

Industrial Social Work

Compiler: Fateme Mohammady

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The development of Social work as a service to mankind is deep-rooted in the history of civilization; wherein social work as an occupation has been known for some time but social work as a profession is of recent origin. Bannerjee (1960) traces its origin in India through religious teachings emphasising virtues like charity and assistance to the needy and helpless. These virtues are embodied in the very structures of our different religious cultures.

The advancement of behavioural sciences, growth democratic values and the increasing emphasis on the concept of justice have contributed to the philosophy of professional social work (Sarma, 1985). Social work as a part of welfare services for Industrial workers in the community has been developed by managements over the last ten years. Welfare is now being envisaged as an integral part of the whole apparatus that includes social security, education, public health, the medical services, factory legislation, the right to strike and all other rights and legitimate expectations which are attached to modern democratic citizenship. There is an increasing recognition of the

contribution of the profession of social work from the primary Social setting to the secondary settings of the schools, hospitals, community centers and now industrial organizations. While the ramifications of the service delivery differ in different settings the common idea namely "help" binds them all. Industrial social work as an area of service delivery is a recent addition to the profession of social work. Its development is influenced by historical, socioeconomic and cultural factors in a particular country at a specific point of time.

The practice of social work in Industry is a direct result of the level of industrialization and composition of labor forces. The availability of material and human resources and entrepreneurial leadership- besides the social policy of the country also influence the practice? of social work. The introduction of the Industrial social worker as different from labor welfare and/or personnel officers has important implications not only for the status, role and interrelationships between them but to the industrial setting itself. The Encyclopedia of social sciences (VOL XV.1935) defines labor welfare as the voluntary efforts of the employers to establish within the existing industrial system, working and sometimes living and cultural conditions for the employees beyond what is required by law, the custom of the industry and the conditions of the market.

While the base for social work is within the definition it is clear that the emphasis is not totally on welfare. This can be seen from the use of the word "Sometimes". The concept that the practice of industrial social work might have a social change component is apparently a new idea. Weiner (1973) held that the professional role of the social worker in the world of work should be restricted to individual direct services. The responsibilities of the social worker in industrial organizations are particularly oriented to handling problems of industrial workers such as absenteeism, alcoholism, indebtedness etc. and are oriented to both welfare and management objectives. Thus Industrial social work is now defined as practice at the work place or in direct contractual arrangement with work place organizations.

Developments in the West

In Europe Scientific social work has its roots in the early 18th century from 1789 (European Social Welfare Programme 1961) before which the vital role of man power was completely ignored. Social work as an approach of 'helping' the needy employees arose out of the Industrial Revolution and the consequent exploitation of employees at the hands of employers. Industrial social work gained momentum because philanthropists were generally industrialists and the trade union movement was also helped by social thinkers and reformers. This

resulted in improvements in the conditions of employees as a result of demands made by trade unions, competition for the market, importance of employees cooperatives and the Hawthorne experiments on the human relations front. The concept of social work was paternalistic in so far as financial and material aid was doled out to the factory workers, and their families. This task also was invariably undertaken by an outside agency in the community on behalf of the industry.

The second phase of the industrial era in Europe which fell between the period of 1920 -19⁴⁰ was marked by increasing recognition of the human factor in industry. However the concept of "Workers welfare" at this stage was almost exclusively related to the employers concern for increase in output and profit.

A major breakthrough was achieved with the series of experiments conducted by the Hawthorne studies/works in Chicago from 1926 onwards. The Hawthorne experiments indicated to the management that higher productivity could be achieved through increased job satisfaction which involves a concern for the well being of the employee and his family. These experiments wpfie also aimed at enhancing production but one particular experiment the one regarding lighting conditions for workers revealed that with increase in lighting facility there was an increase in the output of work not only in

the experimental group but also in the control group (as reported by Saini 1971). The principle involved here was one of natural consent. What was important to the workers was not a mere improvement in the working conditions but also the importance given to them to choose what they felt was needed by them in bettering their working conditions. Thus in Europe the concept of Industrial social work began to be gradually integrated into the National social policy. The ideological consideration underlying this movement was that "the social welfare services should not only permit individuals,

and communities to participate in the production of goods and materials but should also give them the opportunity to benefit from it (Department of Social and Economic affairs 1971).

This shift from the employer provision of welfare services was also seen in terms of the new social services that were provided with the underlying emphasis on material help. These services were in the form of leisure time services, housing, transport, creches, home assistance services, convalescent homes etc. and were entrusted to the representatives of the employees who shared their responsibilities with the management or to the social workers in the industry. However these responsibilities were confined to being a liaison between the needy workers and the welfare services in the community

and the industry (Economic and Social Welfare Programme United Nations, 1961).

As a sequence to the development in political thinking, and in the social sciences the tasks of the personnel social worker became more administrative in nature. This compelled the social workers to combine personnel and social work tasks. These tasks primarily referred to the personnel policy and were termed general measures and provisions pertaining to the work situation. These obviously were inadequate to tackle personal problems (Saini 1971) therefore the appointment of a social worker was advocated.

In view of the increasing complexity in the field of personnel social work the International Federation of social workers undertook 2 studies to explore the different directions in which personnel social work was developing and at the same time examine the basic concepts underlying its practice. The reports emphasised that the term personnel social work was preferred to the term Industrial social work because the scope of the profession extends beyond industry and includes the care of personnel in hospitals, banks, shops etc. and also concentrates on the individual employee and not the undertaking. Desai (1969) notes that personnel social work has its basis on the recognition of the close working interrelationships between the employees home, community, and his working life and on the

social work philosophy emphasising the individuals worth, dignity and ability to grow and change.

The European Seminar on Personnel social work in 1961 endorsed this view and emphasised the need for it to be embodied in the personnel policy of the enterprise regardless of whether the function was part of the organizational structure of the enterprise or was carried out by an outside agency.

In Britain the concept of social work in Industry was virtually non existent until the 1930's and 40's when the labor management function began to be accepted after the effects of the industrial revolution on the social conditions of the industrial workers which demanded immediate action. The emergencies led to the increase of personnel departments and the basis for the philosophy of the welfare state was being built. This clearly indicates the influence of the political and economic conditions in a country on the development of the pattern of welfare practices in industry.

In America the pattern of welfare work in industry had a close parallel to developments in Britain. The Industrial revolution and its effects contributed to the emergence of a form of personnel work which concerned itself with the provisions of cultural, medical and other assistance. The workers were called social or welfare secretaries (Jacob, 1973).

However as indicated by Viswanathan (1963) there was a marked difference in the development of industrial social work in the European countries and in America eg. in Germany the trained social worker was in a great majority (German Association of Social Workers, 197£>. Although social work as a concept may have emerged later on employees were given help either by persons with a conscience or the trade union and even sometimes by the employers themselves. In America there have been few research studies on the role of the social worker in industry either in relation to management or to the organized labor. One feeling is that this negative sentiment could be due to the view of organized labor that some social agencies were at one time used as media for opposing union activities and also from the assumption that "help" from the social worker smacked of inadequacy and charity for the applicant. This is because people with self respect do not want charity they want justice.

Development in industrial social work in India originated from the recommendations of the Royal labor commission, (1931) which recommended the appointment of a labor officer to look after the interests of labour. The emergence of the concept of labor welfare officer was first seen in the cotton textile mills in Bombay and in the jute industry in Calcutta in the 1930's. The concept of welfare work in Industry at this stage was influenced by statutory requirements. Recruitment of labour

and settling of grievances of industrial workers were the main task of the first industrial labor welfare officer. While the concept of the labor officer was the contribution of the Royal commission the concept of the 'welfare officer' was the contribution of the Factories Act. This practice was based on the requirements of the Factories Act of 1861 and 1881 where the emphasis was mainly on policing and placating labour to some extent in favour of the employers interests. The next landmark was the factories Act 1947 which recommended the appointment of a welfare officer to look after the health, safety and welfare of the employees. Thus the duties covered under labour welfare formed the genesis of the modern concept of Industrial social work in India.

According to Kudchedkar (1979) the designation of a welfare officer is a misnomer since the duties of the welfare officers as laid down under the factories Act 1947 does not only deal with welfare functions but also substantially covers the increasingly important responsibilities of industrial relations and personnel administration at the Factory level. Implementation of various post independent labour legislations like the Industrial Disputes Act, The Workers' compensation act, The Bonus act, Minimum wages act etc and industrial expansion in general led to increase in industrial disputes. Consequently the new entrant with a training in social work skills was loaded with duties other

than those prescribed by the Factories Act concerning the administration of welfare services. Moreover a glance through all the 5 year plans shows that more and more stress is being laid on the provision of services and facilities for industrial labour like health services, social security schemes, quality of work life, holiday homes, recreational centers etc. which are mainly large scale measures to enhance the living and working conditions of Industrial Workers (Sarma, 198**) . This brought about the emergence of the personnel function and the emphasis on job satisfaction of the employees. It is now realised that the concept of job satisfaction is a total concept and interest in employees cannot be restricted to the Bhours that he spends with the company. Concern for whatever happens to him outside the organization also has to be shown (Desai, 198^).

The place of the social worker in Indian industry is within the administrative purview of the personnel and labour welfare department as this department is primarily concerned with the welfare of the operative employees (Desai and Dole, 1979).

Today the main thrust is towards integration of social work intervention skills, to help individual employees or groups of employees to adapt to problems arising from their work situation. It also involves handling of personal problems of workers in so far as they affect the work capacity of the individual employees. The emphasis therefore is on developing

the inner resources of the employees and thereby stimulating managements and other staff functionaries to adapt the work situations to the personal needs of the employees.

Thus as Mohanasundaram (1966) points out Industrial welfare work is not merely providing a few amenities for employees and their families but a serious attempt to deal with internal working conditions, workers' grievances, the promotion of industrial harmony, stability of labour, security of employment, adequate wages etc.

There are benefits which the worker is unable to secure for himself such as decent housing, adequate sanitation, efficient medical attention, education and recreation. welfare is an attempt on the part of the industrialists to smoothen some of these difficulties that confront the industrial worker both in cities as well as small towns. The motivating factors could be purely humanitarian, entirely selfish for increased efficiency, purely for business interests to counteract labour or union demands, income tax benefits, or to fulfill the legal requirements

In India some industrial groups have been taking interest in their employees and their families by engaging the services of social workers and community workers. Some industrial houses today have also taken up development projects in rural areas.

The personnel Function

In the 1750's the Personnel function emerged in the western countries and in the 1960's it also began to emerge in our country. The practice of Industrial social work as distinct from personnel management emerged. The personnel man was expected to look after the welfare of the employees.

In order to discharge their social responsibilities, by promoting employee satisfaction, achieving efficiency of operations and orderly conduct of plant affairs most companies work in 3 directions. Firstly, they participate in and contribute to the public programmes of social security and national health services the benefits of which are available to their employees also as citizens. Secondly, they cooperate with the state and local authorities and other agencies whose services are made use of by workers. Thirdly, they organize personnel departments in their plants to perform the following tasks. Employment service, industrial relations, wage administration, co-ordination of statutory obligations, welfare management and social work. All these services constitute the personnel function in industry which is headed usually by one chief (Vaid, 1970). Desai (1992) feels that in any industrial organization an officer or a manager is primarily concerned with the interests of the managements and therefore he is not likely to have much orientation towards the employees' wellbeing. When employees interests are pitted against the interests of the management this

executive is more likely to side with the management. So over a period of time the welfare/personnel officer loses whatever employee orientation he has. Thus he has no inclination to help the employees solve their problems. Besides as already mentioned the personnel/welfare officer is also burdened with responsibilities in other areas especially industrial relations and personnel administration. Therefore to him, welfare of the employees as an activity has a very low priority. Also to many Personnel/Welfare officers Employee welfare would only mean the administration of the statutory welfare amenities which the organization has provided for the employees. It would need a very conscientious welfare personnel officer to show some more concern for these welfare services. He may even raise a question as to whether they are satisfied with the welfare amenities or not and he may then try to improve it but beyond this, this officer is not likely to venture.

Since the focus of Industrial social work is to help the employees to solve their problems and be self reliant it calls for a sensitive assessment of the level of change possible and mobilization of forces within the industry, the family and the community. This would require knowledge and skill of scientific social work. Industrial social work is yet limited to a few well established industrial organizations. The employment

of social workers is voluntary and falls outside the scope of statutory requirements.

Usually social workers function in special areas of preventive and curative services for alcoholics, chronic diseases, counselling, medical aid and helping with family problems through home visits etc. The major emphasis is on the handling of problems of absenteeism, indebtedness, alcoholism, family and community problems of the employees and work adjustments of the industrial employees. The main thrust is towards integration of social work skills in helping individual employees or groups in adapting to problems arising from their work situations.

Thus there is sufficient scope for the social worker and thereby welfare practice in industry. It is clear that unless the personnel function is freed of its industrial relations orientation it would not be able to do justice to welfare. Somehow the managements have given a lower priority to worker's welfare as compared to industrial relations or other personnel functions. It therefore calls for the services of a professional

_ social worker who could be solely engaged in helping the employees overcome their problems and enable them to continue to function as usual productive human beings. He / She can extend himself/herself beyond individual employees and cater to their families and can also try to improve their community life. But, for this the management should be inclined and take interest in the problems of employees. In fact Akabas (1966) argues that there is a potential for change based on the professions mutual interests with the world of work. She points out that although some twenty years ago it seemed logical that social workers should help only individuals and not , meddle in organizational issues today such a position is insupportable. Endorsing the views of the doyen in social work thinking Pearlman (1968) she points out that since social workers have always recognized work as important in peoples lives it is not new for social workers to enter the world of work. She vehemently denies the argument put forth by writers like Balinsky (1980) who question the possibility of the two components of Industry existing simultaneously ie. People and profits. Akabas argues that the issue is not people versus profits but on the contrary it is the people who are responsible for profits and therefore the secret behind profits is to value highly and care effectively for its human beings.

Management Interests

Why should a management show any concern for the well being of the, -employees at all? The legalist and the rationalist may say that employment is a contract between the employer/management and the employees. At the time of joining an organization an employee with full knowledge and consent accepts the conditions of employment. In the language of the economist an employee exchanges his labour for the money of the employer/management and he has fully accepted the conditions of employment so he really cannot complain. Desai (1982) reflects that though employment is a contract it is not a contract between two equals. An employee is a weaker party and accepts the contract under pressure. To many employees there is no choice other than to accept the only job available to him. So employment is not a morally sound contract and there is a likelihood of employees being exploited by the management/employers. The history of industrialization gives ample evidence of exploitation of employees at the hands of employers/managements.

This gave rise to the Trade Union movement. It also makes the government aware of their role as protectors of the weak and vulnerable employees. Several countries have enacted protective legislations for employees. Since employers/managements in the past did not show any concern, inclination or interest with the well being of the employees the governments had to step in and

enact legislations and so also trade unions had to take up the role of protector of the interests of the employees.

Thus the governments and trade unions compel the management to show some concern for the well being of the employees. But this is certainly not enough. While the legal and other compulsions compel employers to give the absolute minimum that they can get away with to the employees, there is much more that can and should be done for employees.

In the last 50 - 55 years the behavioural sciences have come to the rescue of the employees. As already mentioned one of the findings of the Hawthorne studies (1926 - 33) was that there is a relationship between employees' satisfaction with their jobs and their productivity. Although their concern was the well being of the organization the employees have benefitted from them. Now the employers and managements are interested in higher employee productivity and the Hawthorne studies indicated that higher employee productivity can be achieved through increased job satisfaction.

The second logical extension of this idea is that the concept of job satisfaction could also include the family and the community of the employees. So managements have now realised that to ensure the job satisfaction of the employees the managements may have to help the employees in tackling the personal problems of the employees like alcoholism, drug

addiction, gambling, indebtedness etc. Therefore, some managements are trying to take more interest in the family and community problems of the employees by appointing community workers to sort out their problems. Keeping employees satisfied also has some other advantages (1> Absenteeism or staff turn over can be minimized. (2) A satisfied worker usually does not become a union activist. (3) Cooperation with management and greater initiative in work are also possible.

Some of the earlier studies showed support to the Hawthorne findings but some others did not in the sense that there was no positive relationship between satisfaction and productivity. These findings suggested that the workers could work more efficiently but were somehow not doing so. Thus new ways were sought to improve the situation. These findings have convinced managements / employers that they should show a concern for the well being of their employees for their own selfish interests. The Hawthorne experiments showed that a satisfied employee will not only perform effectively but will also be an asset to the organization. The subsequent studies also contributed by comparing levels of motivation with work desires.

Implications of the "Concern for Well Being"

One of the discoveries of Psychology is that the life of a human being cannot be compartmentalized into different segments e.g. an employee may be working in an organization for 8 hours a day and the remaining 16 hours of the day he spends outside the organization. An organization must show concern not only for employees problems on the job but also to the problems in his family or social life. The extended meaning of the term well-being would include problems faced by employees in their "on the job situation" as well as on their "off the job" situation. This can be developed on two lines one which is called "inside life" and the other which can be called "outside life" in terms of personal problems, familial problems, and problems of the neighborhood and the community.

Worker's Needs

It was the finding of the famous Michigan studies conducted by Rensis Likert (1961) and his colleagues that employee oriented supervisors get better results in terms of production than production oriented supervisors. This sounds paradoxical but is true. Some difficulties of employees are simple and can therefore be tackled by the management themselves but there may be other difficulties which are more complex and which cannot be tackled by the manager. In such cases the specialized help from a social worker may be essential. Therefore the social worker in an industry is likely to get his

clients through two channels a) Employees with problems may approach the social worker and b) Supervisors/managers may refer the problem to the social worker after they have failed in successfully dealing with certain problem employees.

Nowadays managements have also become aware of the need to investigate the family life of the employees. Many times the personal problems of the employees arise out of the family situation and in some cases the family members of the employees themselves need help and some managements even render help to these family members.

Beyond the family is the community e.g. Housing colonies for employees. Managements can also do something to improve the community life of the employees. Congenial surroundings can influence the personality of the individual. Services like community health programmes, sanitation, electricity, drainage etc. are examples. Here social workers can make a contribution (Bombay Chamber of Commerce 19B1).

In India, our villages remain underdeveloped when compared to towns and cities and hence some business houses have started adopting villages. This kind of service not only ensures the development of the villages and the inhabitants but also contributes to the building up of their image. The future employees from these communities are also likely to have favourable attitudes to managements' work. If an organization

earns a reputation for its philanthropy in terms of crises for the organization this can help at least substantially. So industrial organizations are concerned about developing communities around them and also developing some villages under the village adoption programme. The social worker could be appointed by the organization which adopts a village. Areas of intervention may include health, medical aid, children's welfare etc wherein a social workers skill is in the methods of case work and group work could be utilized effectively. This will also ensure that there is an integrated approach and the focus is on the complete development of the village.

The Role, Status, Functions and Scope for a Social Worker in Industry

The development of the Industrial social worker in India is recent. It is primarily voluntary and is influenced by the emphasis placed by the government on certain programmes in organized sectors such as family planning programmes, family welfare, community welfare etc. The place of the social worker in an industrial organization is within the administrative purview of the personnel or labour welfare department as this department is concerned with the welfare of the employees. The concern in this study is on the recognition of the social workers' role in the organization which has led them to give employment to professional Social workers. Occasionally it may be directly

under the management but she/he generally has the autonomy in her/his day to day functioning which helps to build up a positive and purposeful relationship with the operative employees. Usually the social worker is expected to report to someone but it is recommended that her functioning should be autonomous as far as possible (Miranda, 197£f).

The social worker's duty demands contacts with different levels of management in the industrial organization. For effective discharge of her functions it is absolutely essential for the management to give her/him a reasonable amount of authority and status and a clear designation in keeping with the structure of the organization (Saini, 1971). The strategic role of the social worker in an industrial organization stems from his/her intimate contacts with the rank and file workers as well as the access he/she has to decision making channels of power structure in industrial organizations but he/she should be very cautious of the dangers involved in the multiple identification with people of different status and roles and in having his/her skills used manipulatively (Vishwanathan, 1963) This is true of her role in enhancing positive communication between workers and managements. It is highly complex due to the growing importance of the trade unions which now have a great influence on the management. Here the positive and neutral stand of the

industrial social workers can be of great value to the personnel officer.

In a study conducted by Flenon and others (1978) it was shown that to achieve an ongoing coordination between training in social work institutions and industries, it was found necessary to train welfare and management students in industrial social work, develop short term orientation programmes on social work for supervisors and managers, develop demonstration projects, and develop services through the training institutions and professional associations.

Among the other functions of the social worker are individualisation of services in order to meet the individual demands of the worker concerned, educating workers regarding eligibility criterion for various welfare schemes, helping in determining priorities and advocating more comprehensive schemes for the management, the community and the government.

There is plenty of scope for social work practice in industry in both medium and large scale organizations. This is simply because the larger the organization the more complex are the problems posed by human beings. In a small organization managers can have a more direct contact with employees and there is usually an informal atmosphere. In larger organizations there is no such opportunity for the employees. Everything has

to go through proper channels and they thus have access only to the supervisors and junior managers who are not decision makers. So the problems of employees may be ignored and relationships between employees and managements get more formalised and access to managers is reduced. Such organizations experience peculiar problems of employees such as absenteeism, continuous indebtedness, deteriorating performance of good employees etc. In large organizations, there are more misunderstandings between top management and employees at lower levels due to inadequate communication. It is also found that managers are not interested or not inclined to tackle these problems and they feel the need for specialized help.

At present few industrial organizations employ social workers. These too are concentrated in industrially developed cities like Bombay and Bangalore. All over India there are only 79 social workers in private industries all of whom are from Bombay or Bangalore (Indian Association of Trained Social Workers Bangalore 1977). The reasons for this situation are obvious. Industrial managements do not regard employees as important enough. One other reason is that for many jobs there is no shortage of human beings and they are easily replaceable. Besides managements are not so seriously concerned about increasing the productivity of the organization because of

monopoly or near monopoly situations. Paternalistic attitudes towards employees and the authoritarian kind of approach seem to be more prevalent. The social worker would not only be very useful to help employees and their families to overcome their problems but he/she could also improve the community life of the employees and also assist in village adoption and other such programmes. Some problems of an environmental nature like lack of educational facilities, proper recreation, medical facilities etc. could be taken up by her/him with the appropriate authorities. So he or she could develop the programmes at both the preventive as well as the curative levels. The areas of scope for work include promoting the use of health and medical programmes such as health checkups, inoculation campaigns, family planning for workers etc. Resources from within the industry could be tapped for recreational services like libraries, social get togethers, sports etc. Inviting the participation of voluntary organizations like ladies clubs, vocational guidance centers etc. could also be considered. By and large progressive managements have realised that on their own initiative they should take more interest in the welfare of their employees including the family and the community. Welfare legislation merely insists on the minimum welfare amenities which managements must provide for their employees. (Desai 1987, Sopalan and Rao, 1987).

An organization may begin its social work activities by carrying out a survey of needs and problems of employees and their families from which common problems could be identified and action strategies considered.

At the second stage the organization may try to identify the communities where the employees are residing and then organize a survey to identify the community problems. Once this is done an action plan could be chalked out to take care of these problems.

The social worker can definitely be an asset to any medium or large organization. If he/she gets the proper support from the top level managements he/she can function effectively in the organizations.

Reference: shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in

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