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Concept Note
Structural Social Work - Repositioning in Indian Context
Dr Bajju P V

Structural social work is one of the social work practice methods, among progressive and radical social work approaches developed in the end of last century. The critical approach (progressive approach) in social work seeks for alternatives in the existing system and proposes changes in systems and structures. Social problems are not caused by deficits in communication between individuals and systems (as some theories persist). Differential access to power and conflict between systems are the problems and not a lack of mutual fit, reciprocity, interdependence and balance between individuals and systems (Moreau 1989). A progressive approach will alert the social worker to recognize clients suffer psychological harm as a result of institutional structures, which keep many people powerless.

Conventional social work operates within existing social institutions to assist individuals to adjust and adapt to the status quo. In contrast, critical social work maintains that existing social institutions cannot adequately meet human needs and instead works towards fundamental social transformation (Mullally, 1997). Structural social work follows Marxist perspective and seeks to dismantle colonialist, patriarchal and capitalist domination, and focuses of contributing to a welfare and egalitarian state. (Abramovitz, 2008). Muroeue (1988) proposes four practice framework for structural social work - Personal is Political, Oppression, Empowerment, Consciousness Raising.

The conventional social work methods have their origins from the social work practice in west. Though the social work methods at micro, meso and macro levels, are fundamental to social work practice, they need to be consistently reinvented and adapted to local circumstances. Application of structural social work calls for fundamental changes in the society, which requires longer time than many of the clinical approaches followed in social work. Munanno (1989) suggest five practice approaches - Defense: maximizing access to rights and resources. Collectivism: development of collective consciousness. Materialization: Grounding problems in access to resources, Increasing client power in worker-client relationship, Enhancing clients power through personal change. While I build on those frameworks, I also proposes other practice methods of structural social work based on Indian context.

Structural social work in Indian context requires special attention as many of the struggles of Indian society go through are the direct results of social, economic, legal, religious, class and caste structures. Though they vary between states and within states and communities the larger structural arches are the same. In the seminar I will build on the concept of structural social work in reference to historical evolution of social work profession globally and in Indian context, propose structural social work as a progressive and radical social work practice method in India and coalesce practice approaches of structural social work in the country. The emphasis will concomitantly follow detailed analysis of power structures, and self-location of social worker in relation to identified power identities.