
UNIT 1 PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORK: NATURE, SCOPE, GOALS AND FUNCTIONS

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to provide a basic understanding of the Philosophy of Social Work i.e., to make the learner understand the nature of Social Work. This unit studies the nature of social work, scope of social work, functions of social work, the goals of social work, the ideologies of social work, and the spiritual nature of social work.

The study of this unit is expected to enable you to understand the broad perspectives of social work and the interlinking of the various aspects which together indicate what social work is all about.

After studying this unit you will be able to understand:

- What is social work and misconceptions prevalent in the public.
- Nature of social work.
- Scope of social work.
- Functions of social work.
- Goals of social work.
- Personal attitudes of the worker.
- Social work and ethics.
- Ideologies of social work.
- Spirituality and social work.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Different people give different meanings to social work. Social work for some is (*shramadan*), for others it may be charity or disaster relief. Services like road building or cleaning houses or surrounding places will come under (*shramadan*)

But all these are not always social work. Social work helps people with behavioral problems, say children marital problems, and rehabilitation problems of chronic patients.

The reasons for misconceptions are :

- 1) Social workers are unable to separate western professional components and traditional religious components of social work.
- 2) Terminology has not developed as social workers are pre occupied with solving problem of day to day nature.
- 3) Precision and accuracy is lacking as most of the findings are drawn from social sciences.
- 4) Social work deals with problems about which even a layman has some fixed ideas.
- 5) Adding to this confusion politicians, film stars and cricketers describe some of their promotional campaigns as social work, trained social workers since are paid and voluntary, and untrained are not paid, but both working side by side, layman often cannot understand the difference between the kind of activities that come under the label of social work carried on by a wide range of persons with differing backgrounds.

1.2 NATURE OF SOCIAL WORK

Some individuals have personal or family problems. Some times they cannot solve these by themselves. So they need out side help. Such help comes from trained people. The individual seeking help is known as a client and the trained person helping him is known as a social worker. Such helping activities are known as social case work.

The client should have some motivation for self improvement. Readiness to accept help is a pre requisite condition in social work. The social worker only adds to the clients own efforts to improve his situation. He does not impose his advice or solution on the client, respecting the client's right to self-determination. Social workers should not feel superior to, or be contemptuous of the clients. They should have empathy i.e. they should try to understand the client's situation by placing themselves in his/her role. But at the same time, they should not feel like the client. The social worker must understand and accept the feelings of the client.

During disasters and natural calamities hundred of people donate cash and kind to help the victims. They will not have any direct contact with the victims. This is generally known as social service as it involves providing some help to the helpless. But in social work, face to face interaction of the worker and client is important. In certain instances, in addition to temporary relief, the social worker also helps in improving interpersonal relations and adjustment problems related to disaster and natural calamities. The kind of involvement needed to deal with deeper issues and other relationship problems is called social work.

Scientific Base of Social Work

Social work practice has a strong scientific base. Social workers do not believe in knowledge for its own sake. Social work for its basis, a scientific body of knowledge, though borrowed from different disciplines of social and biological sciences. Social work like any other discipline has three types of knowledge.

- 1) Tested knowledge.
- 2) Hypothetical knowledge that requires transformation to tested knowledge.
- 3) Assumptive knowledge which is practical wisdom requires transformation to hypothetical knowledge and from there to tested knowledge.

The knowledge is borrowed from sociology, psychology, anthropology, political science, economics, biology, psychiatry, law, medicine etc. All disciplines have contributed much to the understanding of human nature. Social workers make use of this knowledge to solve problems of their clients.

Social work is rooted in humanitarianism. It is “Scientific Humanism” as it uses scientific base. Social work is based on certain values which when organised constitute the “Philosophy of Social Work”. Social work is based on faith in the essential worth and dignity of the individual. Man is an object of respect not because he is rich or powerful but because he is a human being. Human nature endows the individual with worth and dignity which, every other human being has to respect.

Social work is against any kind of discrimination based on caste, colour, race, sex or religion. Social work is against “Social Darwinism” and the principle of “survival of the fittest”. This means that social work does not believe that only the strong will survive in society and the weak will perish. Those who are weak, disabled and or need care are equally important for social workers. The individual is understood as a whole with the same worth and dignity in spite of differing psychological, social and economic aspects. The social worker believes in the capacity of the individual and also recognises individual differences. The individual’s self-determination is given importance. He should be understood from both domestic and cultural points of view. Social work is a combination of “idealism and realism”. To a social worker an individual is important but society is equally important. The individual is greatly moulded by social circumstances. But, ultimately the individual must bear the responsibility for his/her conduct and behaviour. The worker has to solve the problem on account of which the client is disturbed. Hence social work is problem solving in nature.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answers.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

- 1) What are the reason for the prevailing misconceptions in social work?

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- 2) What is a professional relationship is social work?

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1.3 SCOPE OF SOCIAL WORK

The concern of social work's is to help people who are in need so that they develop the capacity to deal with their problems by themselves. It is both science and an art. Social work is science in the sense that the knowledge taken from different disciplines forms the body of knowledge for a social worker and she/he uses this theoretical base for helping people i.e., for practice. What theory postulates has to be put into practice. The required capacity to do it is known as skill. Hence, professional social work with selected knowledge and the set of social work values, has to be transformed into a professional service.

A social worker has to establish a positive relationship with the clients. S/he should know how to interview and write reports. She/he should be able to diagnose i.e., find out the cause for the problem and finally she/he should work out a treatment plan. An Assessment of the problem, planning for its solution, implementing the plan and evaluating the outcome are the four major steps involved in social work. Social worker's keen interest in helping the client, alone will not solve the problem. S/he should know how to help his/her clients. The methods of social work will help his/her to understand ways of helping people. Social work methods are :

- 1) Social case work
- 2) Social group work.
- 3) Community organisation.
- 4) Social work research.
- 5) Social welfare administration.
- 6) Social Action

The First three are known as direct helping methods and the last three are secondary methods or auxiliary methods. These six social work methods are systematic and planned ways of helping people.

Social case work deals with individual problems— individual in the total environment or as a part of it. An individual is involved in the problem as he is unable to deal with it on his own, because of reasons beyond his control. His anxiety sometimes temporarily makes him incapable of solving it. In any case, his social functioning is disturbed. The case worker gets information regarding the client's total environment, finds out the causes, prepares a treatment plan and with professional relationship tries to bring about a change in the perception and attitudes of the client.

Social group work is a social work service in which a professionally qualified person helps individuals through group experience so as to help them move towards improved relationships and social functioning. In group work individuals are important and they are helped to improve their social relationships, with flexible programmes, giving importance to the personality development of the individual in group functioning and relationships. The group is the medium and through it and in it, individuals are helped to make necessary changes and adjustments.

Community Organisation is another method of social work. Being made up of groups, a community means an organised systems of relationships but in reality no community is perfectly organised. Community Organisation is a process by which a systematic attempt is made to improve relationships in a community. Identifying

the problems, finding out resources for solving community problems, developing social relationships and necessary programmes to realize the objectives of the community are all involved in community organisation. In this way the community can become self reliant and develop a co-operative attitude among its members.

Social Welfare Administration is a process through which social work services both private and public, are organised and administered. Developing programmes, mobilising resources, involving selection and recruitment of personnel, proper organisation, coordination, providing skillful and sympathetic leadership, guidance and supervision of the staff, dealing with financing and budgeting of the programmes and evaluation are, some of the functions of a social worker in administration.

Social work research is a systematic investigation for finding out new facts, test old hypotheses, verify existing theories and discover causal relationships of the problems in which the social worker is interested. In order to scientifically initiate any kind of social work programmes, a systematic study of the given situation is necessary, through social work research and surveys.

Social action aims at bringing about desirable changes to ensure social progress. Creating awareness about social problems, mobilizing resources, encouraging different sections of people to raise their voice against undesirable practices, and also creating pressure to bring about legislation are some of the activities of the social workers using the method of social action. It seeks to achieve a proper balance between community needs and solutions mainly through individual and group initiatives and self-help activities.

1.4 FUNCTIONS OF SOCIAL WORK

The basic functions of social work are restoration, provision of resources and prevention. These are interdependent and intertwined. Restoration of impaired social functioning has two aspects-curative and rehabilitative. The curative aspect eliminates the factors responsible for the individual's impaired social functioning. That means disturbed interpersonal relations are corrected by removing the factors responsible for it. After removing the factors responsible for the problem, the individual has to adjust to the new remedy or device suggested. The individual is helped to adjust to the needs of the new situation. That is what is known as rehabilitative aspect. For example, a hearing aid is suggested as a curative measure for a partially deaf child, whose social relations are impaired due to the problem. That is the curative aspect. Getting oneself adjusted to the hearing aid is the rehabilitative aspect.

Provision of resources has two aspects, the developmental and the educational. The developmental aspect is designed to enhance effectiveness of the resources and to improve personality factors for effective social interaction. For example Mr & Mrs X are living happily in spite of some differences of opinion. They are not going in for a divorce and there is no problem in their marriage. But with the help of a family counselling agency, they can sort out their differences and improve their relationship. This is what is known as the developmental aspect. The educational spectrum is designed to acquaint the public with specific conditions and needs for new or changing situations. For example a talk given by a counsellor to alleviate family and marriage problems is an educational process.

The third function of social work is prevention of social dysfunctioning. It includes early discovery, control or elimination of conditions and situations that potentially

could hamper effective social functioning. For example starting a youth club in some areas for boys may help prevent juvenile delinquency. Pre-marital counselling for youth may prevent marriage problems in future.

Check Your Progress II

Note : a) Use the space provided for your answers.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) What is the scope of social work ?

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2) What are the functions of social work ?

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1.5 GOALS OF SOCIAL WORK

The goal of social work is to reduce suffering by solving people's problems. People have psycho-social problems with regard to their physical and mental health. Apart from this, adjustment problems in children and adults can be dealt with separately. In other words, social work enhances social functioning of individuals, groups and families by providing recreational services to the public, and by a judicious use of leisure time, can prevent delinquency and crime in the society. It also links client system with the needed resources. Social work helps the individual in bringing about a change in the environment in favour of his growth and development.

Social work provides democratic ideas and encourage the development of good interpersonal relations, resulting in proper adjustments with the family and neighbourhood.

Social work does not believe in 'Social Darwinism'. It does not accept the principle of survival of the fittest. Hence it works for social justice through legal aid. It also promotes social justice through the development of social policy. Social work improves the operation of social service delivery network as well.

1.6 PERSONAL ATTITUDE OF THE WORKER

The Social worker is also a human being. She/he will experience all the emotions that a human being experiences. As she/he is in the position of helping others, there is a tendency to feel superior. Sometimes when the client is narrating his/her sad, painful past experiences, the social worker will identify with her/his client, experience the same feeling as the client. Sometime the social worker may tend to see the client

as a mirror image of herself/himself. All this may have its roots in the worker's early life and experience. She/he has to understand her/his own feelings and control them while being professionally involved in the helping role. She/he must accept the feelings of the client as they are. She/he should not get them mixed up with her/his own. She/he must focus on helping the client by constructive and positive use of the client's emotions and resources.

1.7 SOCIAL WORK AND ETHICS

Any profession usually gives a lot of authority to its professional. A layman who requires social work help may be knowing the intricacies of the problem. A social worker's professional advice is valuable and his/her judgement may not be questioned. But power when it is not regulated by norms of behavior, is liable to degenerate into tyranny. Social workers may charge a high price for their professional service or make undesirable demands from the public. Hence in order to regulate the professional by a code of conduct is developed by professional organisations.

Philosophy of Ethics: The professional has an ethical responsibility towards the clients, the employing agency and the colleagues. She/he has a responsibility towards the community as well as his/her profession. The professional person's relationship with his/her client is the basis for her/his service. The relationship should be impartial and objective. The professional should not discriminate on the basis of sex, caste, creed or colour. The professional has to keep the client's problem and related information very confidential. He/she should have a healthy relationship with colleagues based on equality, co-operation, helpfulness, and regulated competition.

The professional has a responsibility towards society, and should contribute all his/her ability and resources for the good of society. The responsibility towards the profession are even greater for the professional. Formal and informal methods of social control ensure that members conform to the code of ethics. A profession exists when it is recognised. Recognition comes only by reserving jobs for people with technical training, giving preference to qualification in jobs, providing awareness for promotions financial resources etc.

Ethical Responsibilities of Social Work: A social worker has ethical responsibilities towards his clients, the employing agencies, his colleagues, his community and towards his profession.

A social worker's ethical responsibilities towards his clientele impose the welfare of the individual as his primary obligation. The social worker should give greater importance to professional responsibility rather than over personal interests. She has to respect her client's (self determination) opinion. She should keep confidential all matters related to the client. The social worker should respect the individual differences among clients and should not any discrimination on a non-professional basis.

The Social worker has an ethical responsibility towards his employers and should be loyal to them. He/she should provide correct and accurate information to his employer. The social worker should be held accountable for the quality and extent of service, observing the regulations and procedures of the agency. She/he should help his/her agency in increasing its public image even after termination of his/her employment.

The social worker has to respect his/her colleagues and should help in fulfilling their responsibilities. The social worker should assume the responsibility of adding to her/his knowledge. She/he should treat all without discrimination and should cooperate with other research and practice.

The social worker has an ethical responsibility towards the community in protecting it from unethical practices. She/he has to contribute knowledge and skills for the betterment of the community.

Above all, the social worker has an ethical responsibility towards her/his own profession. She/he should defend her profession from unjust criticism or misinterpretation. She/he should sustain and enhance public confidence through her/his self-discipline and personal behaviour. The social worker should always support the view that professional practice requires professional education.

1.8 IDEOLOGIES OF PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORK

If the global historical background of social work is analyzed, we can understand the following ideologies of social work.

Social Work as Charity: Religion encouraged individual to help their neighbors who were in need of help. The people who were in need of help were given alms. Those who are helped them, given alms out of charity. Thus western countries started their social work practice with charity mode. As religion encouraged them to help their fellow-human beings who were poor, they started giving alms in cash and kind. Soon they realised that could not give enough to the increasing poor and a way-out was required to overcome the problem. At that time the state (Government of UK) intervened by enacting legislation and initiating state responsibility to take care of the poor.

Welfare Social Work Approach: The state started providing its share of service in giving alms, and by passing the Elizabethan poor Law (1601) in UK to deal with the poor. The Act divided the poor into three categories, the able bodied poor, the impotent poor and the dependent children. The first category was forced to work in the workhouses, whereas the other two categories were given alms in almshouses. The Act, as well as subsequently passed enactments were unable to solve the problem of poverty. The government realised that an individualized approach was needed to understand the problem. The problem may be one, but different individuals have different causes for the same problem. They realised that the individual cause has to be investigated for its solution. Hence charity organisations were started to do that work.

Clinical Social Work Approach: In 1935, the Social Security Act was passed recognising the need for helping the poor. The Act was meant to handle the problem that were a consequence of industrialization. The state took over some of the financial problems of the people. A large number of volunteers were taken. As volunteers are trained people who can do case work practice, they also supervise untrained people. Most people realised that money alone could not solve problems and they turned to counselling roles. Counselling has drawn its base from psychological sciences particularly from Psychoanalytical theory.

Clinical social work is a specialised form of direct social work intervention with individuals, groups and families, which mostly take place in the worker's office. In

this approach with the disciplined use of self, the worker facilitates interaction between the individual and his or her social environment.

Ecological Social Work Approach: In ecological social work approach problems are seen as deficits in the environment and not as personal deficits of the individual. Social work tradition emphasised social treatment and social reform which become the basis for ecological approach. Professional social workers and their employing agencies consider themselves as change agents aiming at systemic change. Identifying the problem, identifying the clients and target system (which is causing the problem) finding out the decision making on the goals of change in collaboration with clients and identification of “action system” with which change agent can achieve goals for change are the steps in ecological approach.

Radical Social Work Approach: Social workers are not satisfied only with care of the disabled and the deviants. In 1970, due to influence of Marxism, they advocate oppression as the cause for many problems. They broadened their professional responsibilities to include reform and development in order to bring about an equitable social order.

Some radicals in the profession have gone beyond social reform and development. The social workers aim is changing the system by bringing basic changes in the social institutions and relationships instead of dealing with adjustment problems and seeing individual as victims of an unjust social order. This is called radical social work and for various reasons it has also failed to deal with the problems.

Progressive Social Work: Progressive social workers may identify themselves with radicals, activists etc., They are unhappy about the injustice in the society. The progressive social workers strive to alter the oppressive element in the society. They help them heal their wounds and educate them to make proper choices so as to build their future.

Feminist Social Work: Liberal feminism is the school of thought that emphasises equality of sexes and demands legal reforms and equal opportunities for suffrage, education and employment to both men and women. Liberal feminists do not analyse the roots of gender oppression in the society.

Marxist feminists view women’s oppression as the outcome of capitalist mode of production. Where there is division between domestic work and wage work, only the latter is productive.

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answers.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) What are the ethical responsibilities of social worker?

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2) What are the different ideologies of social work ?

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1.9 SPIRITUALITY AND SOCIAL WORK

India is a home for many religions and has a rich spiritual heritage. In Hinduism the Vedas and the Upanishads form the basis for spirituality. They provide a method to control one's own inner forces to realise the ultimate truth. The truth is the key for knowing one's own identity and the purposes of life. It gives a detachment from oneself and helps in controlling one's own emotions. Similarly other religions also help their adherents to reach these ends.

We believe that service to humanity is service to God. Humanitarianism is the basic principle of social work. It respects the human worth and dignity. Social work believes in the creativity and inherent potentialities of the individuals.

The social worker brings out their potentialities through appropriate institutions and timely opportunities. The social worker will interact with different type of personalities including anti-social personalities. She has to develop a non judgmental attitude towards them accepting individuals and groups as they are. The social worker is trained to have a controlled professional self due to which she avoids feeling superior though she is at the giving end in the helping relationship. Further she has to develop a detached outlook in dealing with the client during her professional endeavors.

1.10 LET US SUM UP

Social work aims at helping people to solve their problems. Mostly social work deals with interpersonal problems, such as marital problems, parent-child problems, rehabilitation of chronic patients etc. It is different from social service. The presence of professional relationship and face-to-face interaction makes social work different from social service. Social work has a knowledge base borrowed from other social and psychological sciences. Social work has methods such as social case work, group work, community organisation, social action, social welfare administration, and social work research.

Social work has three important functions, restoration of impaired social functioning, provision of resources and prevention of social dysfunctioning. Social work's goal is problem solving. It deals with psycho-social problems of physical and mental health, corrects the problems of interpersonal relations, and provides social justice

The social worker's personal attitudes such as love and hostility should not interfere with her professional work. A social worker like any other professional, is guided by professional ethics. She has her ethical responsibility towards her profession, client, colleagues and the community.

The social work history will give an account of different ideologies from charity, welfare approach, clinical approach, ecological approach, radical approach to progressive social work and feminism.

1.11 KEY WORDS

- Professional relationship** : Relationship of the worker and the client based on the workers acceptance of the client and clients faith and respect for the worker.
- Restoration** : Bringing the client back to normalcy in case of disturbed social relations.
- Personal attitudes** : The worker as she is also a human being may have subjective feelings, which are known as personal attitudes. These attitudes are to be controlled.
- Professional ethics** : The social worker having a knowledge of theory, training, specialisation and professional organisation are controlled by professional ethics. These ethics are rules of conduct.
- Misconceptions** : Wrong ideas which need corrections

1.12 SUGGESTED READINGS

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- Khinduka, S. K. (1965), *Social Work in India*, Kitab Mahal, Allahabad.
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- Murali Desai (2002), *Ideologies and Social Work. Historical and Contemporary Analysis*, Rawat Publication, Jaipur.

1.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

- 1) • Social workers are unable to separate western professional components and traditional religious components of social work.
- Terminology has not developed as social workers are pre occupied with solving problem of day to day nature.
 - Precision and accuracy is lacking as most of findings are drawn from social sciences.
 - Social work deals with problems about which even a layman has same fixed ideas.

- Adding to this confusion politicians, film stars and cricketers are naming their activities as social work. Since trained worker and paid and voluntary untrained workers are not paid but both work side by side, a layman cannot understand what is meant by social work.
- 2) The worker should accept the client as he is without any discrimination and the client should be willing to take worker's help because of his confidence in him and his agency.

Check Your Progress II

- 1) Social work is a science in the sense that the knowledge taken from different disciplines forms the body of knowledge for the social worker and they use this theoretical base for helping people i.e., for practice. The methods of social work will help her to understand ways of helping people. The social work methods are: 1) Social case work, 2) Social group work, 3) Community organisation, 4) Social work research, 5) Social welfare administration, 6) Social action.
- 2) The basic functions of social work are restoration, provision of resources and prevention. These are interdependent and intertwined. Restoration of impaired social functioning has two aspects – curative and rehabilitative. The curative aspect eliminates the factors responsible for the individuals impaired social functioning. This means disturbed interpersonal relations are corrected by removing the factors responsible for them. After removing the factors responsible for the problem, the individual has to adjust to the new remedy or device suggested. The individual is helped to get adjusted with the needs of the new situations. This is what is known as the rehabilitative aspect. Provision of resources has two aspects developmental and educational. The developmental aspect is designed to enhance effectiveness of the resources and to improve personality factors equipment for effective social interaction. The educational spectrum is designed to acquaint the public with specific conditions and needs for new or changing resources. The third function of social work is prevention of social dysfunctioning. This means is early discovery, control or elimination of conditions and situations that could potentially hamper effective social functioning

Check Your Progress III

- 1) Social worker has his ethical responsibilities towards his clients, employing agencies, to his colleagues, to his community and towards his profession.
- 2) If the global historical background of social work is analyzed we can understand following ideologies of social work-social work as charity welfare, social work approach clinical social work approach, ecological social work approach, radical social work approach, progressive social work, feminist social work.