INDIGENOUS SOCIAL WORK – IN THE LIGHT OF AMBEDKARISM

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ABSTRACT

One of the most important contributions of Dr.BR Ambedkar's life and his achievements in those dark ages towards lifting the spirits of his fellow caste brethren is to inspire, to liberate their mind that has, for many millennial, come to accept manacles and servitude impressed on them. Believed that, they are born to serve the 'twice born' and their existence is only as slaves. Freedom, dignity, self respect self-esteem, confidence were concepts that were alien and nonexistent in their mind. Ambedkar broke those shackles of their mind. His gifts of equality, human freedom and dignity have lifted the country from an impoverished nation to a power to be reckoned with (Akhilesweri 2013). He was a reformer, a thinker, a revolutionary and a doer. But such stories are rarely sung in countries like India, or restricting to certain areas. It has become natural order in the case of DR. BR Ambedkar, who left his mark in worthy causes but neglected in the history. Reciting such incredible contributions in the academics will inspire and guide future citizens. But it is unfortunate for having meagre discussions on Ambedkar in most relevant disciplines like social work. This short piece of writing attempts to bring about thoughtful discussion on relevance of Dr. BR Ambedkar to Social Work Profession and practices in India. The paper also argues that 'Ambedkarism' is the indigenous human rights and social justice frameworks to inspire human service professions like Social Work to flourish and accomplish meet its mission. Prime objectives of the paper is to focus on philosophy, aims and objectives of social work and what social work ought to do in Indian scenario?, to brief about Ambedkarism and its relevance to social order and democracy, social justice and human rights. Finally spotlights the essence of social thought of Dr. Ambedkar to social work profession and social work education.

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Social Work

Social work a benevolent profession originated along with the industrialization, based on humanitarian and democratic ideals. A hallmark of the social work profession is its long-standing contextualist orientation (Weick 1999), in which person-environment perspectives serve as core components of the social work knowledge base. At the same time, there has been considerable debate about specific elaboration of the relationship between human development, behavior, and the social environment (Bloom 1996). Its beginning been focused on meeting human needs and on developing human potential and resources. Social

Work is a profession whose purpose is to bring about social changes in society and social functioning of individuals towards social & sustainable development. According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), "the primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed and living in poverty" (NASW 1999). The International Federation of Social Workers defines the purpose of social work as including the promotion of social change and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being (IFSW 2000). According to Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), the purpose of the social work profession is to "promote human and community wellbeing". The major focus of Social work on well being of the individual and the social reform of social systems, social change, relying on human rights, especially social justice and promoting consciousness raising and supporting community organization and collective action. (UNO 2004).

Reviews of the definition of the mission of social work maintain the focus on marginalized people's empowerment, but add an emphasis on global and cultural sensitivity (Bidgood 2003). Furthermore, that purpose "is actualized through its quest for social and economic justice, the prevention of conditions that limit human rights, the elimination of poverty, and the enhancement of the quality of life for all persons". Hence, the pursuit of social and economic justice is central to social work's purpose. Social justice refers to the creation of social institutions that support the welfare of individuals and groups (www.cesj.org n.d.). Economic justice, then, refers to those aspects of social justice that relate to economic well-being, such as a livable wage, pay equity, job discrimination, and social security. Social work is also concerned with the provision of welfare services, when people's capacity for responding to the demands of life is strained, when capacity growth seems unattainable and when important decisions elude resolution.

Social work is also concerned with the participation of the individual and group differences it is often forced to mediate between the people and the state and other authorities, to champion particular causes, and to provide protection when state action for the public good threatens the rights, freedom of particular person or groups. Human rights are inseparable from social work theory, values and ethics and practices. Rights corresponding to the needs have to be

upheld and fostered, and they embody the justification and motivations for social work action. Advocacy of such rights must therefore be an integral part of social work. Social work as a discipline focuses on theoretical and philosophical positions such as social justice, equality, and empowerment. Social Work is based on the philosophy of scientific humanism, with an assumption, that the individual goods and social goods are interlinked.

The Social Worker

Social work practitioners face individuals with needs, cognitions, wants, hopes, plans, and learning capacities who are faced with (un) responsive, discriminating, and oppressive social systems and cultural environments, from the family to world society.The professional Social Worker has to develop his ability to give himself an intelligent, skillful and disinterested service to others. To be eminently practical, Manshardt propounded that the activities of a high grade school of Social Work should fall into three general fields: the Academic Curriculum encompassing adequate knowledge of human nature, appreciation of environmental background, an adequate philosophy and conception of normal human relations and knowledge of all other available sources of relief; practical work or Field Work and Social Research which is both scholarly and accurate while being eminently practical dealing with the everyday problems of social life (Manshardt 1985). The tasks of the social workers, envisaged in relation to these social realities, are those of the catalytic agent for developing, and modifying current policies, service and institutional structures whenever necessary; educating the people to recognize their inherent capacity for action and to identify the policies/institutional and socio-political structures that exploit them, or to identify structures which do not achieve social goals for all; to assist the micro-action which services the interests of all its groups; (giving primary emphasis to the weakest segments). The social worker has to act as the enabler, guide, teacher, advocate, broker, and negotiator and sometimes as the one to lead the confrontation, when this is indicated, on behalf of the client system he/she must serve, especially the most vulnerable sections of our society. What is sought to be achieved is to rearrange our priorities so that the primary problems affecting the larger segment of our population receive greater emphasis than the residual problems (http://www.tiss.edu n.d.).

Social Work Education and Practices in India

The basis of all social work is the deficiency of every legal organization of society. A perfectly functioning organization of the whole society, a social mechanism embracing all mankind would not leave room for social work, but such a mechanism is unimaginable (Tillich 1962). The anecdote of Independent India is nothing different, as an experimental hub for Globalization, illiteracy, unemployment, rampant corruption and crime, unresolved class question, uneven economic distribution, escalating gender disparities and other plunging social indicators, creates a space for intervention of human service professions.

In 1975, one of the leading social work educators wrote that social work had remained almost static for more than 25 years. After a decade this still hold true (Devi 2009). During the period of seven and half decades after its inception in India achievements are very few the problems and challenges are very many (Rambabu 2012:). The major shortcoming of social work education in India is its inability to sufficiently indigenize its knowledge-base. The basic teaching material with respect to interventionist methods (the holy trinity of social case work, social group work and community organization) is still primarily American. The challenge, as mentioned before, has not been met and there is often a lingering doubt in the mind of many social work educators and trained social workers whether social work in India can afford to be only concerned with specific individuals, groups and communities when the problems are really the problems of large masses of people (Gore, 1985) (Rambabu 2012:). Many of the problems that are identified as problems of the socially oppressed and economically deprived sections cannot be called adjustmental problems. The social and cultural context of these problems is well beyond the reach of moral-ethical and /or psycho-social paradigm of intervention (Srivatsava 1999). Since social work literature, modes of practice, approaches, theories, have been heavily borrowed from western countries, so we need to develop the indigenous approaches too. This requires that the academicians and practitioners must document their experiences so as to facilitate the process of developing indigenous approaches (Thomas: 2010).

"Second Review Committee for Social Work Education of the
University Grants   Commission reiterated the need to shift the
emphasis from remedial to developmental functions in the training of
social workers, and to widen it from a narrow urban to a wider rural

and tribal base to meet the needs of the majority in our population. Poverty and population are interrelated problems which confront us and at the interface of these problems are illiteracy; malnutrition; poor habitat (sanitation, potable water, housing, communication and accessibility to services); low productivity; unemployment; underemployment; and the disabilities resulting from social and economic inequity, and the exploitation of the vulnerable and weaker sections of our society. Without the development of an indigenous base, educational programmes of social work will continue to rely heavily on western textual material. We need to give top priority for producing materials which are indigenous in their reference and relevant to local situations" (http://www.tiss.edu n.d.).

"The third review committee in 2001 spoke the need of relating social work education to the social realities. It recommended the curriculum to be divided in three sets. These are: 1) Core set includes the philosophy, ideology, values, ethics, theory and concepts. 2) The supportive set deals with knowledge and skills to assist the core set. 3) The interdisciplinary set includes theories, concepts from other disciplines which relates with social work according the students choice" (Thomas 2010).

Caste: nature and Impact on Indian Society

Social discrimination is a universal phenomenon which is reflected in various forms among different people across regions. Hindu society has historically been marked by a rigid form of social stratification based on the varna-jati model of social organization in which the Brahminical religious principle, namely purity and pollution, played a central role in defining social hierarchy and separation. Caste, however, is a unique determinant of social discrimination in the Indian Sub-continent (Acharya 2010). Sir Henry Maine, the famous British jurist and legal historian described the caste system as "The most disastrous and blighting of all institutions." (Maineme. s 1905). M.A. Sherring referred to the caste system as "The most baneful, hard-hearted and cruel social system that could possibly be invented

for damning the human race." (Sherring 1974). This led to a variety of social inequalities characterized by social oppression and economic exploitation (selvam 2007). The kind of inequality inherent in the caste system is called "graded inequality" (Jaffrelot 2009). The slavery system of Hindu social order under the Varna and caste system the shudras, Ati-shudras, Melecchas and women were not only economically enslaved, but also enslaved socially, physically, legally, educationally, culturally, religiously and mentally (Ballal 2009). Ambedkar called the philosophy of Brahminism as the technique of suppression, with the principle philosophy of graded inequality of different classes, complete disarmament of shudras and excluding them from power, education and acquiring property. Furthermore to preserve patriarchal system and complete subjugation and suppression of women. (Ambedkar n.d.).

Contribution of Dr. Ambedkar:

"Noble is your aim and sublime and glorious is your mission. Blessed are those who are awakened to their duty to those among whom they are born. Glory to those, who devote their time, talents and themselves to the amelioration of slavery. Glory to those who would   reap their struggle for the liberation of the enslaved in spite of heavy odds, car pine humiliation, storms and dangers till the downtrodden secure their Human Rights." (Ambedkar n.d.).

At the ideological level some argue that attitudinal change will help address exclusion. But those who argue along these lines forget that attitude is an outcome of the social structure. It is the social location of a person that guides his or her attitude, and the attitude in turn either reinforces the skewed social order or calls for change. The only choice open for him to save his people from their animal existence was to fight for their emancipation and their human rights (M. Rao 2010). Being a victim of caste, Dr. Ambedkar analyzed Hindu society before starting his struggle against untouchability and the caste system. He was a scholar as much as a man of action – in any case before becoming one. In his writings, Ambedkar tried hard to show the mechanisms of the caste system and clarified the origin of untouchability in order to support his fight for equality (Jaffrelot 2009). He wrote extensively on the roots of the caste

system, Hinduism *per se*, the ill effects of the caste order, the minority question, the vision of a caste-free society, the gender question, contemporary politics and vision of India. Ambedkar came out with a hard-hitting critique in his book '*Annihilation of Castes*' (1936), pointing out that what was implicit in the caste system was *not* merely division of labour but *also* a division of labours. Dr. Ambedkar's attack on the caste system was not merely aimed at challenging the hegemony of the upper castes but had broader connotation of economic growth and development. He argued that the caste system had reduced the mobility of labour and capital which in turn, impeded economic growth and development in India. Dr. Ambedkar calls for people and institutions to have an action on the social cause. In Ambedkar's world and work, 'Dalit movement' was only a launch pad for a larger reform movement strongly grounded in humanism, human rights and western values (P.Radhakrishnan 2013).

Dr. Ambedkar succeeded in establishing the untouchables as scheduled castes and as a politically relevant category both to themselves and to others, thus bringing the untouchables from invisibility to visibility, from silence to articulated protest. By the early twentieth century, armed with his intellectual sophistry and personal sense of pain, Ambedkar became the most formidable critic and opponent of the caste order on India's national scene, articulating the demands of the untouchables and carrying the message of their agony to the highest corridors of power. Ambedkar tried to endow the lower castes with a glorious history of sons of the soil to help them acquire an alternative – not-caste based – identity, to regain their self respect and overcome their divisions (Jaffrelot 2009). In *The untouchables, who were they and why they became Untouchables?* (1948), Ambedkar refutes Western authors explaining caste hierarchy by resorting to racial factors (Dr.B.R.Ambedkar n.d.). 'Dalit' has become understood today as embodying the sense of being oppressed and therefore, the need to revolt against oppression. The political usage of the term is inclusive of all who are "broken and oppressed" viz., SCs and STs, neo-Buddhists, workers, peasants, landless labourers, women and religious minorities who are oppressed by caste and exploited economically.

The comparison between the oppressed groups is natural despite different historical situations because the process of liberation is almost similar (KAPOOR 2004). Dr. Ambedkar gave

effective expression to the grievances of the rural poor through mass movements. His successful struggle against the prevailing land tenure system called "kothi" liberated a vast majority of the rural poor from an extreme form of economic exploitation. Land is a way to social justice, in a society which was segregated on hierarchical values and where women were not even considered as equal human being. Hence it was important to take the land beyond just welfare-ism or from those who use it for their own agenda where people are no more the decision makers but surrender their decisions to a few 'learned people' or 'revolutionaries'. Land plays a diabolical role in the life of rural people. Being the main source of subsistence, land is metamorphosed in to socio-economic reality (E Nancharaiah n.d.). He highlighted the issue of land and advocated for Co-operative agriculture.

Dr. Ambedkar also raised the Women's issue as Member of Legislative Council during his debate in Bombay Legislative Assembly on 10th Nov. 1938; he strongly advocated family planning measures and said that besides many other problems giving birth to, too many children negatively affects Mother's health. Later in the year 1942, He also introduced Maternity Benefit Bill during his tenure as Labour Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council. From 1942 to 1946, Dr. Ambedkar was instrumental in bringing about several labour reforms including establishment of employment exchanges, generally laying the foundations of industrial relations in Independent India. His ministry also included irrigation, power and other public works. He played an important role in shaping the irrigation policies especially the Damodar Valley Project (Ingle 2010).

After Independence, Dr. Ambedkar became the first Law Minister of India. Even while drafting the Indian Constitution (as the Chairman, Drafting Committee) in 1948-49, the economist in Dr. Ambedkar was very much alive. He strongly recommended democracy as the 'governing principle of human relationship' but emphasized that principles of equality, liberty and fraternity which are the cornerstones of democracy should not be interpreted narrowly in terms of the political rights alone. He emphasised the social and economic dimensions of democracy and warmed that political democracy cannot succeed when there is no social and economic democracy. He gave an expression to the objective of economic democracy by incorporating the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Indian Constitution. Further to ensure women's status Dr. Ambedkar also introduced an

emancipatory bill (the Hindu code Bill) in Parliament which intended mainly 1) to abolish different marriage systems prevalent among Hindus and to establish monogamy as the only legal system; 2) Conferment of right to property and adoption on women; 3) restitution of conjugal rights and judicial separation; attempts to unify the Hindu Code in tune with progressive and modern thought (Katulkar 2008). Discrimination was a menace to be guarded against if the Fundamental Rights were to be reared in country like India... where it was possible for discrimination to be practiced on a vast scale and in a relentless manner. Fundamental Rights could have no meaning unless (a) provision was made for protection against discrimination on the ground of race or creed or social status (S. Rao n.d.). Social engineering and the raising of awareness of the practice of untouchability and caste discrimination among the higher castes on a continuous basis through education, campaigns and social work are equally necessary (Thorat 2009).

Ambedkarism

'Ambedkarism' is today a living force in India (Omvedt, Dalits and the Democratic Revolution n.d.), "a Movement of Liberation of man in this life, suffering in the insulted, inhumane, irrational, unscientific, unjust and unequal social order, to establish right relationship between man and man in an Ideal Society of Justice - Liberty - Equality – Fraternity based on the new revolutionary ideology of Humanism". (Ballal 2009). Ambedkarism is of great relevance to Indian society even today in achieving social justice, removal of untouchability, in establishing equality and freedom and true democracy. Democratic socialism is the keynote of his political thought and constitutionalism is the only way to achieve it (Ishita Aditya Ray 2011). In one of his last essays on 'Buddha or Karl Marx', Ambedkar had rephrased this as 'The function of philosophy is to reconstruct the world and not to waste its time in explaining the origin of the world'. (Omvedt, Buddhism in india: challenging Brahmanism and caste 2003). The incredible contributions made by Dr. Ambedkar as an economist is only due to his society oriented economic philosophy and relevant policies. The economic philosophy underlying is best captured in his own phrase: *Bahujan Hitaya Bahujan Sukhay* (i.e., Greatest Good to the largest number of people). Ambedkar's philosophy is couched in social, religious and moral considerations. The focal point of philosophy is the oppressed and the depressed, aims at giving life to those who are disowned, elevating those who are suppressed and enabling those who are downtrodden and

granting liberty, equality and justice to all irrespective of their castes. In his conception of exploitation less society, democracy has an extraordinary role which he defined as 'one person, one vote' and 'one vote, one value'. Democracy means empowerment of any person for participating in the process of decision making relating to him, democracy means liberty equality and fraternity- Ambedkar's definition of democracy had such tone (Ishita Aditya Ray 2011). Democracy rests on four premises 'the individual is an end in himself' 'the individual has certain inalienable rights which must be guaranteed to him by the constitution', 'the individual shall not be required to relinquish any of his constitutional rights as a condition precedent to the receipt of a privilege', 'the state shall not delegate powers to private persons to govern others'.

Relevance of Dr. Ambedkar to Social Work Profession:

> *"You must abolish your slavery yourselves. Do not depend for its abolition upon god or a superman. Remember that it is not enough that a people are numerically in the majority. They must be always watchful, strong and self-respecting to attain and maintain success. We must shape our course ourselves and by ourselves"* (Ambedkar n.d., 67).

The response to exclusion is inclusion. Inclusion has to analyse and understand the processes and outcomes of exclusion and work out mechanisms for inclusion. The field of social work purports to highly prize the development of theory that provides both logically supported and empirically based explanations of the causes of social problems and of the presumptive mechanisms of action of psychosocial interventions (Thyer 2008). Two classical theorists Mary Richmond and Jane Addams, who paved the way for the two main theoretical traditions of social work focusing on individuals and society. Mary Richmond focused on the individual and Jane Addams's basically focused on the structure and culture of society and their influence upon the individual. The causes of social problems are to be sought in societal structures and their cultural legitimation. It is essential to develop social change programs on the basis of scientific knowledge and genuine research (Soydan 1999).

"A historian ought to be exact, sincere and impartial; free from passion, unbiased by interest, fear, resentment or affection; and faithful to the truth, which is the mother of history the preserver of great actions, the enemy of oblivion, the witness of the past, the director of the future". (Ambedkar n.d.).

Adoption of a good theory can help a practitioner or researcher make sense of a given psychosocial phenomenon. Dr. Ambedkar held that reason and scientific temper had the potential – for all people everywhere – to challenge unexamined tradition and prejudices by cultivating a collective, democratic "will to inquire, to examine, to discriminate, to draw conclusions only on the basis of evidence after taking pains to gather all available evidence. His relentless efforts and eminent scholarship reinstate the Western and Vedic views of understanding Indian society. He laid a new scientific, rationalistic and humanistic approach towards building a "Nation" which is in the process of making.

The systems theory of Luhmann states that social problems are generated by the exclusion of people from social systems such as the family and educational, economic, political, and cultural systems. The main focus is on understanding the structure and dynamics of and between biological, psychic, and social/cultural systems, and on building the trans-disciplinary explanatory base for social work (Warren.K 1998). The Ecosystems perspective views that the problems arise when there is a poor fit between a person's environment and her/his needs, capacities, rights, and aspirations. Change endeavours focus on transactions instead of an isolated improvement of the social functioning of individuals (Germain 1996). Human behavior and the social environment have always played a key role in the social work curriculum, they have undergone substantive change over time, from a primary focus on human behavior and development heavily influenced by psychoanalytic theory to a focus informed by ecological perspectives. (Susan I. Stone 2008) From the 1960s to the 1980s, ''radical social work'' – neo Marxist, structural, feminist, antiracist, anti oppressive, or anti discriminatory – emerged as a distinctive theoretical and practice approach (Staub-Bernasconi.S 1991). ''Structural theory'' extended the approach to all forms of overlapping and mutually reinforcing injustices in relation to class, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, and religious and ethnic minority status (Mullaly.B 1997).

Along with present and continuous inequality and exclusion, one needs to comprehend historical and changed forms of inequality and exclusion so as to respond in an appropriate manner. Socially committed Social Sciences and area studies about India have to develop comprehensive analytical tools and categories in order to express and substantiate adequately the *plight of the Indian people* (Klaus 2005). An integrated approach is required to combat poverty, unemployment, underdevelopment, etc. Again social Action is essential to create necessary conditions and climate for social work (Kulkarni.V.M 1967). In order to improve oppressive social conditions, social action as a method can provide new direction in social work education and practice in India, and a need to reorganize curriculum, field work, methods of teaching and research. Chhaya Patel calls it indigenization of social work education, adjusting, therapeutic, ameliorative, clinical and social control functions of social work are inadequate. There is a need to have developmental orientation (Patel 2001).

There are about 350 schools in India as per the sources gathered from experts of social work from across the country (Rambabu 2012:). In the process of imparting social work training 'Ambedkarism' lays foundations for identifying, understanding, analyzing and prioritizing issues in India. Ambedkarism is of great relevance to Indian society even today in achieving social justice, in establishing equality and freedom and true democracy. It is imperative to recognize and incorporate the valuable contributions of people and institutions in Social Work practices. The philosophers and academicians in the social work discipline should adopt Ambedkarism as a guiding force in building native knowledge base and prioritizing the Social Work goals.

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