

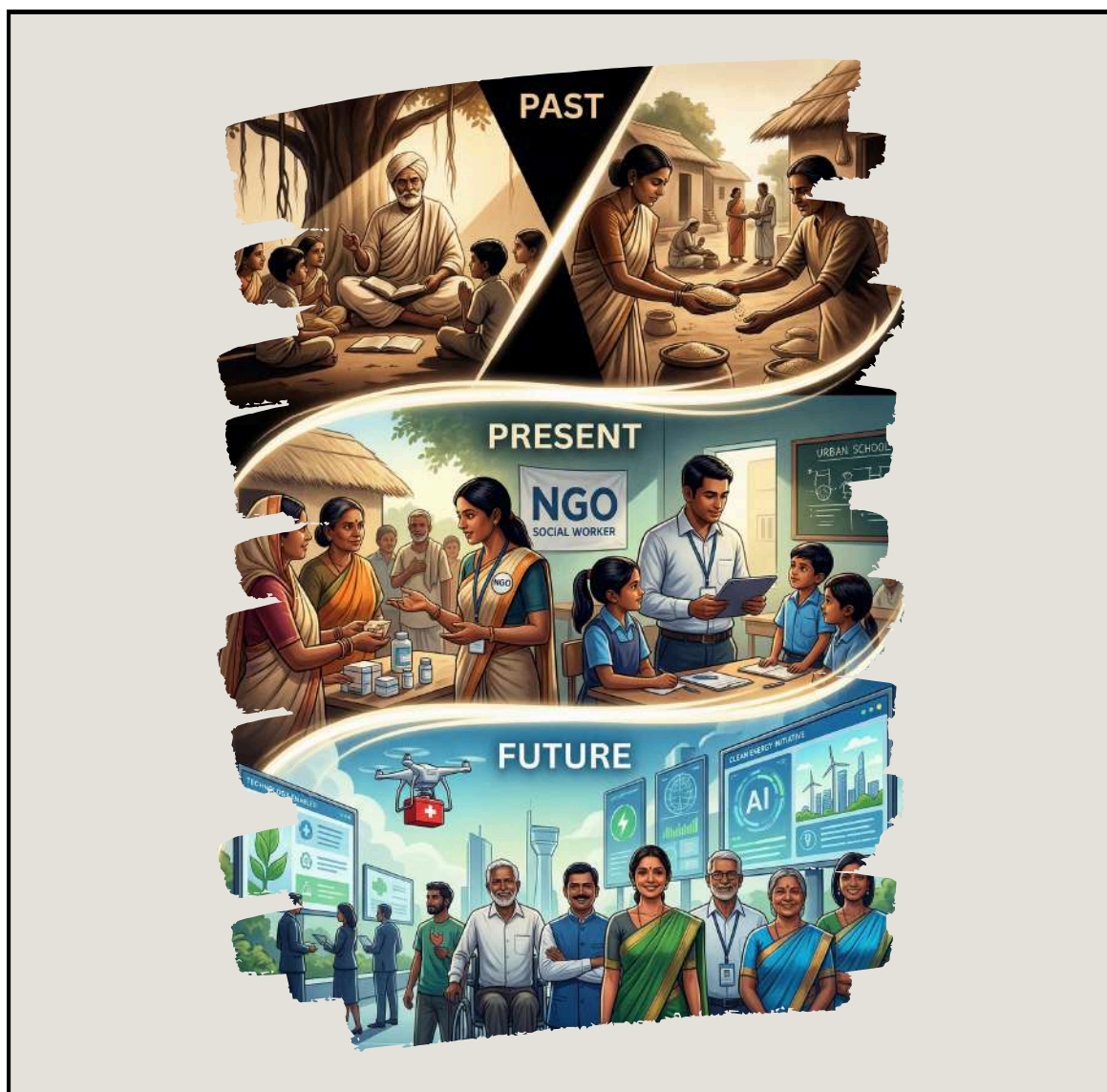


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“Social Work in India: Past, Present, and Future.”

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MESSAGE FROM EDITOR

Dear Esteemed Readers,

Greetings from the National Association of Professional Social Workers in India (NAPSWI),

As you are aware, NAPSWI has been consistently publishing its Newsletter, featuring social work-related updates, members' achievements, and valuable contributions from across the country. With the growing enthusiasm and rich inputs from our members, the need for a dedicated platform for scholarly and thematic articles was strongly felt.

In response to this collective vision, we are pleased to present the second issue of the Social Work Digest, a platform exclusively devoted to thought-provoking articles contributed by NAPSWI members.

The theme for this issue is "Social Work in India: Past, Present, and Future." This edition aims to reflect on the historical foundations of social work in India, critically engage with contemporary practices and challenges, and envision the future directions of the profession in a rapidly changing social landscape.

We sincerely hope that this issue will further strengthen academic dialogue, encourage critical reflections, and foster collective engagement within the social work community.

We are also happy to reiterate that this initiative continues alongside our Journal of Social Work Education, Research and Action, for which a dedicated website will be launched soon.

The theme for next issue is "Social Work Practice in different fields" including Best practices. We are also planning May issue on "Case Studies from Social Work Practice Fields " These case studies will be vetted by senior practitioners.

Awaiting your feedback, comments, suggestions and contributions

Warm regards,

*Prof. Sanjai Bhatt
Editor
Social Work Digest*

FUTURE CHALLENGES OF PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IN INDIA

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Introduction: Professional social work education in India has evolved significantly over the past several decades. A major milestone occurred in 1936 with the establishment of the Sir Dorabji Tata Graduate School of Social Work, which was later renamed the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS). The institution was founded by Dr. Clifford Manshardt, with the support of Dr. J. M. Kumarappa, who later became its first director. The establishment of this institute marked the beginning of professional education in social work in India.

The primary objective of professional social work education was to develop trained professionals capable of addressing social problems through systematic methods and ethical practice. Social work as a profession is committed to promoting social justice, empowering marginalized communities, and enhancing the well-being of individuals and society.

According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), the mission of social work is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of people, especially those who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty (NASW, 1996). Social work also focuses on understanding the relationship between individuals and their social environment.

Despite its long history, social work education in India faces numerous challenges. One major concern is the rapid and unregulated expansion of social work institutions across the country. Currently, more than 300 institutions offer social work education in India.

Many of these institutions operate as private, self-financed colleges with high tuition fees. In some cases, social work education has become commercialized, which contradicts the ethical foundations of the profession.

Another issue is the increasing popularity of distance education programs in social work. Although such programs provide access to education for many students, they often lack adequate fieldwork supervision and practical training. This limitation significantly affects the quality of professional social work education.

Additionally, the expansion of institutions has created regional imbalances, unhealthy competition, and lack of uniform academic standards. These concerns highlight the need for systematic planning and regulation to maintain the quality and credibility of social work education in India.

Course Structure and System of Curriculum:

The curriculum forms the foundation of professional education. It reflects the philosophical, historical, psychological, and sociological dimensions of a discipline. In social work education, the curriculum should integrate theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and professional values.

However, the curriculum in many social work institutions in India has become outdated and inadequate to address contemporary social realities. Rapid socio-economic changes require continuous revision and modernization of academic content.

The knowledge component of social work education should include areas such as:

1. Social structure and social institutions
2. Human behavior and psychology
3. Social problems and social policies
4. Social planning and administration
5. Globalization and development issues
6. Feminism, multiculturalism, and social justice perspectives
7. Emerging areas such as community development and project management

In addition to theoretical knowledge, skill development is essential in social work training. Professional skills such as communication, counseling, group facilitation, community mobilization, and project management enable social workers to translate theoretical knowledge into effective practice.

Social work education must also emphasize ethical and ideological foundations, including humanistic values, social justice, human rights, empowerment, and liberation perspectives.

In the Indian context, the integration of Ambedkar thought and Buddhist philosophy can contribute to developing culturally relevant social work approaches.

Introducing specialized electives and interdisciplinary learning opportunities can further strengthen the professional competence of social work students.

Fieldwork Practicum:

Fieldwork practicum is one of the most important components of social work education. It provides students with an opportunity to apply classroom knowledge in real-life social situations under professional supervision.

Through fieldwork training, students gain experience in working with individuals, groups, and communities. It enables them to develop professional competence, critical thinking, and practical skills necessary for effective social work practice.

In most institutions, social work students are required to spend approximately 15 hours per week in fieldwork, which amounts to about 225 hours per semester.

Fieldwork activities generally include:

1. Orientation programs
2. Observation visits
3. Individual and group conferences

4. Rural camps and community development activities
5. Study tours and internships
6. Concurrent fieldwork placements

Despite its importance, several challenges affect the quality of fieldwork practicum in India. Many universities and field agencies fail to recognize the significance of structured fieldwork training. Furthermore, several institutions face difficulties such as a shortage of qualified fieldwork supervisors and limited collaboration with professional organizations.

To address these issues, it is necessary to develop a standardized fieldwork manual for social work institutions across India. At the same time, fieldwork placements should be based on students' interests, learning objectives, and the relevance of field agencies.

Declining Quality of Students:

During the early stages of social work education in India, many talented and motivated students were attracted to the profession due to its social relevance and promising career prospects. However, the situation has gradually changed.

1. With the expansion of private institutions and the increasing popularity of other professional courses such as management, engineering, and information technology, social work education has lost some of its appeal among high-performing students.
2. As a result, many institutions face challenges related to:
3. Low academic preparedness among students
4. Lack of professional commitment and motivation
5. Poor attendance and limited engagement in academic activities

In some cases, social work is perceived as a secondary option for students who are unable to secure admission in other professional courses. This perception negatively affects the professional identity and credibility of social work education.

To address this issue, institutions must strengthen admission procedures, promote awareness about the importance of social work, and provide career guidance to prospective students.

Weak Research Base in Social Work

Research plays a crucial role in the development of any academic discipline. It contributes to knowledge generation, policy formulation, and evidence-based practice. In social work, research helps in understanding social problems and designing effective interventions.

However, social work education in India suffers from a weak research culture. Many institutions lack adequate infrastructure and trained faculty for conducting high-quality research.

Some of the major challenges include:

1. Limited research funding
2. Insufficient research training for students
3. Lack of research-oriented faculty
4. Limited use of technology and statistical tools

Strengthening research education and establishing regional research centers can significantly improve the research capacity of social work institutions in India.

Future Perspectives and Challenges

The social work profession in India is currently facing a critical transition. Rapid socio-economic changes, globalization, and increasing social inequalities demand innovative and context-specific approaches to social work practice.

Several strategic initiatives are necessary to strengthen social work education in India. First, there is a need to establish a National Council for Social Work Education under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment or the Ministry of Education to regulate and standardize social work education.

Second, partnerships between universities, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations should be strengthened to improve field training opportunities.

Third, social work institutions should promote research and theory development by establishing regional research centers.

Fourth, teaching methods and practice orientation should shift from purely clinical approaches toward organizational development, community engagement, and policy advocacy.

Fifth, there is a need to develop culturally relevant theoretical frameworks that incorporate Indian philosophical traditions, including humanistic values, social justice principles, and Ambedkarite perspectives.

Finally, capacity-building programs should be organized for social work educators, particularly in newly established institutions.

Although employability has become an important aspect of professional education, the fundamental values of social work such as social justice, human rights, and empowerment—must remain central to the profession.

Therefore, social work institutions in India must work collectively to establish minimum academic standards while encouraging innovation and contextual relevance. Such efforts will ensure the continued growth and relevance of professional social work education in India.

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"FROM AWARENESS TO ACTION: A SOCIAL WORKER'S JOURNEY IN CANCER PREVENTION"

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Introduction: Every person in a society aspires to live a healthy, tolerant, safe, inclusive and fair life. Social work services have an essential contribution to make in achieving that goal. Worldwide the incidence and prevalence of cancer is increasing day by day and this also followed in India. Social workers play a vital role in promoting health and well-being, especially in cancer prevention and care. As cancer incidence rises in India—breast and cervical cancers being most common in women—social workers support patients and communities by addressing psychosocial needs, linking to resources, and promoting coping strategies. They are key contributors across the cancer continuum, from prevention and early detection to treatment and survivorship, helping individuals navigate the social, behavioral, and environmental factors that influence health. “The whole person in the context of the behavioral, social and environmental factors that influence cancer” (NCI, 2002).

Social work: Social work is a practice-based profession that promotes social change, development, cohesion and the empowerment of people and communities. The key components of social work include social and economic assessment, comprehensive patient and family counseling, economic support measures and post treatment follow-up and social rehabilitation. Social workers help individuals, families, and communities navigate social, economic, and health challenges. They provide counseling, lead support groups, connect patients to healthcare services, and reduce the social, financial, and psychological hardships of illness. They also promote healthy lifestyles, disease prevention, and access to care, empowering people to improve their well-being.

Social worker: A social worker is a professional who works with the people to help themselves, so that people can manage their daily lives with respect and dignity. Social workers can provide counseling, guidance and help in the form of helping the people to help themselves. Social workers are the key factors in cancer prevention.

Cancer screening & prevention: Cancer screening & prevention aims to detect cancer before symptoms appear. Screening cut the number of people who die from the disease, or prevent deaths from cancer altogether and cut the number of people who develop the disease to explore the role of social worker in cancer screening which is increasing day by day in changing life style. This article is written with the help of secondary sources, online journals, experts' expression, self-observation, personal experience of clinic settings, interviews with patients and other assessments to explore the role of social workers in cancer screening.

Social Workers on the Frontline of Cancer Prevention

Social work as a profession is much broader than the other professions. Social workers may be engaged in different types of occupation like hospitals, clinical settings, schools, labor welfare

department, courts, Non-governmental organization, mental illness hospitals, public relation officers in banks & railways, and many other sectors. Social workers are key members of the health care team and intervene at multiple levels and in multiple systems to optimize quality of life and quality of care. Social workers by providing practical help, counseling, deals with patient and family centered care. Cancer is a life threatening, yet treatable, disease. Although early detection can improve health outcomes and keep quality of life, many people Cancer Screening is the early identification and treatment of asymptomatic persons who have already developed subclinical (unrecognized) disease by use of periodic tests and examinations.

1. **Motivation:** Motivation is the process that initiates, guides, and maintains goal-oriented behaviors. It plays an important role in cancer screening. Social workers motivate a person, group and community for cancer screening in healthy people before symptoms appear, when cancer may be easier to treat.
2. **Counselling:** counsel people, groups and families. In the role of counselor, the social worker helps people to express their needs, clarify their problems, explore resolution strategies, and apply intervention strategies, and apply intervention strategies to develop and expand the capacities of people to deal with their problems more effectively.
3. **Facilitator/ Enabler/:** Social worker act as an enabler in helping the other person in cancer screening program, Social worker are involved in gathering group of people together for education of cancer screening, where to go for investigation, where to go for further treatment when the report comes positive.
4. **Liaison Agent:** social workers act as a liaison agent in any area whether it is community, hospital or any other institutions; they serve as liaison between schools, hospitals or government agencies and people or families. It makes things easier for both.
5. **Educator:** Social workers act as an educator in cancer screening programs. Education about early detection and cancer prevention. Health education interventions are critical in improving knowledge and perceptions, and increasing self-efficacy of women about cancer and screening. Social workers teach people about the importance of cancer screening, risk factor, symptoms and treatment.
6. **Community Change Agent:** Social workers can mobilize and organize people for cancer screening. Social workers as a change Agents take an active role in transforming themselves, their colleagues, their institutions, and their local communities, to create a positive, productive, just and sustainable future.
7. **Coordinator:** Social worker is also a good coordinator in the cancer screening field, he coordinates and organizes setting of clinics, camps, training program, awareness activities and other services. Collaborating with professionals from other discipline in delivering comprehensive care.
8. **Resource Utilisation:** Social workers have been forced to be creative and skillful in generating and mobilizing resources. There is an effective intervention for use of existing resource use.
9. **Case Manager:** Social workers work as a case manager in any area especially in cancer screening where all the history of patients requires any time till their treatment is done. Maintaining case histories and preparing reports are the necessary and must for any social worker.
10. **Referral & Follow-Up:** Referral of screened positive patients to tertiary care for further

evaluation and treatment. Screening is not the job of social work but to make sure the further treatment is also a part of it. a social worker can play an active role in patient follow-up ensuring that the patient does not have any problems during treatment and their situation has improved..

11. **Community Outreach Program:** Social workers help in extending the cancer screening facilities to the rural areas by organizing awareness and screening camps.
12. **Documentation And Maintenance Of Records:** documentation and record keeping is the important aspect of any health institution especially where we deal with patients. Social workers play an important role in documentation; it helps in continuity and quality of care.
13. **Training and Development:** Social workers are often involved in teaching people about resources, importance of cancer screening, medical diagnosis, cancer prevention.
14. **Researcher:** Research is a critical tool for all social workers. The process of becoming a researcher should start during social work education. Research may be used to check the effectiveness of practice in which the social worker engaged and the programs they carry out, development of new policies and programs from the research.
15. **Prevention and Promotion of Cancer:** Social workers play a vital role in cancer prevention by educating communities about risk factors, early signs, available screenings, vaccinations, and preventive measures. As we know, “prevention is better than cure,” their efforts help save lives and promote healthier communities.

Conclusion: Social workers have a very important and responsible role in cancer awareness and screening. We can fight cancer disease by educating people about cancer awareness, importance of cancer screening and other preventive measures. To meet the goal of a cancer free society we required a determined, dedicated, professional, well qualified and well versed social worker so that they can approach the society to fight with cancer.

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PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORK IN INDIA: FROM COMMUNITY TRADITION TO FUTURE-READY PRACTICE

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Introduction: At its core, social work in India has always been rooted in community, compassion, and collective responsibility. Long before it emerged as a formal profession, communities supported vulnerable people through shramdaan (voluntary manual labour), shared care and a strong sense of social duty. Over time, these traditions evolved into an organized field that today responds to complex social challenges across different sectors.

World Social Work Day reminds us that social work is both a profession and a collective effort to promote dignity, hope, and social harmony. In India, the profession has developed through a combination of cultural traditions, community participation, and gradual professionalization. Today, social workers operate within systems involving Governments, Civil Society Organizations, and Corporate Institutions while remaining closely connected to community values.

This article reflects on the evolution of professional social work in India by examining its past foundations, present developments, and future direction. It highlights the influence of Gandhian philosophy, the shift toward rights-based practice, and the growing connection of social work with global frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) approaches.

The Past: Gandhian Philosophy and Community-Centred Foundations

Social work in India existed long before it became a formal profession. Traditionally, communities supported vulnerable people through collective care, shared resources, and a strong sense of social responsibility. Helping others was seen as a moral duty rather than a specialized occupation. Indian philosophical ideas such as Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam—the belief that the world is one family—encouraged inclusion and collective wellbeing. During the 19th century, social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar worked to challenge social injustices and promote education and equality. The ideas of Mahatma Gandhi also played an important role in shaping social action in India. Gandhi emphasized self-reliance, dignity of labour, village development, and people's participation in solving their own problems. Over time, these ideas and reform movements developed into more organized social service efforts during the colonial period. A major step toward professional social work came in 1936 with the establishment of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai, which introduced formal education and training in social work. After India's independence, social work expanded through Government welfare programs and community development initiatives. From the 1980s onwards, the field increasingly adopted rights-based and participatory approaches to address

issues such as poverty, gender inequality, and child protection. Today, social work in India brings together Government programs, NGO initiatives, CSR and global frameworks such as the SDG to promote inclusive and sustainable development.

The Present: Professionalization and Systems-Based Practice

In recent decades, social work in India has moved beyond charity-based activities toward a more professional and rights-based approach. Social workers today are involved not only in helping individuals but also in designing development programs, strengthening institutions, supporting policy implementation, and using research and data to plan effective interventions.

Social workers increasingly collaborate with different stakeholders, including Government departments, schools, health systems, and community organizations. The focus has gradually shifted from only providing immediate assistance to creating long-term social change.

Indian social work is also becoming more connected with global development priorities. The SDGs provide a shared framework linking local development work with global goals such as poverty reduction, quality education, gender equality, health, and social justice. At the same time, the expansion of CSR has created new opportunities for professional social workers. Corporate-supported development programs require skilled professionals who can design community interventions, ensure accountability, and measure social impact.

Similarly, the growing importance of ESG frameworks has expanded the role of social work in areas such as climate change, social inclusion, ethical engagement, and community wellbeing. As a result, social work today operates not only within communities but also within broader systems related to governance, sustainability, and responsible development.

The Changing Identity of the Social Worker: From Welfare Provider to System Facilitator

The role of Social Workers in India has changed significantly over time. Earlier, social workers were often seen mainly as people who delivered welfare services. Today, their role is much broader. Social workers now act as facilitators, coordinators, and bridge-builders between communities and institutions. They help communities organize themselves, support local leadership, and ensure that Government policies and programs actually reach vulnerable groups. In this way, the role of social workers has shifted from only providing services to enabling long-term social change. Modern social workers are also expected to combine empathy with strong analytical and organizational skills. They are involved in program planning, monitoring, using data for better decision-making, advocacy, and working with different sectors such as Government, civil society, and private organizations. Experience from practice shows that effective social work today depends both on human connection and on strategic and well-planned action.

Professional Recognition and the Need for Social Work Registration

As social work expands across these diverse sectors, formal recognition is vital for establishing common standards and accountability. Registration ensures that social interventions are delivered by trained professionals, which strengthens trust between practitioners, institutions, and communities. In fields like CSR, registered status allows social workers to be recognized as skilled technical experts rather than informal providers.

A major milestone is the National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions (NCAHP) Act,

2021. This law provides a regulatory framework for the health sector, recognizing clinical, medical, and psychiatric social work. This creates clear pathways for standardized education. However, a significant need remains for a comprehensive regulatory body that covers all domains—such as rural development and child protection—to ensure uniform ethical practice across the entire profession.

The Future: Towards a Future-Ready Social Work Profession

The future of social work must address complex challenges like rapid urbanization, climate change, and widening inequalities. To respond effectively, the next generation of practitioners will need advanced skills in evidence-based planning, digital tools, and data analysis. However, this technological shift must remain grounded in human relationships; innovation should strengthen community engagement rather than replace it.

The profession's future success will depend on deep collaboration between government systems, civil society, and the private sector. Social workers will act as "system facilitators," ensuring that development remains inclusive and participatory. By ensuring community ownership and local leadership, the profession can navigate modern complexities while driving sustainable social change.

Conclusion: The evolution of social work in India reflects a meaningful journey from community-based action and Gandhian ideals to a professional discipline engaged with global development priorities. It demonstrates that tradition and innovation can work together rather than oppose each other.

As societies work toward more inclusive development, the profession must continue strengthening professional recognition, ethical practice, and evidence-based approaches while remaining rooted in compassion and social justice.

At a time when the world is searching for models of socially responsible development, Indian social work offers an important example—development that places human dignity at its centre, connects local realities with global responsibility, and builds pathways of hope through collective action.

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PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORK IN INDIA- PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

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Introduction: Social work is a practice-based profession based on experiential learning. Having a theoretical base and its validation in field is at central so far as desired outcomes of profession is concerned. The introduction of social work in India through its methods was conceptually rooted in western philosophy but its implementation according to the changing societal and cultural praxis of India has made it a growing and dynamic profession. Social work over a period of these changing times, has evolved from being Eurocentric towards shifting to human rights perspective.

Key words: social work, social work education, indigenization, globalization, cultural homogenization, Eurocentric approach.

Past: Social work profession was introduced in India after four decades of its starting in England and in 19th century in America. During medieval period, people in India were helped in form of dana i.e. charity through religious gurus and kings. In a culturally diversified country like India, social work education has drawn its blue print since the medieval and colonial era.

During colonization, these services were carried out in form of social reforms which is validated in the history of India. Raja Ram Mohan Roy's struggle for banning sati, Savitri Bai Phule's endeavor to educate girls, Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent means of fighting for rights and appealing the conscience and Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar's ideology of getting united, educated for annihilation of caste are some of the well-known examples that are documented in Indian History.

The establishment of Sir Dorabji Tata Graduate School of Social Work, The Delhi School of Social Work, College of Social Work Nirmala Niketan, Mumbai, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda are some of the pioneering institutes which commenced the formal training in Social Work from 1936.

The history of social work education in India is often quoted back to 1936 in which the first school of social work was established. Dr. Clifford Manshardt, the first director of the school of social work came to India way back in 1926 i.e. 10 years before formally establishing the school and found a complex web of social problems like juvenile delinquency, poverty, illiteracy gripping the society. It led to establishment of first school of social work and commencement of professional training in social work in India.

Present: The socio-cultural importance of offering services with an altruistic motive is evident in both the west and in the southern countries like India. The discourse of taking the western social work context varies globally in a bandwidth of adopting the international social work practices and deriving localized intervention models from concepts and methods that are indigenized. The need for indigenization arises from not only preserving the social and cultural sanctities but also having a meaningful and goal-oriented intervention.

A substantial and continuous debate has also been carried out which talks about process and pace of indigenization of social work in India. Kendall (1986) significantly highlighted the importance of response from social work as a profession in responding to the changing needs and challenges that a particular society faces. This has a specific significance of keeping in mind the local socio-cultural praxis where the intervention is being made.

Kendall (1986) also highlighted that the process of indigenization of social work in India has been at slow pace and that there is a need to create and document the indigenous and local practices which can form a knowledge base to refer, implement and rewrite it with the changing annotations of the society.

Future: Globalization has resulted in major alteration of social work curriculum with a changed focus on increasing needs and demands of a particular set of skills that is required according to prevailing situations and environment.

Social work education has evolved with time and has shifted its perspective from the Eurocentric tenets towards human rights perspective in recent years. This has expanded the horizon of intervention in the fields of environment, dignity of individuals, emerging communities due to marginalization, interpersonal relationships, LGBT community, rights of person living with HIV and AIDS, chronic mental illnesses etc. A considerable work has also been done at grass root level in India which is good example of integrating theory to practice. India also has a history of taking stand for land and forest rights and the indigenous communities associated with it. The Chipko Movement is a best example from which the world drew its lessons as an effective intervention strategy. A large number of social work institutions in India like The Tata Institute of Social Sciences, College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan have supported this approach through its teachings and field interventions (Nadkarni et. al. 2016). It also created ample of indigenous resource for social work education in form of songs, poems and writings which illustrate how the movement took a form from an indigenous effort. These unique models have strength to augment social work theory, practice and education for the years to come.

Conclusion: The social work practice in India expanded its horizons of intervention especially with reference to its long trajectory of social movements. They have also highlighted the shift towards a rights-based approach in social work. There are many interventions in form of projects at social work institutional levels which have successfully developed the pedagogical tools to implement and create indigenized models of social work in India. But the gap of translating this indigenous knowledge in to languages of mass circulation is what social work field needs to focus on.

NB: The excerpts of this writeup has been taken from a published paper titled, “Indigenization of Social Work in India- A paradigm of theory to practice” in Perspectives in Social Work Journal Vol XXXVIII(1) April, 2023.

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PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORK IN INDIA: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE A THEORETICAL AND POLICY-CRITICAL REFLECTION

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Introduction: Professional social work in India has traversed three interconnected phases: colonial institutionalization, post-independence welfare statism, and contemporary rights-based governance within a liberalized economy. While the profession has expanded considerably in education, research, and policy engagement, it remains an incomplete professionalization project—marked by unresolved tensions between its transformative promise and structural constraints. The absence of statutory regulation, persistent epistemic dependence on Western theoretical frameworks, and subordination to managerial governance collectively limit its capacity to address entrenched inequalities of caste, class, gender, and region. This paper argues that the future of professional social work in India depends upon resolving these core tensions through regulatory consolidation, indigenization of knowledge, strengthened research culture, and assertive policy engagement.

The analysis draws upon structural functionalism, Marxist and critical traditions, developmental social welfare perspectives, and Indian sociological scholarship. Talcott Parsons conceptualized professions as institutions that maintain social order through specialized knowledge and ethical commitments. In contrast, Marxist and conflict theorists contend that professions may reproduce structural inequalities when they prioritize individual adjustment over systemic transformation. These theoretical tensions are clearly visible in India, where social work has oscillated between welfare administration and rights-based advocacy— between participation in state-led development and critique of its exclusions.

The Past: Institutionalization and Welfare-State Expansion

The formal genesis of professional social work education in India is marked by the establishment of the Sir Dorabji Tata Graduate School of Social Work in 1936, later renamed the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in 1944 and declared a Deemed University in 1964. The institution introduced systematic training in casework, group work, and community organization, drawing heavily upon British and American professional models. While this transplantation provided foundational methods and legitimacy, it also initiated a pattern of epistemic dependence that continues to shape the discipline.

Following Independence, India adopted planned development anchored in welfare-state principles. The Community Development Programme (1952) sought rural reconstruction through participatory development and administrative decentralization. Social workers became actively engaged in rural welfare, family services, correctional administration, medical and psychiatric social work, and urban community development. This period reflected what M. S. Gore (1965) envisioned as professional education aligned with developmental planning and social policy objectives. Surinder Pathak (1981) analysed this evolution, highlighting social welfare's developmental orientation within India's broader socio-political context.

Yet this expansion coexisted with deepening critique. A. R. Desai's (1976) Marxist analysis argued that the post-colonial state represented proprietary classes rather than functioning as a neutral arbiter. From this perspective, welfare policies managed rather than transformed structural inequalities rooted in class and caste. Neera Desai's (1988) feminist scholarship further exposed the gendered dimensions of development policy, urging social work to integrate women's rights and gender justice into its central concerns. Thus, the post-independence phase reflected institutional growth alongside emergent critical consciousness.

The Present: Rights-Based Legislation and Managerial Governance Expansion of Legal Entitlements

Following economic liberalization in 1991, India combined market-oriented reforms with targeted social protection measures. Landmark legislations strengthened entitlement-based approaches, including:

1. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
2. Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act
3. National Food Security Act
4. Mental Healthcare Act

These enactments reflect Amartya Sen's (1999) capability approach, emphasizing the expansion of substantive freedoms rather than mere income growth. In this policy environment, social workers engage in rights facilitation, psychosocial support, community mobilization, grievance redressal, and implementation across multiple welfare sectors.

Managerialism and the New Public Management

The rights-based expansion, however, has unfolded alongside governance increasingly shaped by managerial logics associated with New Public Management (NPM). Welfare delivery is now structured through measurable targets, digital monitoring systems, audit cultures, and project-based funding. As Harvey (2005) argues, neoliberalism involves not the withdrawal of the state but its restructuring to create conditions conducive to market rule. Within this reconfiguration, social work risks subordination to technocratic performance indicators.

Dagnino's (2007) notion of a "perverse confluence" is instructive here: the language of participation and rights can coexist with the state's retreat from direct service provision, transferring responsibilities to NGOs and communities through short-term, competitive funding mechanisms. James Midgley's (1995) developmental social welfare framework advocates integration between economic and social policy; yet fragmentation and sectoral silos frequently persist. Consequently, social workers often function as project implementers rather than policy shapers, with professional judgment constrained by externally imposed reporting requirements.

The Unfinished Professionalization Project

The most significant structural challenge remains the absence of statutory regulation for social work in India. Eliot Freidson's (2001) theory of professions underscores autonomy, control over specialized knowledge, and regulatory authority as defining features of professional status. Without a national licensing or regulatory framework, the profession confronts:

1. Ambiguity in scope of practice
2. Inconsistent ethical oversight
3. Limited formal recognition in policy formulation
4. Blurred distinctions between professionally trained social workers and generic welfare personnel

This creates a self-reinforcing cycle: lack of regulation weakens professional identity; employers appoint non-qualified personnel; the profession remains undervalued; political will for regulation

diminishes further. Despite substantial contributions in mental health, child welfare, disaster response, and community development, professional legitimacy remains insufficiently consolidated.

Epistemological and Theoretical Concerns

Indian social work education continues to rely heavily on Western paradigms— psychoanalytic, systems, and ecological models. While analytically useful, excessive dependence limits contextual sensitivity. Yogendra Singh's (1973) reflections on modernization highlight the tension between “great” and “little” traditions in Indian sociology. Similarly, Indian social work operates between a dominant Western professional canon and the localized socio-cultural realities of caste, kinship, and community-based support systems.

Contemporary scholarship emerging from Dalit studies, feminist theory, and subaltern perspectives demands deeper indigenization of knowledge production. Indigenization does not entail nativist rejection of global theory; rather, it requires critical appropriation and contextual innovation grounded in Indian realities. Integrating caste analysis, gender critique, labour studies, disability rights, and environmental justice into mainstream pedagogy is essential. Participatory research methodologies and community-based knowledge systems must occupy central space in professional education.

The Future: Strategic Directions for Consolidation

Statutory Recognition: A national Social Work Council established through legislation would define professional standards, regulate accreditation, enforce ethical codes, and enhance public accountability. Regulatory consolidation is fundamental to professional autonomy and legitimacy.

Knowledge Production and Research: Advancement depends upon rigorous, contextually grounded research. Strengthening Indian-language scholarship, fostering practice-based research partnerships, and documenting indigenous helping traditions are critical tasks. Engaging global theory while generating Indian conceptual alternatives will deepen epistemic independence.

Policy Leadership: Social workers must move beyond implementation roles toward participation in policy advisory bodies, legislative consultations, and national commissions. Professional education must therefore cultivate policy analysis, advocacy skills, and institutional leadership pathways.

Digital and Ethical Preparedness: As welfare systems become increasingly digitized, professional training must incorporate data literacy, privacy safeguards, and digital ethics. Digitization generates new vulnerabilities for marginalized populations; social workers must be equipped to navigate these responsibly.

Reaffirming Social Justice: Persistent inequalities across caste, class, gender, and region require that social work remain firmly anchored in constitutional values of justice, equality, and dignity. The profession cannot remain confined to adjustment within unjust systems; it must contribute to transforming those systems. Service delivery must therefore be complemented by structural advocacy and rights-based engagement.

Conclusion: Professional social work in India has progressed from philanthropic initiatives to institutionalized welfare engagement and rights-based participation. Its historical trajectory reflects both significant expansion and continuing structural limitations. The absence of statutory recognition, limited policy authority, and epistemic dependence are interconnected dimensions of an incomplete professionalization project.

The future of the profession lies in regulatory consolidation, indigenized scholarship, strengthened research culture, and assertive policy engagement. Grounded in constitutional values, informed by critical theory, and accountable to marginalized communities, professional social work in India can

move beyond managing deprivation toward contributing meaningfully to social transformation and democratic deepening.

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PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORK IN INDIA: INTEGRATING MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELLING, DE- ADDICTION SERVICES AND LEGAL AWARENESS

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Introduction: India is witnessing rapid social, economic and cultural changes that influence the mental health and well-being of individuals and communities. Professional social work has played a crucial role in addressing these challenges through psychosocial support, rehabilitation and community awareness.

The profession of social work in India has evolved significantly from charitable activities to a structured professional discipline that integrates counselling, community intervention and legal awareness. In the present context, social workers working in mental health and de-addiction settings are increasingly required to adopt multidisciplinary approaches to address complex psychosocial problems.

This article reflects on professional social work practice in India by integrating three key areas: mental health counselling, de-addiction services and legal awareness programmes related to the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (POSH) Act. It highlights how professional social workers contribute to individual recovery, family support and community empowerment.

Mental Health Counselling in Social Work Practice

Mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, substance dependence and emotional distress are increasingly observed across different age groups in India. Professional social workers working as psychiatry counsellors play an important role in providing psychosocial interventions for individuals experiencing mental health challenges.

Mental health counselling focuses on understanding the psychological, social and environmental factors affecting a person's well-being. Social workers conduct counselling sessions that help patients express emotions, identify stressors and develop coping strategies.

In psychiatric settings, counselling interventions often include supportive counselling, motivational interviewing and psychoeducation. These interventions help patients understand their condition, adhere to treatment and improve their quality of life.

Another crucial aspect of mental health social work is reducing stigma. Many individuals hesitate to seek mental health support due to social stigma and lack of awareness. Social workers therefore play a key role in promoting mental health awareness and encouraging help-seeking behaviour within communities.

De-Addiction Services and Psychosocial Rehabilitation

Substance use disorders remain a major public health concern in India. Alcohol and drug addiction not only affect the physical health of individuals but also disrupt family relationships, employment stability and social functioning.

De-addiction centres provide structured treatment programmes that include detoxification, counselling and rehabilitation. Social workers working in these centres provide essential psychosocial support for patients undergoing recovery.

Counselling in de-addiction settings focuses on helping individuals understand the impact of addiction, identifying triggers and preventing relapse. Motivational counselling techniques are commonly used to strengthen a patient's willingness to change and sustain recovery.

Family counselling is also an important component of de-addiction services. Addiction often creates emotional distress for family members, and social workers facilitate communication between patients and their families to rebuild trust and support recovery.

In addition to counselling, social workers assist in psychosocial rehabilitation by helping patients reintegrate into society. This may include vocational guidance, social support networks and community-based rehabilitation initiatives.

Legal Awareness and the Role of Social Workers

Professional social workers are increasingly involved in promoting legal literacy and safeguarding vulnerable populations. Awareness programmes related to child protection and workplace safety are important components of contemporary social work practice.

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act provides a comprehensive legal framework to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation. Social workers play a vital role in spreading awareness about child protection laws, identifying vulnerable situations and guiding communities on reporting mechanisms.

Similarly, the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (POSH) Act aims to ensure safe working environments for women. Social workers who are trained as POSH resource persons or trainers contribute to workplace awareness programmes, training sessions and policy implementation.

By promoting awareness of these laws, social workers help communities understand their rights and responsibilities. Legal literacy empowers individuals to seek protection and promotes safer social environments.

Future Directions for Professional Social Work in India

The future of professional social work in India depends on strengthening multidisciplinary collaboration, expanding community-based services and promoting professional training.

Mental health services need greater accessibility at the community level. Social workers can play a central role in bridging the gap between healthcare systems and communities through counselling services, awareness programmes and rehabilitation initiatives.

Additionally, integrating legal awareness with psychosocial support can create more holistic interventions. Social workers trained in mental health, de-addiction and legal literacy can contribute

significantly to building safer and healthier communities.

Conclusion: Professional social work in India continues to evolve in response to emerging social challenges. Mental health counselling, de-addiction rehabilitation and legal awareness initiatives represent important areas where social workers contribute to individual and community well-being.

By combining psychosocial support with community awareness and legal education, social workers can create meaningful and sustainable social change. Strengthening these integrated approaches will be essential for the future development of the social work profession in India.

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THE SILENT MANSIONS OF PALLATHUR: A GLIMPSE INTO INDIA'S AGEING FUTURE

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Introduction: As a part of our field visits, this was one of our typical day in Pallathur Panchayat, Sivagangai District, Tamil Nadu. We knocked one of the hind doors of a grand Chettinad mansion. Each street of Pallathur were joined together by lavish Chettinad home at an average length of 100 to 150 feet. An elderly women sneaked out of a small front room. Upon a minute of conversation, she had the belief and courage to open up to us. As social workers, our interpersonal skills were on point that we could convince her on our purpose of visit. A preliminary skill that every social worker should master at.

Myself Ms.Keerthana and my fellow researcher Ms. Gunavathi was assigned a for a survey on Rapid Need Assesment for elderly residing in Pallathur Panchayat under the esteemed guidance of Dr. MA.Velusamy, the respected Head of the department, Department of social work, Alagappa University, Tamil Nadu. The survey was in collaboration with Hepa Age India, an NGO working for elderly population age with dignity and respect. Pallathur is one of the Towns in Tamilnadu with significant elderly population. One in every few households have elderly couple or elderly men or women residing mostly alone. They have their children working abroad or employed in metro cities like Chennai and Bangalore.

The grandma that we were having conversation with, married and got settled in her husband's home town Pallathur in early 80'. She is now in her late 70's and her husband is close to 85 years of age. She had two sons; one settled in another country and the other working in a metro city. They both visit them on their summer holidays which for them is best time of the year. They occasionally receive financial help from both their children and are mostly dependent on their old age pension. With every visit they will receive a thousand or two from their children. Fortunately, the health status of the couple is perfectly alright, while her husband is dealing with fluctuating sugar levels. Both could communicate well in English. Most of the homes, we could find these elderly having very good standards of education and having a strong command in English, both men and women. Out of the entire old age population, Only very few countable numbers had smart phones, remaining had basic "button type" phones both of which were neither useful. Inside their homes, due to poor connectivity, they could not dail or receive any calls. Because of poor connectivity, they must move out of their homes and onto the roads to get a signal. Due to narrow roads and lack of public transport, entire Pallathur is accessible only by auto's. In case of any medical emergency, they need to come to the roads and make a call for an auto. It could obviously take 10 to 15 min based on the availability of vehicles.

The Community Lifeline: Of One-Rupee Care and Shared Kitchens

Regarding daily food requirements, every elderly household is taken care by their community kitchen. All together pay a minimal sum of Rs. 1000 or Rs.3000 based on their financial availability. Rainy or a sunny all 3 meals a day would be handed over to them in carriers. After every other meal, empty

carriers at the doorstep will be replaced with filled ones. This was an awe factor for us, where a community helps itself in times of need.

The medical needs of the old age population is taken care by AMM hospital in Pallathur, a remarkable philanthropic healthcare institution. The hospital takes care of basic medical needs of all the population in and around Pallathur, popularly known as “1 rupee hospital” as a due credit for providing accessible healthcare services at such a nominal fee. Day 1 of every month, those houses with elders would receive their necessary medicines at free of cost their doorstep. The hospitals do have mobile vans to help those in need. A call to the hospital, vans would reach their doorstep with no travel charges.

The Digital Divide and the Distance of Care

The grandma’s only concern is the need of public transport and financial assistance to lead both of their later years. At Pallathur, Out of 1 in 3 home share a similar story. Although some of their needs are being met, a few critical gaps still require a closer look.

India's elderly population (60+) is projected to grow by 134% from 2022 to 2050, surging from roughly 149 million to 347 million, according to the UNFPA India Ageing Report 2023ⁱ. The town of Pallathur represents our future India. A significant percentage of the population are turning out to be in their late 60’s and 70’s. In its provision of essential food and medical care, Pallathur serves as an inspiring model for elderly support across the country, Yet a holistic evaluation is needed in many other factors such as social and emotional wellbeing and financial independence and security, physical safety and assistance, cognitive and legal support. With a long-standing reputation for excellence in geriatric care, HelpAge India has intervened to further strengthen the support systems for the elderly.

As India approaches a demographic shift where one in every five citizens will be a senior citizen by 2050, the quiet streets of Pallathur offer both a roadmap and a warning. The town’s success in weaving a safety net of "1-rupee" healthcare and community-funded kitchens proves that grassroots empathy can solve the most basic hurdles of survival. Our visit made it clear that a truly supportive environment for the elderly requires more than just basic care; it demands a holistic ecosystem that fosters emotional well-being and personal autonomy.

“India’s journey toward 2050 must be paved with policies that treat the elderly not as a burden to be managed, but as a legacy to be cherished”.

(We sincerely thank the Chairman of Pallathur Panchayat, Ms. Shanthi Sivashankar for helping us successfully complete the survey)

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UNDERSTANDING THE REAL SIZE OF INDIA'S SOCIAL SECTOR BEYOND NGOS

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Introduction: When people think about the social sector in India, the first image that often comes to mind is Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) working on community development. Some may also associate the sector with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives undertaken by companies. While both are important pillars, the reality is that the Indian social sector is far broader and more complex than commonly perceived.

In practice, social sector is a vast interconnected ecosystem working to address social, economic and environmental challenges. It includes Civil Society Organizations (NGOs), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, social enterprises, impact investors, advisory and consulting organizations and academic institutions.

India's core social sector workforce comprising NGOs, CSR teams, advisory and consulting organizations, academic institutions and impact investing professionals employs approximately **2.7 - 2.8 million people**. When the broader ecosystem of social enterprises is considered potentially supports over **25 million additional jobs**. Even without counting social enterprises, the organized social sector already engages **nearly 3 million professionals, making it one of the largest development workforces globally**.

Understanding the true scale of this sector highlights that social development in India is supported by a large and diverse professional workforce working across institutions, industries and disciplines to create sustainable social change.

Key Components of the Indian Social Sector

1. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs / NGOs / NPOs / Voluntary Organizations)
2. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)
3. Social Enterprises
4. Impact Investing & Social Finance
5. Consulting & Advisory (CSR / Social Impact / ESG)
6. Academic & Research Institutions (Social Development Focus)

Each of these components plays a unique role in shaping India's development landscape.

Civil Society & Non-Profit Organizations

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), commonly referred to as NGOs, NPOs, or voluntary organizations, form the backbone of the social sector. These are mission-driven, independent organizations that work for the betterment of society by addressing issues such as education, healthcare, livelihoods, gender equality, environment, and social justice.

India is estimated to have over **3 million¹ registered NGOs**, although the number of actively

functioning organizations is significantly smaller. The NITI Aayog Darpan portal², which serves as a central database for NGOs working with government programmes, currently lists around 5.3 lakh organizations.

The nonprofit ecosystem also generates considerable employment. Estimates suggest that around 2.7 million full-time professionals work within NGOs across India³, in addition to a large network of volunteers who contribute to community development initiatives.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Corporate Social Responsibility has become a second major institutional pillar of the social sector in India since the introduction of the CSR mandate under the Companies Act, 2013. Companies meeting the prescribed financial criteria (Net Worth \geq ₹500 crore, Turnover \geq ₹1,000 crore or Net Profit \geq ₹5 crore) are required to **spend at least 2% of the average net profits of the preceding 3 financial years on activities listed under Schedule VII of the Act.**

According to data from the National CSR Portal⁴, Ministry of Corporate Affairs, **over 27,000 companies across 40 States and Union Territories implemented CSR initiatives during FY 2023–24.**

CSR ecosystem has also created a dedicated professional workforce responsible for programme design, implementation, compliance, monitoring and impact assessment. Broadly, the corporate CSR landscape can be divided into three operational segments:

1. Around 300 large companies dominating CSR expenditure, typically with dedicated teams of 10 to 25 professionals
2. Approximately 2,700 mid-sized companies with CSR teams of 2 to 5 members
3. Nearly 24,000 smaller companies, where CSR responsibilities are often handled by a fractional role or integrated with HR or sustainability functions

Based on these patterns, the estimated CSR workforce in India is around 20,000 professionals.

Social Enterprises

Social enterprises represent a rapidly growing segment of the social sector. Unlike traditional NGOs that primarily rely on donations or grants, social enterprises use market-based approaches and revenue-generating business models to address social or environmental challenges.

These enterprises operate in areas such as financial inclusion, healthcare access, sustainable agriculture, education technology, renewable energy, and livelihood creation. While financial sustainability is important, their core objective remains the creation of measurable social impact.

According to the British Council's study on social enterprises⁵, India is estimated to have around **2 million social enterprises**. Approximately **74% of these operate as private companies, while the remaining 26% function as non-profits organizations.**

If we assume that the 74% operating as companies represent about 1.48 million enterprises, and that each employs an average of 17 full-time employees, the potential employment generated by this segment could reach around 25 million jobs⁶.

Although employment levels vary significantly across enterprises, this estimate illustrates the enormous scale of the social enterprise ecosystem in India.

Impact Investing & Social Finance

Impact investing refers to investments made with the intention of generating measurable social or environmental impact alongside financial returns. These investments support enterprises and initiatives that address development challenges such as poverty reduction, financial inclusion, healthcare access, climate action, and sustainable agriculture.

Over the past decade, India has emerged as one of the largest impact investment markets among emerging economies.

According to the **Impact Investors Council⁷**, the **Indian impact investment ecosystem has mobilized over \$18 billion across more than 1,000 investments between 2010 and 2022.**

This ecosystem includes:

1. Impact venture capital funds
2. Development finance institutions
3. Philanthropic investors
4. Family offices
5. Accelerators and incubators supporting social enterprises

The direct workforce within this ecosystem is relatively small but highly specialized. It is estimated that around **3,000 professionals work** across impact investment funds, intermediaries, accelerators, and ecosystem organizations that deploy capital into mission- driven enterprises.

Consulting & Advisory

Specialized professional services provided by experts or organizations that help non-profits, foundations, and corporations design, implement, evaluate, and improve social impact initiatives. These include CSR consulting firms, sustainability advisory organizations, monitoring and evaluation agencies, impact assessment firms, policy research organizations, and ESG consulting companies. These organizations support Corporates, Philanthropies, Governments and Non-profits in:

4. Designing social programmes
5. Strengthening governance systems
6. Conducting monitoring and evaluation
7. Measuring and reporting social impact
8. Aligning initiatives with national and global sustainability frameworks

Growth of mandatory CSR under the Companies Act, 2013, along with rising expectations around ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) reporting, **has significantly increased the demand for specialized advisory services.**

Based on ecosystem assessments, India has several hundred consulting and advisory firms working within the CSR and social impact space, typically with teams ranging from 15 to 30 professionals. **Collectively, the estimated workforce within this segment is around 15,000–20,000 professionals.**

Despite relatively small team sizes, these organizations play a crucial role in translating social intent into structured programmes, scalable models, and evidence-based impact measurement.

Academic & Research Institutions (Social Development Focus)

Academic institutions form the knowledge and talent backbone of the social sector. Universities and schools of social work across India offer programmes such as Bachelor of Social Work (BSW), Master of Social Work (MSW), Development Studies, Public Policy and Public Administration and related courses.

These institutions contribute to the sector by producing **trained professionals, conducting research, generating policy insights, and supporting impact evaluation and capacity building for development organizations.**

Research on social work education in India⁸ identifies approximately **526 Social Work Educational Institutions (SWEIs)** across the country, including around 181 universities offering social work programmes through dedicated departments or schools.

The estimated academic workforce engaged in social work education ranges between **4,000 and 7,000 faculty members.**

Considering the intake capacity across BSW and MSW programmes, these institutions collectively produce approximately **20,000 social work graduates every year**, many of whom enter NGOs, CSR departments, government programmes, research institutions and development consulting organizations.

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ONE HAND, MANY HEARTS: UNITING FOR JUSTICE, PEACE, AND COMMON GROUND.

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The metaphor ‘One Hand, Many Hearts’ captures the essence of collective action in a divided world. A single unified efforts (one hand) powered by diverse passions. Cultures, and convictions. This research explores how solidarity across differences can advance justice, peace, and shared humanity. Drawing on philosophical foundations, historical triumphs, contemporary case studies, and current global challenges. It argues that true unity requires both emotional empathy and practical collaborations. Grounded in UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 16 and real world examples from the civil rights movement, South African reconciliations, modern peace building and strategies to overcome polarization while offering recommendation for communities, policy makers, and civil society. In the era of rising conflict and division, this theme serves as a timely call to co-build hope through inclusive solidarity.

In a world marked by deepening polarization, geopolitical tensions, and social fragmentations, the need for unifying frameworks has never been greater. The one hand symbolizes collective, coordinated actions- practical steps taken together. While many hearts represent the diversity of individual experiences, emotions, faiths and motivations that fuel genuine solidarity without erasing differences.

The research draws on transitional justice theory, solidarity studies and UN frameworks to demonstrate that sustainable peace and justice emerge not from top- down imposition but from grassroots collaborations. By examining historical and contemporary examples. Solidarity lies at the core of this theme. Sociologists and peace scholars define it as mutual support that transcends self- interest, enabling collective resistance to injustice. In transitional justice contexts, social solidarity strengthens reconciliation by fostering shared responsibility for past harms and future healing. Recent studies highlight ‘agonistic solidarity’ embracing disagreement without violence- as particularly effective in fragmented regions.

At the core of the initiative is also an emphasis on capacity-building for educators and fostering cross-learning opportunities. Over 150 educators participated in the 5th monthly RiseUp4Peace capacity-boosting dialogue in April, where UNODC's youth mainstreaming specialist Paloma Munne presented the Youth Empowerment Accelerator (YEA) framework to promote youth mainstreaming. Educators from around the world shared practical ways to strengthen SDG 16 education, highlighting the importance of a ‘collaborative spirit.’

"With this network, the idea is to foster cross-fertilisation of expertise and ideas between educators and educational institutions, and enable young people to sharpen their skills," said Ms. Paramjit Dhillon, Principal (Admin and Innovation), KNPS Phagwara.

Knowledge support was also provided to 316 educators, 5,100 young people and 12 educational institutions directly on SDG 16-related themes and youth mainstreaming on the rule of law. This

resulted in the co-creation of a range of school-led initiatives engaging and empowering over 14,000 young people—including a students' 'Run4Peace' campaign driven by the Little Kingdom School (Madhya Pradesh), virtual student assemblies on SDG16 conducted at the Funlish language school, setting up of a 'peace tree' with messages on SDG 16 at the Sri Sessaas International Public School Salem (Tamil Nadu), interactive dialogues held at the Schiller Institute (Uttar Pradesh) and other institutions, pledge drives, posters and artwork activities, among others.

Goal 16 is about promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. People everywhere should be free of fear from all forms of violence and feel safe as they go about their lives whatever their ethnicity, faith or sexual orientation.

However, ongoing and new violent conflicts around the world are derailing the global path to peace and achievement of Goal 16. Alarming, the year 2022 witnessed a more than 50 per cent increase in conflict-related civilian deaths – the first since the adoption of Agenda 2030 – largely due to the war in Ukraine. In 2024, loss of lives amid armed conflicts surged 40 per cent from 2023, marking the third consecutive annual rise. About four times more children and women were killed in 2023–2024 than in the previous biennium; of these, 8 in 10 child deaths and 7 in 10 female deaths occurred in Gaza.

High levels of armed violence and insecurity have a destructive impact on a country's development, while sexual violence, crime, exploitation and torture are prevalent where there is conflict or no rule of law, and countries must take measures to protect those who are most at risk.

Governments, civil society and communities need to work together to find lasting solutions to conflict and insecurity. Strengthening the rule of law and promoting human rights is key to this process, as is reducing the flow of illicit arms, combating corruption, and ensuring inclusive participation at all times.

Why should I care?

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How does this apply to where I live?

Goal 16 aligns with the broader human rights framework by promoting societies that respect and uphold individual rights, as well as the right to privacy, freedom of expression, and access to information.

Peace is a fundamental precondition for social and economic development. Without peace, societies are often plagued by conflict, violence, and instability, which can hinder progress and result in the loss of lives and resources.

Equal access to justice is essential for protecting the rights of individuals, resolving disputes, and ensuring that vulnerable populations are not marginalized or mistreated.

Crimes threatening peaceful societies, including homicides, trafficking and other organized crimes, as well as discriminatory laws or practices, affect all countries.

What if we don't take action?

Armed violence and insecurity have a destructive impact on a country's development, affecting economic growth and often resulting in long-standing grievances among communities.

Violence also affects children's health, development and well-being, and their ability to thrive. It causes trauma and weakens social inclusion.

Lack of access to justice means that conflicts remain unresolved and people cannot obtain protection and redress. Institutions that do not function according to legitimate laws are prone to arbitrariness and abuse of power, and less capable of delivering public service to everyone.

To exclude and to discriminate not only violates human rights, but also causes resentment and animosity, and could give rise to violence.

1. In 2024, loss of lives amid armed conflicts surged 40 per cent from 2023, marking the third consecutive annual rise.
2. About four times more children and women were killed in 2023–2024 than in the previous biennium; of these, 8 in 10 child deaths and 7 in 10 female deaths occurred in Gaza.
3. Rising conflicts and violent organized crime persist around the world, causing immense human suffering and hampering sustainable development. The number of forcibly displaced people reached an unprecedented 123.2 million by the end of 2024. Civilian casualties in armed conflicts surged 40 per cent in 2024.
4. In 2021, the world experienced the highest number of intentional homicides in the past two decades. The global homicide rate declined by 5 per cent between 2015 and 2022 from 5.9 per 100,000 people in 2015 to 5.2 in 2023.
5. Globally, detected human trafficking victims increased by 25 per cent in 2022 compared to pre-pandemic levels and by 43 per cent compared to 2020. A key driver of this surge is the growing number of child victims, which has risen by 31 per cent since 2019.
6. Killings and disappearances of human rights defenders, journalists and trade unionists remained alarmingly high in 2024, with at least 502 killings documented across 44 countries and 123 disappearances documented across 37 countries. While these represent slight declines from 2023, persistent human rights abuses continue to undermine progress towards peace, justice and accountability.
7. Structural injustices, inequalities and emerging human rights challenges are putting peaceful and inclusive societies further out of reach. To meet Goal 16 by 2030, action is needed to restore trust and to strengthen the capacity of institutions to secure justice for all and facilitate peaceful transitions to sustainable development.

The United Nations (UN) was founded in 1945 with the primary goal of maintaining international peace and security. Since its inception, UN peacekeeping has become a valuable tool to help countries navigate the challenging path from conflict to peace. India has been a key contributor to global peace

and security, with over 2,90,000 peacekeepers serving in more than 50 UN missions. Currently, over 5,000 Indian peacekeepers are deployed in 9 active missions, working in challenging conditions to promote international peace. The UN Peacekeepers, known as Blue Helmets, get their name from the light blue of the United Nations flag. In 1947, the UN decided on this colour because blue symbolizes peace, while red is often linked to war. This light blue shade has since become a symbol of the UN. In 2023, India received the UN's highest peacekeeping honour, the Dag Hammarskjöld Medal, posthumously awarded to Indian peacekeepers Shishupal Singh and Sanwala Ram Vishnoi and civilian UN worker Shaber Taher Ali for their sacrifice in the Democratic Republic of Congo. From 24th-25th February 2025, the Centre of United Nations Peacekeeping (CUNPK) hosted the 'Conference on Women Peacekeepers from the Global South' at the Manekshaw Centre in New Delhi. This two-day event brought together women peacekeepers from 35 nations to discuss the evolving role of women in peacekeeping operations and strategies to enhance their participation. The conference underscored India's commitment to gender equality and its leadership in promoting inclusive and effective peacekeeping operations.

Over time, peacekeeping evolved to include complex tasks such as nation-building, electoral assistance, and countering violent extremism. Challenges like mission failures in Rwanda and Bosnia prompted reforms, leading to the Brahimi Report (2000), which emphasized robust mandates and better resources. The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine further shaped interventions, while modern missions increasingly focus on civilian protection, gender inclusion, and regional partnerships. Today, UN Peacekeeping continues to adapt, balancing traditional roles with emerging global security threats. India's Contribution to UN Peacekeeping India has a long and distinguished history of serving in UN peacekeeping, dating back to its participation in the UN operation in Korea in the 1953. India's commitment to non-violence, enshrined in its philosophy and championed by Mahatma Gandhi, aligns with the UN's approach to promoting global peace. This commitment stems from India's ancient principle of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (the whole world is my family), which emphasizes the interconnectedness of humanity and the importance of peaceful coexistence. Since the 1950s, India has sent over 290,000 peacekeepers to more than 50 missions worldwide, making it the largest contributor to UN peacekeeping efforts. Today, over 5,000 Indian troops serve in nine of the eleven active missions, often in dangerous and hostile regions, dedicated to upholding global peace and security. In this noble pursuit, nearly 180 Indian peacekeepers have made the ultimate sacrifice—heroes whose bravery and commitment will always be remembered.

India is dedicated to helping Global South nations strengthen their peacekeeping capabilities. Through the Centre for UN Peacekeeping, India continues to provide training and capacity- building programs, including specialized courses for women peacekeepers, as carried out for ASEAN nations in 2023. Peacekeeping is at the core of India's foreign policy—driven by dialogue, diplomacy, and global cooperation. This commitment reflects India's belief in the importance of South-South cooperation and its role as a leader in promoting peace and security in the developing world. Indian peacekeepers have served in diverse and challenging environments, making significant contributions to peace and security in various regions.

India has deployed Staff Officers, Experts on Mission, Military Observers, and Independent Police Officers in key UN peacekeeping missions, including United Nations Operation in Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI), United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), United Nations Peacekeeping Force In Cyprus (FICYP), United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), and United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA). These deployments reflect India's unwavering commitment to global peace and stability. India has been a leader in strengthening UN, host nations, and partner nations through capacity- building efforts. Committed to supporting UN initiatives, India has provided highly adaptable peacekeeping units, advanced training, logistical support, and

technological upgrades while promoting gender parity in peacekeeping forces. Beyond deployments, India actively helps host nations by offering training, infrastructure development, and Civil-Military Coordination (CIMIC) programs. Notably, Indian Army Veterinary Detachments have significantly impacted various UN missions, showcasing India's dedication to humanitarian and peacekeeping efforts worldwide. To ensure the efficiency and sustainability of Indian contingents in UN missions, the Indian Army has deployed state-of-the-art, indigenously manufactured equipment and vehicles. Built-in India, these advanced systems have proven their resilience in the toughest terrains, harshest climates, and most challenging operational conditions, reinforcing India's commitment to global peacekeeping.

Women play a crucial role in conflict resolution, community engagement, and peacebuilding, often gaining better access to local populations, particularly women and children. Their presence also helps prevent sexual violence, builds trust within communities, and fosters more inclusive and sustainable peace processes. Yet, despite these advantages, their participation in peacekeeping missions remains disproportionately low. Despite global efforts, women still make up less than 10% of the UN's 70,000 uniformed peacekeepers—including military personnel, police officers, and observers. Recognizing the need for greater gender inclusivity, the UN has set ambitious targets under its Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy, aiming for 15% women in military contingents and 25% in police units by 2028.

The push for greater female representation began in 2000 with UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which formally recognized women's critical role in conflict prevention, peace negotiations, and post-conflict rebuilding. This was followed by a series of Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Resolutions—including 1820, 1888, 1889, 2122, and 2242—that reinforced the need for women's leadership in peace efforts and took a strong stance against conflict-related sexual violence. In 2022, women made up 7.9% of all uniformed personnel in field missions - up from just 1% in 1993. This included 5.9% in military contingents, 14.4% in police forces, and 43% in justice and corrections roles. Among civilian personnel, 30% were women, with a growing number in leadership positions, achieving gender parity among Heads and Deputy Heads of Missions.

Why Women Peacekeepers Matter? Stronger Peacekeeping: Diverse and inclusive teams lead to more effective peace operations, improving civilian protection and peacebuilding. **Better Access & Trust:** Women peacekeepers enhance engagement with local communities, especially women, building trust and expanding outreach. **Diverse Leadership & Decision-Making:** Gender-balanced teams bring broader perspectives, strengthening decision-making and ensuring operations reflect the communities they serve. **Role Models for Change:** Women peacekeepers inspire future generations, challenging traditional norms and empowering women and girls to advocate for their rights. **Advancing Gender Equality:** Upholding equality and non-discrimination is central to UN Peacekeeping, aligning with the core principles of the UN Charter. While progress has been made, achieving true gender balance requires stronger commitments from countries worldwide. As the UN continues to push for change, increasing women's presence in peacekeeping is not just about numbers—it's about creating more effective, inclusive, and lasting peace.

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Social Work Digest is a thematic publication of the National Association of Professional Social Workers in India (NAPSWI), created to provide a dedicated platform for scholarly and reflective articles by social work professionals and members across the country. It focuses on critical discussions, professional experiences, and emerging perspectives within the field of social work in India. Each issue highlights a specific theme to encourage meaningful academic dialogue and knowledge sharing. The Digest complements NAPSWI's newsletter and supports the growth of professional learning, collaboration, and documentation of best practices, helping strengthen the social work community and guide the future development of the profession.

Call for Articles

The National Association of Professional Social Workers in India (NAPSWI) invites its members and professionals to contribute articles to the Social Work Digest. You may submit your articles based on the specific theme announced for each month.

Kindly send your contributions to napswi@gmail.com with the subject line:

“Article for [Month] – NAPSWI Social Work Digest.”

We encourage well-structured, insightful, and practice-oriented articles that contribute to the growth of the social work profession. Your valuable contributions will help strengthen academic dialogue and knowledge sharing within the community.

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