in, teaching and practicing international social work in South Asia. Given the diversity and cultural and political issues present within the region, it is a fertile ground for international social work teaching and practice.

The current president of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) is a professor from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, India. The author of this chapter is currently serving as a member of the executive board of IASSW, is from India and worked in Nepal. Faculty members from the Sri Lankan School of Social Work and Institute of Social Welfare and Research, Dhaka University, are serving on the executive board of APASWE, providing evidence that social work educators from this region are actively associated with the regional and global social work organisations. There is also evidence that many schools from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and also countries like Nepal where social work education is just beginning, have made linkages with schools of social work around the globe to further strengthen the social work education and profession in the region (Nikku 2012b).

International organisations like the IASSW, International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and International Council of Social Welfare (ICSW) and regional organisations such as APASWE can play an important role in strengthening social work education in the South Asian region. A brief analysis shows that their presence in the region is weak, suggesting that there is a need for social workers from this region to actively participate, develop partnerships and share their concerns at these international and regional forums and make use of these bodies to strengthen social work in their own countries.

Social welfare programs and policies

From the above brief presentation on the status of social work in each of the countries in the region, we can conclude that social work has taken a back seat in most, if not, all the South Asian nations which do not provide social services and care as a matter of right for citizens, but do so on the basis of political needs and agendas. The wellbeing of the professional workforce who work for the wellbeing of others is also at a crossroad. Social work as a helping profession is in need of help. The level and scope of social welfare services and the role of civil society in each of these countries are also very varied.

South Asia is home for many non-governmental organisations in which trained social workers seek employment. The nonprofit sector, with its roots in volunteerism, increasingly plays a central role in South Asia's cultural, economic and social development. Throughout the region nonprofit organisations provide vital services especially to the poor and marginalised, address significant needs of communities, and are increasingly important alternative delivery mechanisms for needed services of citizens.

In the last 25 years or so, due to growing disenchantment with the functioning of the government and the fear that the 'market' may not reach everywhere, NGOs have increasingly been recognised as a 'third' institutional pillar for the development of an economy. Most of the activities carried out by the NGOs are on behalf of the government, making

them mere implementation agencies. The constraints and challenges South Asian NGOs face are excessive governmental control, a project-based culture and, more importantly, they lack a proper management system and model of their own. To cope with management problems, NGOs are heavily dependent on corporate sector management, which, most of the time, negates the values of this sector (Rahman 2007, 223). Many NGOs are not in a position or do not have the mandate to employ professional social workers as their employees. This leads to a problem of continuity in committed leadership as many NGOs do not have policies in place to prepare successive leaders. Social Work, though a young profession in the region, might provide answers to these issues.

Working with Muslim clients and communities

Around 62% of the world's Muslims live in South and Southeast Asia, with over 1 billion adherents (Pew Forum 2012). Pakistan, Bangladesh and India from the South Asia region are included in the world list of top 10 countries with the largest Muslim populations. India has the world's second-largest Muslim population (next to Indonesia) in raw numbers (roughly 176 million) though Muslims make up just 14.4% of India's 1.2 billion total population. The three countries of Pakistan, Bangladesh and India together account for about one-third of the global total Muslim population. This will have implications on how social work education is structured, course content and what values and philosophy are taught and practiced. Social work knowledge and skills in a particular country are socially constructed. A brief analysis of social work curricula in the countries clearly shows the evidence that they are influenced by Western models and hence not entirely culturally relevant to this region and particularly the Muslim dominant countries. In contrast, increasingly, models of social work emphasise the importance of understanding clients' worldviews for effective social work, and integration of spirituality in social work is increasingly being called for (Barise 2005). Further efforts are needed for localisation of social work within Muslim contexts (Sarker & Ahmadullah 1995) in the region.

Voices of social work educators

Social Work is contextual, yet increasingly crossing boundaries and national borders in South Asia. As discussed above, several key factors have challenged and influenced social work education and practice in this region. In addition, social work educators played a crucial role. Many challenges were reported by social work educator colleagues irrespective of their location in the region. Some educators (especially from Nepal and Sri Lanka) shared that it is very difficult for them to separate practice from teaching as their countries are going through transitions and conflicts and social work is yet to be recognised. Many social work educators from this region saw themselves as academic activists and are working closely with a range of practitioners, bureaucrats and policymakers who are often not trained in formal social work. Many of them also reported that there are not enough academic opportunities to progress compared to their counterparts in other (especially Western) parts of the world. Chan and Ng argued that 'it is important for social work teachers to adopt a holistic practitioner-researcher-educator role in their everyday practice in order to create the necessary impact to effect change' (2004, 312). To further illustrate the point, I present some voices which show the plight of social work educators:

In Nepal it is a young and emerging profession. It is only since about 16 years that social work education has been initiated in Nepal. There is less recognition in our profession by the state and other development organisations which is the biggest challenge. Another challenge is we do not have a social work association and hence it is difficult to intervene in serious social problem cases in the society. (Samjhana Oli, social work educator with seven years of experience at Nepal School of Social Work)

None of the Sri Lankan public universities offer SWE [social work education]. Only one institution provides diploma, degree and master degree in Social Work. The institution is under the purview of the Ministry of Social Services. The social work profession is not legalised yet. (Sri Lankan social work educator with 15 years of teaching experience)

Conclusions

I must acknowledge and admit that the analysis of the material for this chapter has deliberately used broad generalisations to make a point and to emphasise the differences between social work education and practice in respective countries to put the regional differences in focus.

In this chapter, I presented the status and scope of social work education in the South Asian region, which is in various stages of maturity as an academic discipline and a profession. Despite the diversity, common threads we see in the life and work experiences of social work educators and practitioners are: commitment to social justice, social work values and ethics, skills and competencies. One of the major challenges in the region is to indigenise social work literature (theories and practice) in order to reflect local culture and values. Another goal is to encourage indigenous social work practices to train social work graduates with appropriate skills and attitudes.

It is evident in this chapter that the presence and influence of social work education in the region is growing over the years and more departments/schools of social work have been established in the past decade. The caution here is in relation to the mushrooming growth of social work departments in affiliated colleges of Universities in India, leading to lower quality standards. The lack of clear state support for social work education in Pakistan and Bangladesh also needs to be analysed and addressed. Afghanistan needs immediate help in initiating social work training to be able to help the country's ongoing reconstruction process. At the same time the lack of presence of schools of social work or educational opportunities for professional social work in Bhutan and Maldives may be a point for further reflection. The presence of only a few schools in Nepal and Sri Lanka needs further assistance nationally and internationally and can make crucial contributions to the growth of social work in South Asia.

Social work education in the South Asia region is facing an uncertain future within the academy as it has to compete with other market-oriented disciplines. The social work educational programs are yet to gain public and state support and perceived relevance. There exist tensions among the Universities and institutions offering social work at different levels due to their differences in mission, purpose and values. In a healthy environment these differences should be serving as a springboard of ideas rather than hurdles. Despite these tensions, social work education has contributed to training of staff who in turn directly or indirectly contributed in addressing social issues in the region. In addition, social work education and practice in this region has been shaped by different forces such as religion,

political situation, availability of trained staff and donor influences in a particular country in the region. Social work knowledge and skills are socially constructed. The rich diversity of this region should trigger innovations in social work practice in working with different cultural and religious client groups.

To conclude, this chapter provides a valuable but brief comparison of, and discussion on, the social issues and status of social work education in the respective countries of the region. It also presents the formal and informal social welfare systems and the role social work education could play. This chapter also shows how social work in the South Asia region is diverse and also divided, and argues for an indigenous base of social work knowledge. It calls for a unified approach and recognises the need for governments, university administrators, and international and regional organisations to come forward to help social work educators and leaders to strengthen social work training and practice in their respective countries. I further argue for a common base of social work knowledge and praxis for South Asia as a distinct political and cultural region. I have also tried to raise further discussion on how social work institutions, academics, development practitioners and the state can further promote the process of academic and professional renewal in the region.

This chapter is dedicated to Shireen Rehmatullah of Pakistan and Armaity Desai of India, the founding President of the Asian and Pacific Association for Social Work Education (APASWE), for their lifetime passion to build social work scholarship.

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