

SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL WELFARE IN PAKISTAN: FOR THE SOCIETY BUT NOT FROM THE SOCIETY

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Abstract

The origin of social work and social welfare in Pakistan could be traced back to the country's inception in 1947. However, little is known about its professional growth in the Pakistani context. This article traces the historical evolution of social work education, social policy and social welfare administration in Pakistan while highlighting the troubles that social work and social welfare faced in taking roots in the local context. It also attempts to explain this troubled growth in terms of ideological issues, colonial inheritance, low recognition of social welfare and lack of direction and progress in social work education in Pakistan. It is concluded that the recent devolution of social welfare from the centre to the provinces could be an opportunity to address those troubles and bring social welfare and social work in accordance with the needs of the people of Pakistan.

Key Words: Social Work, Social Welfare, Professional Growth, Pakistani society

1.1. Introduction

The history of the professional social work is not very old. The sixteenth century English Poor Laws are considered to be the first organized initiative, requiring professional overseers to administer welfare services to the poor (Skidmore & Thackeray, 1976). However, the root idea is old enough to be traced back to the history of modern civilization, of which, charity is an important value. According to Payne, 'charity emerged from both religious and social responsibility, and the two were closely

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related' (Payne, 2005, p. 21). In fact, it is noted that there is a strong tradition of introducing social work history by relating the giving of alms, according to Judaic-Christian ethics (Piccard, 1979). However, lately, there is a growing trend among social work scholars and practitioners to look at the origin and practice of social work and social welfare in other religious and cultural traditions (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000; Gray & Fook, 2004; Osei, 1996; Ragab, 1990; Tsang & Yan, 2001).

Muslim scholars point to the following verse from the Quran, which provide the Islamic value base of social work.

It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces towards East or West; but it is righteousness to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and practice regular charity, to fulfil the contracts which we have made; and to be firm and patient, in pain (or suffering) and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, God fearing (Al-Qur'an, 2:177).

Among Muslim countries, little is known about social work and social welfare in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan despite the existence of a sizeable social welfare system and social work education at the university level since early 1950s. The country came into being in 1947 as a result of partition of the Indian sub-continent into two independent states of India and Pakistan. The partition resulted in one of the largest cross-border migration in the world history. The newly established state was to settle millions of refugees, which gave rise to organized social welfare activities involving voluntary as well as state actors (Ghafur & Mollah, 1968). Today, Pakistan hosts the sixth largest population in the world, of which one-third lives below the poverty line, requiring an organized social welfare system to help them fight against poverty. Only a cursory body of knowledge exists that documents the origin and growth of social work and social welfare in Pakistan (for example Ghafur & Mollah, 1968; Graham, Al-Krenawi & Zaidi, 2007; Rashid, 1966; Rehmatullah, 2002). This article attempts to contribute to fill this gap by documenting and analyzing the troubled growth of social work and social welfare in the Pakistani context.

The article is organized in such a way that first, it traces the historical evolution of social work education, social policy and social welfare administration in Pakistan. It does so while highlighting the troubles that

social work and social welfare faced in Pakistan since inception to date. Second, it attempts to explain this troubled growth in terms of ideological issues, colonial inheritance, low recognition of social welfare and lack of direction and progress in social work education followed by a conclusion. It is concluded that, as result of the 18th Constitutional amendment, the devolution of social welfare from the centre to the provinces could be an opportunity to correct some of the past wrongs and bring social welfare and social work on track, in accordance with the needs of the people of Pakistan.

1.2. Social Work and Social Welfare in Pakistan

The advent of social welfare, in developing countries of the global South, is accredited either to their cultural and religious values or the colonial influence (Boyden 1997; Graham, Al-Krenawi & Zaidi, 2007; Rehmatullah, 2002). In Pakistan, from the very beginning of the establishment of a state welfare system, the official rhetoric was that of Islam. However, the reality was somewhat mixed. It is worth mention that at the time of Independence, the resource-constrained state has to deal with many socioeconomic problems that aggravated with the influx of refugees from India. The country had not inherited any social welfare structures from the British India, therefore, in 1951, the Government of Pakistan sought help from the United Nations (UN) to advise the government on social welfare issues. The UN advisers recognized that the Islamic values and injunctions pertaining to social welfare, such as providing assistance to the poor, care of the indigent, the orphan, and the realization of Zakat were engrained in the daily lives of the people. The UN advisers, therefore, recommended that these values be translated into the social welfare policy of the country (Rehmatullah, 2002). However, considering the dearth of trained social workers, social administrators and social policy makers, the 'training for Social Work' was given priority over formulation of a national social welfare policy.

1.2.1. Social work education

The first in-service training course began on 2 October 1952 and lasted till 2 April 1953. A main objective of the training course was to determine the prospective pattern of social work training best suited to the needs of Pakistan. Despite the decision to base the training course on Pakistani culture and traditions, the curriculum of the course tended to follow the pattern of Western social work education (Rehmatullah,

2002). The reasons for this include time constraints and lack of expertise to make any sociological study of the Pakistani culture and traditions on which to base the curriculum (Rehmatullah, 2002). The next three-months course was organized in Dacca in September 1953. While evaluating the Dacca course, the training team formulated some guidelines for planning future social work training in Pakistan. These guidelines included, among others, 'social work training in Pakistan must demonstrate clearly the manner in which ideas and practices, believed and fundamental to social work anywhere, could be translated in terms meaningful for the traditions and social needs of Pakistan' (Livingstone, 1957, pp. 28-29).

These experiments and learnings from the short-courses were conceived as preparations for more extensive training at university level. Consequently, a two-years post graduate diploma in social work was introduced in the University of the Punjab on November 15, 1954, which was upgraded in 1956 to a master degree (Department of Social Work, 1969). Fully aware of the dearth of indigenous literature on social work, the pioneers sought to 'establish a training pattern relevant to the distinctive cultural and socioeconomic needs of Pakistan' and for this purpose the course was kept flexible (Department of Social Work, 1969, p.16). It was emphasized that 'no body of knowledge and skills, however effective elsewhere, should be accepted uncritically as essential to the social welfare needs of this country', therefore, students were 'encouraged to evolve an indigenous social work philosophy grounded in the needs and aspirations of the Muslim society of Pakistan' (Department of Social Work, 1969, pp.16-17).

However, despite all above emphasis on the need for locally relevant social work training, the curriculum was clearly based on western practices. For example, those involved in the early years of social work training noted how Pakistani teachers and students of social work found it difficult to place Social Case Work (a specialized method of social work used in one to one professional relationship) in the Pakistani context where families and communities predominate over individuals (Rashid 1966; Rehmatullah, 2002). The initial Western format of the curriculum, which was used out of necessity in the first training course, dictates the contents of social work education even after half a century and expansion of social work education up to the PhD level in seven leading universities of the country. According to a late 2013 web-based research, social work education programmes are carried out at the University of Punjab (www.pu.edu.pk) University of Peshawar (www.upesh.edu.pk), Karachi University (www.ku.edu.pk), Islamia

University Bahawalpur (www.iub.edu.pk), University of Sargodha (www.uos.edu.pk), University of Sindh Jamshoro (www.usindh.edu.pk) and University of Baluchistan, Quetta (www.uob.edu.pk).

Almost all these programmes follow a very similar curriculum including social work methods (Case Work, Group Work, Community Development and Organization, Social Policy and Administration, Social Legislation and Social Research), relevant social sciences (Sociology, Psychology, Economics), optional/elective courses on emerging fields (Gender, Human Rights, Poverty Reduction), field practicum and research. In fact, the universities of Dhaka, Karachi, Peshawar and Baluchistan adopted the same curriculum developed by the Punjab University (Rehmatullah, 2002). The recommended reading lists hardly include a reference of material written by a Pakistani author or by others in the Pakistani context. In short, these programmes still lack a locally relevant approach to social work, which meets the cultural and socioeconomic needs of the country. The case of social welfare policy and administration was not very different from social work education.

1.2.2. Social welfare policy

On the policy front, as noted earlier, the UN advisers recommended that the Islamic values of welfare such as providing assistance to the poor, care of the indigent, the orphan, and the realization of zakat, which were engrained in the daily lives of the Pakistani people, be translated into the social welfare policy of the country. The main elements of Pakistan's first social policy included; 1) a community development program, 2) a programme to stimulate the development of private welfare agencies, 3) a programme to stimulate the development of social welfare programmes in the provinces and local authorities, 4) a new housing policy, and 5) an expanded programme of labour protection. It is not difficult to note that these elements were based more on the prevailing situation rather than the religious and cultural values of the people or the ideological foundations of the country (Rehmatullah, 2002). The irony of this situation was not lost to this UN adviser for Social Welfare to the Planning Board, whose Note for Record read as, 'it is one of the ironies of life that though for most people, most of the time, spiritual values are more important than material possessions, yet it is much easier to plan, calculate, assess in the material world than in the spiritual. When we think about the future, either personally or corporately, it is always in physical terms that we do our planning.' (Wilson cited in Rehmatullah,

2002, p. 34). This was not a good beginning for social welfare policy in Pakistan.

However, the worst was yet to come. The first social welfare policy, however poorly founded it was, remained a document buried in official files as, for almost next twenty years, there was no clear social welfare policy. During the course of four Five Year Plans (1955-77) and the two Annual Plans (1975-77), a variety of social services was established under various public and private agencies (National Council of Social Welfare, 1976). This arrangement did not go without criticism. For example, one critic observed, 'if we do not want frustration to perpetuate we must fix the focus of orientation of social policy...instead of making efforts through so many agencies, will it not be better if these are co-ordinated and pushed through a new sector...it will avoid unnecessary waste of overhead and administrative expenditure and duplication of effort' (Hak, 1971, pp.20-23). Such criticism was not to be taken into account any soon.

Instead, the national Constitution, adopted in 1973, placed social welfare on the 'Concurrent Legislative List' meaning both the federal and the provincial governments could legislate in this field. This resulted in further lack of focus of a national social welfare policy and poor co-ordination between the centre and the provinces as each was looking to the other to take initiative (Jillani & Jillani, 2000). It was not until 1988, that a full fledged Ministry of Social Welfare produced a comprehensive policy document, that is, the second social welfare policy 1988, which guided the social welfare programmes in coming years. This policy had a mixed approach to social welfare as it was based on the concept of an Islamic welfare state and the contemporary concept of social development (Rehmatullah, 2002). The third (1992) and fourth (1994) social welfare policies were not much different from the second as the purpose and focus of these policies was not clear, but, rather reflected a struggle between traditional remedial services and the contemporary concept of social development with a rhetoric of Pakistan being an Islamic state having a given set of welfare-related values and practices.

With the passage of 18th constitutional amendment in 2010-11, which devolved considerable power to the provinces, social welfare became a provincial subject. Thus, the era of national social welfare policy ended. Four out of five provinces inherited a Directorate of Social Welfare, which, traditionally, have been responsible for the administration of social welfare services in the provinces, but, having no experience or expertise in policy formulation. Therefore, it is to be seen that given the

great socioeconomic and cultural diversity, what direction each province take in terms of its social welfare policy.

1.2.3. Social welfare administration

In terms of social welfare administration, experimental urban community development and medical social services projects started in Karachi (1953) and the Village-Aid programme (1953) , started in cooperation between the International Cooperation Administration of the United States and the Government of Pakistan, are considered the first social welfare services in Pakistan (Ghafur & Mollah, 1968). In January 1955, the first UN Adviser on social policy and administration, after an extensive consultation with the government officials and prominent social workers, recommended the creation of an independent Ministry of Social Affairs. Similarly, a national conference on social welfare held in Karachi in November 1955 demanded the same (Rehmatullah, 2002). However, these demands could not materialize.

Instead, a department of social welfare was created in the Ministry of Works. The administrative structure of this department was in line with the existing bureaucratic system rather than the unique social work and social welfare needs. In 1956, a National Council of Social Welfare was established, followed by provincial councils the next year. Initially, the Council was assigned some policy making and surveillance functions, but, eventually, it became a grant giving agency (Rehmatullah, 2002). As late as in 1958, a separate Ministry of Health and Social Welfare was created at the national level. However, soon after, with the promulgation of 1962 Constitution, the country was divided into two units and social welfare became a provincial subject to be administered through two Directorates of Social Welfare (Ghafur & Mollah, 1968). This bureaucratic social administration was almost unreachable, especially to voluntary social welfare agencies working in remote rural areas (Rehmatullah, 2002).

In 1970, the One Unit was disbanded, and as a result, separate directorates of social welfare were created in all five provinces. A full fledged Ministry of Social Welfare is only a recent development, established in 1980s. In terms of financial allocation in the national budget, by the end of the Third Five Year Plan, it was already being criticized that government was providing not even 1 % of the total cost of various welfare programmes (Hak, 1971). In the Eighth Five Year Plan (1994-9), an allocation of Rupees 1.460 billion is considered the highest ever, provided (under the umbrella of Social Action Programme

– SAP) for social welfare programmes in Pakistan (Rehmatullah, 2002). In the 2010-11 national budget, out of 55 Public Sector Development Program allocations, Social Welfare received the sixth lowest allocation - Rupees 107 million, which reflects the low priority that government attaches to social welfare (Jabeen, 2013). In short, from the very beginning, social welfare in Pakistan has been a neglected area, both in terms of financial provisions and proper administrative structures. The next section attempts to find an explanation for what has been happening in social work and social welfare in Pakistan.

1.3. An explanation for the troubled growth of Social Work and Social Welfare in Pakistan

Scarce literature that is available on social welfare in Pakistan reveals four main explanations for the troubled growth of social work and social welfare in that country: i) ideology and identity, ii) colonial influence, iii) low recognition of social work among existing policy and administrative structures, iv) lack of direction and progress in social work education. This section details these explanations.

1.3.1. Ideology and identity

As indicated earlier, the discussion around the values and the guiding principles of social work education and social welfare practice in Pakistan started with the very advent of the field in the country. Actually, the country that is now Pakistan has been a “passage” for invaders from the Greeks to central Asians to Arab, Iranians and English, all of whom left many of their cultural practices behind (Mumtaz & Mitha, 1996). Therefore, Pakistani culture has a set of customs, values and cultural practices whose origin is hard to trace. At the same time, Islam is the state religion and ‘State-driven Pakistan ideology’, which is presented as a system of beliefs based on and derived from Islamic teachings, guides policy and legislation (Mumtaz & Mitha, 1996; Syed, 1982, p. 63). This policy and legislation, in turn, is implemented through administrative structures conceived and established in modern secular tradition, which gives rise to a sense of identity crisis at individual as well as institutional levels (Cohen, 2002). The same holds true in the case of social work and social welfare in Pakistan.

The Pakistani history of the field has been a continuous struggle to find an ideological fit between various ideas of human wellbeing ranging

from the traditional concepts of social welfare, the Islamic values, the local customs and the emerging concepts such as social development. For example, the proceedings of the 1976 National Workshop on “Meaning of Social Welfare in Pakistan (as a developing country)” read as following;

Pakistan’s ideology is based on Islam which believes in social interdependence; and enjoins upon all to render assistance to the distressed. It stands for equality, personal liberty, freedom of thought and belief, and rights and responsibilities of every individual...Social welfare is inherent in our religion, and when viewed closely, they are also found to be basic to the theory and practice of scientific social work’ (National Council of Social Welfare, 1976).

At about the same time, the emerging concept of ‘social development’ was becoming the policy mantra throughout the developing world (Healy, 2008; Khinduka, 1971; Medgley, 1999). In Pakistan, like the rest of the developing world, efforts started to what seems a ‘conversion’ of social welfare into social development. While the 1976 National Workshop stressed the Islamic philosophical base of social welfare in Pakistan, it also linked social welfare with social development by proposing ‘promotion of social welfare activities for economic development, and economic prosperity in turn leading to improvement of social condition of the masses’ (National Council of Social Welfare, 1976, p.9). Some even proposed that in the fourth Five Year Plan, social welfare activities which are spread over five departments should be ‘pushed through a new sector called Social Development Sector’ (Hak, 1971, p. 23). However, it was not just a matter of jargon.

Evidence suggests that linking social welfare and social development requires a fundamental shift in the way two are thought about, followed by changes at policy, planning and administrative levels of the government (Healy, 2008, Midgley, 1999). In Pakistan, the rhetoric of social development was being superimposed on a poorly developed system of what might be described at best as targeted “remedial services” (Rehmatullah, 2002). As a result, both social work education and social welfare policy were faced with the issues of identity (such as Islamic, traditional social welfare, and social development ideologies) purpose (such as welfare services for the most vulnerable, marginalized and excluded or socioeconomic development of the masses) and direction (such as remedial, preventive or developmental social welfare), which remains to date.

1.3.2. Colonial influence

Scholars have noted that social welfare and social policy in many developing countries is an inheritance from colonial times (Chitereka, 2009; Midgley, 1981). Such social policy and welfare services reflected the ruler's concern with public order and a very narrow interpretation of social welfare (Boyden, 1997). For example, the countries once controlled by the British tend to focus on personal social services for, on the one hand, those in need of supervision and delinquents and, on the other, the dependent or neglected (Boyden, 1997; Stein, 1981). This colonial influence remains (intact) in many developing countries—including Pakistan—under the subsequent influence of the United Nations (Boyden, 1997).

In fact, Pakistan's first-ever social work graduate teaching program in the University of the Punjab, Lahore, was started and headed for many years by Arthur Livingstone, the UN special representative on Social Welfare (Elliott & Segal, 2008). Since this was a pioneer program and for quite some time, the only program for social work education, its graduates dominated social welfare thinking and administration in the country. Although the broader national five-year plans took into account the preventive, curative and developmental aspects of social welfare, nevertheless the focus remained on the handicapped, the neglected, the delinquent, the vagrant and destitute, and the specially disadvantaged groups of children, women and old persons without family support (Rashid, 1966). This holds true even today as, after the 18th Constitutional amendment, the provinces inherit policies and programs of the national Ministry of Social Welfare and Special Education, which have been narrowly based on the traditional concept, in social welfare of fulfilment of the needs of the most vulnerable and excluded, in the form of cash payments or institutionalization.

1.3.3. Low recognition

As noted earlier, through most part of the social welfare history of Pakistan, social welfare content of policy was delivered by number of agencies and not a ministry of social welfare, which was established only as late as in 1980s. The low budgetary allocation, discussed earlier, is but one proof of the low priority and recognition of social welfare at the policy and planning level. As a result, due to poor human and financial capacity of the Ministry of Social Welfare, social welfare provisions have been limited. Mostly, they respond only to the most

public and extreme cases, such as abandoned, homeless or street children, and this too is limited to urban populations (Boyden, 1997; Jabeen, 2013). This, in turn, results in lack of due recognition of the Ministry of Social Welfare by other parts of the government including other ministries and important decision making bodies such as the Planning Commission of Pakistan (Jabeen, 2013). Due to this lack of recognition, the Ministry would often lose on the bargaining and negotiation front. As Peters (2001) notes that a formal rule constitutes merely a place to begin the policy bargaining in many developing countries, such as those of the Indian subcontinent, the Ministry could never secure a distinct place in the national development plans despite its clear mandate as specified in the Rules of Business of the Government of Pakistan.

In addition, the fact that, for almost 60 years, both the federal and provincial governments could enact social welfare legislation, affected the sector negatively. As Nevile (2002) explains that decision-making rules and structures regulating the wider political arena can affect sector-specific policy-making, in the case of social welfare in Pakistan, both the federal and provincial governments tended to leave social welfare to the other party. This struggle between various levels of state institutions is not uncommon, as demonstrated in many studies in neighbouring India, where tussles over social policies such as food and primary education policy were common (Mooij, 2007). Similarly, Jabeen (2013) found that the federal Ministry of Social Welfare held that in Pakistan's structure of government, the responsibility and resourcing for the social sector rest mainly with the provincial governments; therefore, they should take a pro-active role in addressing these issues. In contrast, the provincial governments looked towards the federal Ministry of Social Welfare for any initiative (Jabeen, 2013; Jillani & Jillani, 2000), which has neither capacity nor resources to act appropriately.

1.3.4. Lack of direction and progress in social work education

In terms of social work education, the initial emphasis on evolving an indigenous social work philosophy grounded in the needs and aspirations of the Muslim society remained till 1969 when the first study on the effectiveness of social work training in Pakistan was conducted. The findings of the study revealed that 17% of all graduates (the study covered 1957- 1965 graduates) could relate Social Work theory (used broadly as the contents taught in the class room) to practice to great extent and almost half (49 %) to some extent. At the same time though,

by ranking subjects on the basis of their practical utility in society, graduates indicated the need for improvement in method courses including Social Group Work, Community Development, Social Administration and Social Research (Department of Social Work, 1969, pp. x, xvi). However, these improvements could never be brought about as noted by Rehmatullah, 'very little social work literature has been produced, and social work methodology of "group work" and "case work" is still being taught in the same manner as in 1954' (2002, p.177). In short, what these programmes still lack, is 'an authentically Pakistani approach to social work centering on the country's religious heritage, concepts of family and cultural diversities' (Graham, Al-Krenawi and Zaidi, 2007, p.638).

The departure of UN experts left a vacuum in terms of qualified teaching faculty, which, in turn, lead to a lack of research and publication based on local realities. For example, in the pioneer social work department of the University of the Punjab, there was no PhD faculty member in first 50 years of the department. The Research and Publication Unit of the department, which was established based on the recommendation of the 1969 evaluation (cited above), remained active only for few years. In early 2000s, in a series of meetings, the then University Grants Commission lead an attempt at revision and modification of social work curriculum in Pakistani universities. The Social Work Curriculum Revision Committee, comprising of representatives from Social Work departments in various universities and their affiliated colleges across the country, met on 6-8 August, 2002 at the University Grants Commission, Islamabad and discussed curricula both for bachelor and master levels. This resulted in minor changes only, such as an addition of an optional course or a more updated bibliography in another course, leaving the basic structure and content untouched. Ever since, hardly any known (documented and/or published) attempts have been made to match the social work curriculum with changing needs of the society and the profession.

1.4. Conclusion

Above analysis reveal that despite the rhetorics of Islamic orientation of social policy and social work curricula being culturally relevant and

²A comparison of the pre and post revision curriculum is a subject worthy of a full analysis on its own, and, therefore, beyond the scope of this article. However, the author, representing her department, was part of the review process and these comments are based on personal experience, observations and discussions with other participants.

based on local needs, the actual social work education, social welfare policy and practice in Pakistan has remained very Western for reasons ranging from inheritance, ideology, recognition to purpose and direction of education. In terms of policy and practice, after the 18th Constitutional amendment in 2010, the devolution of social welfare from the centre to the provinces could be an opportunity to correct some of the past wrongs and bring social welfare policy and practice back on track, in accordance with the ground realities and needs of the people of Pakistan. Similarly, in the post-University Grants Commission era, universities enjoy considerable autonomy and the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan facilitates universities, departments and individual scholars to conduct original research. Curriculum development and revision is another area where the Higher Education Commission offers support and facilitation. Social Work departments in various universities need to avail these opportunities and make a joint effort to review and modify curricula to address the current problems of the profession and make it culturally more relevant and practically useful in the Pakistani context.

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