

National Association of Professional Social Workers in India

(Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, November 29, 2019)

Professor Armaity S. Desai

The Director, TISS, Prof. Shalini Bharat, President NAPSWI, Prof. Sanjai Bhatt, Prof. R.R., Singh, Former Director, TISS, Prof. Suresh Pathare, Secretary, NAPSWI, Members of the Executive Committee, NAPSWI, Prof. Murli Desai, Editor, Prof. Surinder Jaswal, Deputy Director, TISS, Prof. Shubhada Moitra, Dean, School of Social Work, TISS and all those gathered here.

I am so happy that at the launching of the book, "Journey of Social Work Education in India: Emerging Reflections," Edited by Murli Desai, R. R. Singh and Sanjai Bhatt, that the award giving is organised collaboratively by NAPSWI and TISS. It has been a long journey of 61 years of active professional life from 1955 when I entered this institution, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, as a young student with idealism and enthusiasm, in less than a decade after independence of the country, to 2016 in the new millennium. Thereafter, I was housebound due to a painful back and so resigned from active professional life, but continue using the digital pathway with three organisations that would not accept my resignation. I am very grateful to NAPSWI for the recognition given to me by this Lifetime Achievement Award. I believe that receiving recognition from one's own peer group in our own country is the greatest honour and receive it with mixed feelings, because of so many things ahead still to be done that cannot be attempted in one's own lifetime. I have always enjoyed my work, felt fulfilled in developing new thrusts in education and practice, seeing young faculty colleagues develop in their niche areas, of competence and steering organisations to their optimum capacity within their resources available, often very limited. It has been a journey of learning, growth, and challenge. At the time, Awards were not within my thoughts as I did what my job and profession required of me and I am thankful for the opportunities that came my way. I thank Prof. Sanjai Bhatt, Prof. R.R. Singh and the Executive Committee of NAPSWI, for the recognition and the award.

The book being released today documents the struggles and the achievements of the second generation of pioneers in social work education. Our seniors, the first generation of social work educators, Dr Clifford Manshardt and his team at Nagpada Neighbourhood House, Dr G R Banerjee, Prof M.M. Desai, Prof M.S. Gore, Prof Ranade, Prof Gangrade, Prof George and others, all, stalwarts in

the profession, laid the path for us to tread on with the emergence of social work education in India from the mid-30s. When I entered socialwork education as a professional in the late 50s and early 60s, there were only 10 institutions, some affiliated and departments of universities, and others whose two year diploma was well recognised as equivalent to a degree like the TISS and the College of Social Work at Nirmala Niketan. We have come a long way from then and have over 500 university or affiliated institutions today. Reading the articles and my own experience does not leave me comfortable as the quality is varying and there are no accepted standards for imparting social work education at the bachelor's and master's levels.

Prof R.R. Singh's "Epilogue" is a major contribution to the book as it cites the trends as observed in the articles, and has extrapolated the struggles faced by social work educators in their journeys. I was reminded that when I was in the University Grants Commission (UGC), I commissioned a publication with the 10 oldest departments of women's studies in universities, 3 independent centres and 3 scholars to record their struggles as they developed a new discipline in the university system. The book titled, "Narratives from the Women's Studies Family: Creating Knowledge", edited by Devaki Jain and Pam Rajput, and published by Sage in 2003, on the occasion of 50 years of Indian Independence, parallels some of the problems that a young professional course like socialwork faced much before the emergence of women's studies, and even now I don't see it recognised as a professional course, lumping it with the social sciences, after 83 years since the establishment of the first school of socialwork, TISS, in 1936.

Today, social work education is a subject in the university all over the country but often it is bracketed with the social sciences. Very strong efforts must be mounted by NAPSWI, along with other well established social work education organisations to push the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) to establish the Council on Social Work Education. Several contributors of the articles in the book on career journeys have emphasised the need. A draft prepared by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment with some social work educators, based on an earlier submission, was sent by them to MHRD which sent it to the UGC. After discussion in the Commission on the importance of such a Council, I set up a small committee of a few panel members and a few UGC staff to examine it, to see if there was any overlap with the functions of the UGC, an apprehension expressed by the Commission

Members. This Committee, under the leadership of Prof R.R. Singh, who was then Convenor of the UGC Panel on Social Work Education, finalised it and the Commission passed it and submitted it to MHRD. This is the last position way back in 1995. Twenty-four years have lapsed since then and no action is heard of from the Government or even a considered reply. MHRD was always a graveyard for all matters referred to it by the UGC. I am, therefore, glad this issue is to be taken up for discussion today.

We also need to assist our sister institutions in upgrading their standards but this is only possible if we can prevail on the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) to implement the standards prepared by a committee under Prof. Murli Desai as Convenor when she was Faculty at the Tata Institute. Perhaps, it may need some updating because of lapse of time. This is the third area of activism we need to do with NAAC in order to put social work education on a higher plane from expansion to quality development. Mechanism should be developed by NAAC for frequent reviews and change, as social work has to address the current issues.

A third area for action is with the UGC. We need to set up nodal centres in each region to act as lead institutions for upgrading the quality of institutions in their curriculum, field work and research. Our activism should be focused on MHRD, UGC and NAAC simultaneously. We need social work education activists to pursue these matters. The book on our career journeys speaks a lot of activism undertaken by social work educators but right at home we have failed in advocacy of our profession, myself included.

At the field level, I urge social work education institutions and professional organisations to develop funding of fellowships for young professionals to branch out into new areas of practice, and in locations where most professionals do not work, or for which employing organisations do not exist. At TISS this has been done and some exceptional work has been carried out by our alums such as Koshish, mentioned by Prof. Singh in the "Epilogue", that brought out a report on the appalling conditions of children's institutions in Bihar which stirred the country's conscience. Our field action projects have already pioneered new services like the ChildLine India Foundation by the Central Government. We now need to encourage our young graduates while they have idealism and are out to change the world, to be funded, and mentored if

necessary, to develop new start-ups in our profession that aim at issues of social justice and equity.

As a young girl, I lived through the struggle for Indian independence. As children, we used to make round tri-colour badges with the saying, 'Do or Die', little understanding its implications. My own school, Queen Mary's, was located next to Congress House so we saw a lot of action and sometimes even aggression at our school because it was under a British management. I was starry eyed when we got Independence and thought of wiping the tears from every child's eyes. At the end of my life I am horrified to see the country's travails- children's malnutrition, child labour including bonded labour, violence against women, trafficking of women and children, patriarchy rearing its head, speeches that demonise or discriminate against people, prosecution of victims and letting the aggressors free, laws and rules used selectively, the horrendous problems of the nation's economy and environment, the greed for power, and manipulation of the means to justify the ends. I feel like weeping to see my country in this state with the gap between haves and have-nots widening. This is not what I lived for to see when I entered the social work profession and worked towards social change. I go from this world sadder than when I entered the profession but I am encouraged by the courage of those who have come forward to change the ethos, to help the disadvantaged and marginalised, and to empower people for changing their lives, not only from the social work profession, but also in other professions and disciplines.

There is so much we need to do. I am raring to go and my mind and spirit are willing, but my age and body are against me. I am proud when my alums drop in to see me and stimulate me with all the pioneering work they are doing. It makes my life well lived and fulfilling. Emerson said, 'Don't make students like you. One of you is enough!' It is a pleasure to see how they have branched out and creatively worked on issues.

I wish NPSWI all success in its efforts for recognition of the profession and urge it to become a lobbyist to achieve eventually the goal of qualitative social work education that prepares our graduates for the challenges we face today. We should teach the core values and core practice skills of the profession, so that no matter where they work, what issues they deal with, or the ambiguities they face, they can use these core values and skills to make a contribution towards change.

We need to agree together on what we consider as our core values and ethics and core skills.

I again thank NAPSWI for the Award and wish the Association all the very best. I also thank them for giving me an opportunity to make my contribution to their book. I thank Prof. Murli Desai for her patience with me while editing, as my manuscript was longer than the required size, and Prof. R. R. Singh, for going through the long and the edited versions. I am grateful to Professor Shalini Bharat, Director, for holding the function at my alma mater where I also had the opportunity to be the Director for a little over 12 years and subsequently a Member of the Board for 6 years. I started my social work career as a student here and today I am ending here with this Award. This is an emotional moment for me.

I thank Prof. Surinder Jaswal and Prof. Shubhad Moitra, for hosting the function through the School of Social Work. Roshni Nair, Faculty in the School of Social Work at TISS, who lives near my house, generously offered to come home and type out the first draft of my speech as I get back pain sitting on the computer, and also my two house help, Usha Shewale and Pallavi Mate, who encouraged and supported me to come for the function today, my first trip this distance from home in 3 years, from almost the south-west end of the city to almost the end of the north-east. I express my special gratitude to 3 people, my two help, Mary J. Fernandes, now retired, and Usha Shewale, who fully managed my house leaving me completely free to attend to my professional life at TISS, UGC and later during retirement, Janki Ramdas, who was then my PA at TISS, who helped me manage my office and continues to support me even in my retirement days. They are all present here today. I thank all of my former colleagues for the support and inspiration they gave me as Director and a few of whom already retired are present today. Many thanks to all of you for attending the function and giving your precious time.
