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# NAPSWI Social Work Digest

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# MESSAGE FROM EDITOR

*Dear Esteemed Readers,*

*Greetings from the National Association of Professional Social Workers in India (NAPSWI),*

*We present our third issue of NAPSWI's Social Work Digest, a curated publication that bridges the gap between deep academic inquiry and the rigorous demands of field practice. This edition features a diverse array of content ranging from critical social theories to first-hand reflections on juvenile justice, school-based mental health, and medical social welfare.*

*We are particularly honored to feature a lead article by Prof. Brij Mohan, a globally renowned scholar, the first PhD recipient in Social Work in India, and a Dean Emeritus at Louisiana State University. NAPSWI has honoured Prof Mohan with NAPSWI Lifetime Achievement Award. His insightful piece, *"Innocent Questions: What is Social Work?"*, challenges us to rethink the authenticity of our discipline in a world increasingly reshaped by artificial intelligence and shifting social structures.*

*Alongside this theoretical depth, we are grateful to include a contribution from Dr. Sherry Joseph, who provides a vital analysis of international organizations emerging under Indian leadership, such as the International Solar Alliance and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure. Dr. Joseph, has also been recognized with the NAPSWI Life-Time Achievement Award for their monumental contribution to education and research.*

*The Social Work Digest further explores modern intersections of the profession, including an analysis of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) careers and the role of social workers in advancing sustainable finance. We also highlight grassroots empowerment through reflections on SEWA's kheti team and the creative upcycling of religious textiles to provide dignified livelihoods for women. We hope this collection serves as a powerful resource for practitioners and students alike as we move toward a more holistic vision of social wellbeing,*

*Our next issue is focusing on **Case Studies in Social Work Practice**. We invite you to be part of SWD.*

*Happy Reading!*

*Prof. Sanjai Bhatt  
Editor  
Social Work Digest*

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# INNOCENT QUESTIONS: WHAT IS SOCIAL WORK?

## Prof Brij Mohan

### *Introduction:*

The main purpose of this essay is to unravel the nature of Social Work as taught and practiced in India and abroad. This author conceptually rebaptized his professional calling as "Social Praxeology" (1988). Two decades later, he questioned the relevance of the existing zeitgeist, since "Work" has been devoured by the AI oligarchy.

### **Keywords:**

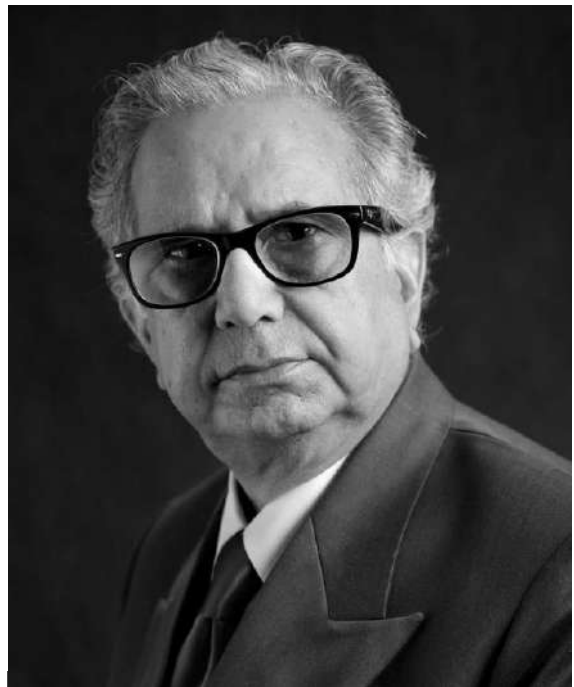
Social Praxeology; Social Work; Social Meltdown, Transformative Praxis, and AI Knowledge.

*"Maut ka bhi koi ilaj ho shayad, Zindagi ka koi ilaj nahee."* Firaq

*(Perhaps there is a death cure; it's life that is incurable)* (Trans. by the author). Firaquian aphorisms have a poetic ethos of prescience. Scientific advancements have nearly conquered all impediments to sudden death. Life, however, is ravaged by its own proclivities, as demonstrated by the persistence of poverty, war, violence, and social meltdown.

I shall neither critique nor use any of the existing institutional and authorial definitions of Social Work (SW). I ask my colleagues and students to rethink the subject rather critically.

I have assayed elsewhere: "The goal of Social Work should be the end of itself." I reiterate this aphorism. There is suffering and there is a cause of suffering. His Holiness Dalai Lama emphasizes "consciousness" which translates into *Karma* (aka "action"):



Prof Brij Mohan obtained his PhD (Social Work) from Lucknow University in 1964. Having served the universities of Lucknow (1963-1975) and Wisconsin (1975-76), he joined the Louisiana State University (1976-2009) as an Associate Professor and became Professor and Dean of the School of Social Work (1981-86). Dean Emeritus Mohan's oeuvre includes 27 books and over 450 articles, chapters, and reviews. His most recent books include *FLAME: Echoes From Kafka's Cave* (2026), *Return of the Leviathan: Being-for-Others* (2025), and *Rediscovery of Society* (2023). Elgar Publishers' upcoming *Encyclopedia of Social Policy* (2027) includes 3 Chapters authored by me: Buddha & Nietzsche; Frank Fanon as a Liberator; and Poverty of Culture. His forthcoming books include *Public Sphere Revisited* (2027) and *A Dean's Memoire* (in progress).

Dr. Mohan is the founding Editor-in-Chief of the *International Journal of Comparative Social Welfare*. He served as Editor of *Social Development Issues*, *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, and *Social Science Gazetteer*. He is a *Social Work Pioneer* (NASW, 1995); he received Life-Time Achievement Awards from the *National Association of Social Workers* (NASW, LA, 2010) and the *Indian Association of Professional Social Workers* (2015). E: Brijmohan128@Gmail.com).

“The fundamental precept of Buddhism is Interdependence or the Law of Cause and Effect. This simply states that everything which an individual being experiences is derived through action from motivation. Motivation is thus the root of both action and experience. From this understanding are derived the Buddhist theories of consciousness and rebirth.”

Dalai Lama (1990: 10)

The Western, especially American, view of life is understandably incongruous with Buddhism. I emphasize this because “the Law of Cause of Effect” is essentially a secular-scientific formulation beyond any religious trappings. Capitalism doubtless corrupted this Law. The emergence of a “helping profession” in the post-war era essentially negates my *logic of social welfare* (1988).

Having graduated from the Institute of Social Sciences, Agra University in 1960 with an MSW, I joined the Lucknow University’s doctoral program under the supervision of Dr. S. Zafar Hasan. I hold the 1<sup>st</sup> PhD in Social Work (1961) in India<sup>1</sup>. I moved to the United States from Lucknow University (1975). I never went to an American University for higher education. The motivation to attain a PhD signified my search for knowledge and truth. The more I learned, the less I appreciated Social Work’s authenticity as a *Discipline*. My continued inquiry and nearly morphed my status as a pariah in the Establishment. Some detractors saw me as “Philosopher” rather than “Social Worker,” which ironically, is accepted as an unintended compliment. While Lucknow University gave me an identity, the Louisiana State University offered me opportunities to teach, learn, and serve as a “Practitioner of Philosophy.”<sup>2</sup>

I have taught and practiced *hope* all my life. In a world ravaged by authoritarian narcissism and obscenities of war --confounded by staggering inequality and savage injustice— authentic Social Work must seek meaningful transformation (rather than the inanity of “help”)<sup>3</sup>. Translation of this formulation into real *action*<sup>4</sup> involves three consideration:

1. *Consilience*<sup>5</sup> which produces educated citizens who are equipped with transformative knowledge (Praxis).
2. *Reinvigoration* of “Practice of Hope” (Mohan, 2012) with emphasis on consciousness of change and corresponding modalities of social transformation (not ‘social development.’); and, *Revolutionize* “Action.” *Enlightenment* calls for reinterpretation. Buddha’s *enlightenment* changed the world for ever. Our ‘professional enlightenment’ should be in the vanguard to ward off plausible human extinction<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Katherine Kendall as advised by TISS’s Professor Desai, contended that L.U. did not offer any PhD in Social Work. Two decades ago, I personally talked to Dr Kendall at the CSWE’s Commission on Accreditation and corrected her information.

<sup>2</sup> Bonnie Hawkins’s address on the Life-Time Achievement Award by NASW (LA), 2008). The LSU System honored my service (1976 to 2020) as Dean Emeritus.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Mohan, B. 2026. *FLAME: Echoes from Kafka’s Cave*. (Barnes & Noble). To understand the dynamic of FLAME & Echoes, See Podcast, Brij Mohan with John Daniel (YouTube, John G. Daniel Productions LLC).

<sup>4</sup> This ‘action’ refutes the Parsonian theory of ‘Social Action.’

<sup>5</sup> ‘The unity of Knowledge.’ (Wilson, E.O.1998.

<sup>6</sup> In *Seven Pillars of Social Practice* (Mohan, 2018; 2025), I incorporated the “pillars” in the Core curriculum to impart this voice in all students and teachers. The elitist “specialization” model of mass production of MSWs for cheap jobs, upended the roots of authenticity. No one, sadly, recognized what I was promoting.

I am honored to find that my work has been likened to Jurgen Habermas. I would rather be known as Brij Mohan of Social Theory (than “the Habermas of Social Work.”<sup>7</sup>)

In sum, Social Work’s future in a polarized, fast-changing world—on the cusp of World War III—warrants critical awakening<sup>8</sup>. Human ingenuity has been upended by the rise of OpenAI. It may be Frankenstein’s Revenge on the faltering human proclivities<sup>9</sup>. “The God Complex” may not prevent plausible human extinction.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> “Brij Mohan is a prominent social work scholar and philosopher often referred to as the “**Habermas of Social Work Theory**”. This comparison stems from his deep engagement with **Critical Theory** and the Frankfurt School, particularly the works of Jürgen Habermas and Herbert Marcuse.” The following narrative retrieved online illuminates this comparison:

“Key Parallels with Habermas

- **Critical Theory Framework:** Like Habermas, Mohan utilizes critical theory to examine human oppression and the “crisis of social work,” looking beyond economic factors to include the influence of language, social institutions, and behavioral norms.
- **Lifeworld vs. System:** His work explores the tension between individual human existence (the “lifeworld”) and the rigid structures of society (“the system”), aiming for a unification of theory and practice that prioritizes social justice.
- **Public Intellectualism:** Mohan has been described as a “philosopher activist”. Much like Habermas acts as a public conscience in Germany, Mohan provides a critical voice on global development, poverty, and the human condition within the American academic landscape.” (Google; retrieved, 4/12/2026)

<sup>8</sup> See, Mohan, B. 2018, 2025a, and 2026.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Tarnoff, Be. 2026.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Butler, Kiera (2026)

# “MADE IN INDIA”- INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION UNDER INDIA’S LEADERSHIP

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The rhetoric of ‘*Made in India*’ has transcended space and time from that of the 1995 pop album of *Alisha Chinai* to the India government’s initiative launched in 2014 (*Make in India*) to transform India into a global design and manufacturing hub. The spirit of ‘Made in India’ is also reflected in India’s changing foreign policy emerging from the growth of the economy from a recipient country of international assistance to a donor country capable to assume greater responsibilities on the world stage.

The Government of India’s approach to Development Partnership has been shaped by India’s struggle for independence and solidarity with other colonized and developing countries and the inspiring leadership of Mahatma Gandhi who said *"I do want to think in terms of the whole world. My patriotism includes the good of mankind in general. Therefore, my service to India includes the service of humanity"*. Despite its own resource constraints, India has been sharing its developmental experiences and technical expertise with other countries in the spirit of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam".

The Ministry of External Affairs plays a pivotal role in the delivery of development co-operation, notably through its Development Partnership Administration (DPA) to streamline the execution, management, and monitoring of foreign aid projects. DPA is designed in similar lines of FCDO, SIDA, CIDA and erstwhile USAID. India’s development co-operation is delivered through various mechanisms and channels for engaging with developing countries, including the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme, the Special Commonwealth Assistance Programme for Africa, and bilateral development assistance to neighbouring and other developing countries. Various Indian ministries, institutions and programmes are also involved in development co-operation and implement projects. Depending on the priorities of partner countries, India’s development cooperation ranges from commerce to culture, energy to engineering, health to housing, IT to infrastructure, sports to science, disaster relief and humanitarian assistance to restoration and preservation of cultural and heritage assets.

India has also taken the leadership in establishing four international institutions in this decade. The International Solar Alliance (ISA), the Coalition for Disaster Resilience Infrastructure (CDRI), Global Bio-fuels Alliance and International Big Cat Alliance were established to foster development cooperation, technical assistance and capacity building.

1. **International Solar Alliance (ISA)** was launched in 2015 by India and France during the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris. It is the first international intergovernmental organisation headquartered in India. ISI is a treaty-based organization with 125 member countries (which have signed and ratified the framework agreement of ISA) working together to expand access to clean, affordable, and reliable solar energy worldwide. ISA focuses on mobilizing \$1 trillion+ in solar investment and developing 1,000 GW of capacity by 2030, targeting sun-rich nations. ISI focus on Scaling solar technology, financing solar projects, promoting research and development, and capacity building. Two key initiatives of ISI are (a) One Sun One World One Grid that aims to build a global grid to transfer solar power across regions and (b) Solar Technology Application Resource Centre to promote capacity building.

2. **Coalition for Disaster Resilience Infrastructure (CDRI)**, established in 2019 under the leadership of the Government of India and with the support of France and the UN is a multi-stakeholder global partnership of national governments, UN agencies and programmes, multilateral development banks, the private sector, and academic institutions. CDRI aims to promote the resilience of infrastructure systems to climate and disaster risks, thereby ensuring sustainable development. It seeks to rapidly expand the development and retrofit of resilient infrastructure to respond to the Sustainable Development Goals imperatives of expanding universal access to basic services, enabling prosperity and decent work. The Coalition has 65 national governments, international organizations, development banks and the private sector as its members. Headquartered in New Delhi, India, CDRI's Secretariat holds the status of an International Organization. The CDRI supports countries to upgrade their systems to ensure disaster and climate resilience of existing and future infrastructure. CDRI's mission is, by 2050, to drive US\$10 trillion of new and existing infrastructure investments and services to be resilient to natural hazards and climate change through enhanced capacity, informed policy, planning, and management, thereby improving environmental quality, livelihoods, and overall well-being for more than 3 billion people worldwide.
3. **Global Biofuels Alliance (GBA)**: The GBA intends to promote recognition of the strategic role that sustainable biofuels can play in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, including in the transport, power, cement, and other hard-to-abate sectors. GBA formed in 2023 is a multi-Stakeholder Alliance bringing together Governments, International Organizations and Industry- 33 countries and 14 international organizations. To enhance the development and deployment of sustainable biofuels by increasing awareness, supporting policy development and skill advancement, promoting best practices, fostering international trade, serving as a pivotal source of information and collaborating with various regional and international organizations to effectively achieve its objectives and endorsing standards and regulations among other measures.
4. **International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA)**: IBCA is a treaty based inter-governmental international organisation with headquarters in India. The alliance focuses on the conservation of the Tiger, Lion, Leopard, Snow Leopard, Cheetah, Jaguar, and Puma. The objective of IBCA is to foster international cooperation for the conservation of seven big cat species; to enhance knowledge exchange on big cat threats and solutions and to build the capacity of range countries for effective big cat management. The IBCA's formation was a response to the urgent need for a global collaborative approach to big cat conservation. By bringing together range countries, conservation partners, and scientific organizations, the alliance fosters a united front against the threats to big cats. Twenty three countries have joined IBCA as member and three countries have opted to be observers. Apart from that 16 countries have given their consent to join IBCA. Range Countries are the countries that have the natural habitat of big cats harbouring their population in the wild.

Having said about the 'made in India' international organizations, India is also the founding member of the United Nations, Asia Development Bank, G20 industrial nations and the founder of the Non-aligned movement. India had contributed USD 37.64 million to the UN regular budget for 2025, joining the "honour roll" of member states that paid their dues in full and on time. India is a member of 22 different UN bodies and continues to play an active role in negotiations concerning peace, security, and human rights. India is the largest contributor of troops and police personnel since the inception of UN peacekeeping, with over 240,000 personnel deployed across 49 missions. India was the first country to deploy an all-female formed police unit (FPU) to a UN peacekeeping mission in Liberia in 2007. As listed by the Protocol Division of the Ministry of External Affairs, there are 47 International organizations with offices in India. All of these organizations have their headquarters outside of India- for instance, UNICEF in New York, IFRC in Geneva, FAO in Rome and the Arab

Leage in Cairo. An international Organization to operate in India must establish a Headquarter agreement with Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.

The external assistance received by India in 2026-2027 includes Multilateral sources and Bilateral sources. The multi-lateral sources include loans from the World Bank Group (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and International Development Association); Asian Development Bank, European Investment Bank, New Development Bank, Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank, International Fund for Agricultural Development, and grant from the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Among the bilateral sources includes Japan (loans, grant in aid and technical assistance through Japan International Cooperation Agency), Germany (through KfW the German Government's Development Bank and technical assistance programme through GIZ), Russian Federation (development cooperation), France (through the French Agency for Development) and the Republic of Korea. The aspiration of India is to reduce the receipts of international aid and to increase the foreign aid to other countries.

# **SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE IN THE REHABILITATION OF CHILDREN IN CONFLICT WITH LAW (CICL): CHALLENGES, INTERVENTIONS, AND FIELD REFLECTIONS**

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## **Introduction**

Children in Conflict with Law (CICL) represent one of the most vulnerable and complex groups within the juvenile justice system. Their behavior is often shaped by adverse life experiences such as neglect, abuse, poverty, and exposure to violence. Through my field experience working in an institutional setting, I have come to realize that working with CICL is not just about managing behavior, but about understanding deeply rooted emotional and social issues. Social Work Practice plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between legal provisions and the lived realities of these children. Social worker engages directly with CICL in institutional setting such as Observation Home, Place of Safety, where they assess individuals needs, provide psychological support, and facilitate rehabilitation and reintegration into the society. Their role extends beyond case management to include counselling, crisis intervention, family engagement, and coordination with various stakeholders.

From a Practice perspective, working as a probation Officer with CICL present multiple challenges, including managing aggressive behavior, addressing repeated offending, handling Staff -child conflicts & dealing with limited resources. At the same time, it offers opportunities to bring meaningful change lives of children by addressing the root causes of their behavior and promoting positive development. This Article aims to explore the realities of social work practices in the field of CICL, with a focus on key and reflections drawn from a field experience. It highlights the importance of compassionate, consistent and right based approach in ensuring the effective rehabilitation of children and their successful reintegration into society.

## **Understanding the Lived Realities of CICL**

In my practice, I have interacted with children who come from highly unstable family environments. Many have experienced domestic violence, substance abuse within the family, or complete lack of supervision. These factors significantly influence their behavior patterns. I observed that many children enter the institution with anger, mistrust, and resistance. Their aggression is often a learned response rather than intentional delinquency. This understanding is essential for effective intervention.

## **Role of Social Worker: Building Trust in a Resistant Environment**

One of the most challenging aspects of my role has been building rapport with children who are unwilling to communicate. In the initial stages, many children refuse counselling, avoid interaction, or respond aggressively.

In such situations, I relied on informal engagement, active listening, and maintaining a non-judgmental attitude. Over time, consistent presence helped in breaking resistance and creating a safe space for them to express themselves.

### **Field Challenge- Managing Aggression and Repeated Offending**

A significant challenge I encountered was working with a repeated offender who frequently engaged in fights and disrupted the environment of the Observation Home. The child had multiple prior entries into the system and displayed a pattern of aggression, non-compliance, and influence over other children.

Initially, the behavior was addressed through warnings and institutional discipline, but it did not lead to lasting change. This made it clear that punitive approaches alone were ineffective. During individual counselling sessions, the child gradually revealed a history of family neglect, lack of emotional support, and association with negative peer groups. His repeated offending appeared to be linked to both environmental factors and a sense of identity formed around aggression.

To address this, I adopted a structured intervention approach:

1. Regular one-on-one counselling focusing on emotional expression
2. Anger management techniques
3. Assigning small responsibilities within the institution to build accountability
4. Positive reinforcement for even minor behavioral improvements

Over time, although the change was gradual, there was a noticeable reduction in aggressive incidents and increased participation in daily routines. This case highlighted that repeated offending requires deeper psychosocial intervention rather than short-term disciplinary action.

### **Staff Conflicts: A Hidden but Critical Challenge**

Another important aspect of field reality is managing conflicts between staff and children, which often goes unaddressed in theoretical discussions. In several instances, I observed that misunderstandings between staff and children escalated into verbal arguments or strict disciplinary actions. At times, staff members, due to workload and stress, responded harshly, which further triggered resistance and aggression among children.

As a social worker, I often found myself in a mediating role:

1. De-escalating situations between staff and children
2. Helping staff understand the child's background and triggers
3. Encouraging more empathetic and child-friendly approaches
4. Supporting children in expressing their concerns in a respectful manner

This balancing act was challenging, as it required maintaining professional relationships with staff while advocating for the child's best interest. However, such interventions helped in reducing tension and creating a more supportive environment within the institution.

### **Family Dynamics and Reintegration Challenges**

Family plays a crucial role in the rehabilitation process. However, in my experience, many families were either unwilling to accept the child back or lacked the capacity to provide a stable environment. During family counselling sessions, I encountered parents who expressed frustration, disappointment, or emotional detachment. In some cases, the child was blamed entirely for the situation, without acknowledging underlying family issues. Working with families required continuous engagement, counselling, and motivation. Even small shifts in family attitude significantly impacted the child's willingness to change.

### **Emotional Demands and Learning**

Working in this field is emotionally intense. Handling aggression, repeated offending, and systemic limitations can be exhausting. At times, progress feels slow, and setbacks are common.

However, these experiences have strengthened my ability to remain patient, empathetic, and solution-focused. I have learned that change in such settings is gradual and requires persistence.

### **Effective Intervention Strategies**

Based on my field experience, the following strategies have proven useful:

Building trust before formal intervention

1. Using counselling as a continuous process, not a one-time activity
2. Focusing on root causes rather than surface behavior
3. Promoting positive reinforcement over punishment
4. Mediating conflicts to maintain a supportive environment
5. Engaging families as partners in rehabilitation

### **Reflection: Beyond Institutional Care**

While institutional care provides structure and immediate intervention, long-term rehabilitation depends on external factors such as family support and community acceptance. Without addressing these, the risk of reoffending remains high. My experience has shown that rehabilitation is not about controlling behaviour temporarily, but about enabling lasting change through understanding, support, and opportunity.

### **Conclusion**

Social work practice with Children in Conflict with Law requires a delicate balance of empathy, discipline, and professional judgement. The presence of repeated offenders, staff conflicts, and family challenges makes this field complex yet deeply impactful. From my experience, I believe that every child has the potential to change when provided with the right environment and guidance. The role of a social worker is to act as a bridge—between the child, the institution, and society—ensuring that the path towards rehabilitation remains possible.

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# BRIDGING THE GAP IN HEALTHCARE: THE COMPASSIONATE JOURNEY OF SOCIAL WORK

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In the complex ecosystem of Indian healthcare, the difference between a patient receiving life-saving treatment and being left behind often depends on more than just medical expertise—it depends on navigation, advocacy, and social support. For over two decades, I have been at the forefront of this mission, transforming the role of a Medical Social Welfare Officer into a lifeline for thousands.

## **A Foundation of Counseling and Care**

My journey began in 2003 as a family counsellor, where I developed the foundational skills of empathy and psychological support. This human-centric approach followed me to PCET Engineering College and eventually into the medical field of PGIMER, Chandigarh in 2007.

At PGIMER's Poor Patients Assistance Cell, I redefined the scope of a Medical Social Worker. Beyond mere guidance, I became a strategist for the underprivileged, pioneered fund-raising through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and built the "Poor Patients Fund" from the ground up to ensure that financial constraints never dictated a patient's right to health.

## **Beginning of new chapter at AIIMS, New Delhi**

In 2012, I joined India's premium health institute AIIMS, New Delhi Here I got the opportunity to understand the aspects and impacts of infertility on human personal and social life. Recognizing that infertility is as much a social and emotional crisis as a medical one, I have dedicated years to specialized IVF and surrogacy counselling.

Social work in this sensitive field involves:

1. **Emotional Resilience:** Professional counselling for intended parents and surrogates to manage the high-risk emotional experiences and stress associated with IVF.
2. **Ethical Guidance:** Ensuring all parties are fully informed and comfortable with their decisions, navigating the psychological risks and the shift from traditional IVF to surrogacy.
3. **Legal Liaoning:** Helping families understand the complexities of the Surrogacy (Regulation) Act to ensure a transparent and protected path to parenthood.

Since 2016, I have served at the Dr. R. P. Centre for Ophthalmic Sciences, where her work has become a blueprint for institutional social service.

My journey at AIIMS is marked by structural improvement and systemic advocacy:

1. **Policy & SOP Development:** I authored the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the issuance of Disability Certificates and the implementation of flagship schemes like **Janani Shishu Surksha Karyakarm**, **Ayushman Bharat-PMJAY** and **Rashtriya Arogya Nidhi Umbrella Schemes** ensuring that government benefits reach the end-user without friction.

2. **Empowerment through Rehabilitation:** Recognizing that medical treatment is only half the battle, I focus heavily on vocational and rehabilitation counselling, helping disabled patients secure loans, pensions, and educational training.
3. **Institutional Integrity:** From 2017 to 2021, she served as the Former Co-Member Secretary of the **Women Grievance Cell**, upholding a safe and equitable environment for the institution's staff and students.
4. **A Legacy of Advocacy**  
At present I am coordinating and supervising critical patient-centric initiatives, including the "May I Help You" counters and cross-departmental liaisoning. By bridging the gap between ophthalmologists, technical staff, NGOs, and donors. I am ensuring that the Dr. R. P. Centre is not just a place of clinical excellence, but a sanctuary of holistic support.

"Here at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, I and my colleagues—Medical Social Welfare Officers posted across different departments—stand as a testament to the power of social welfare in medicine. Through our professional commitment, we have proven that while doctors may treat the disease, it is the social worker who often heals the life surrounding the patient."

# **NURTURING MINDS, BUILDING RESILIENCE: SOCIAL WORKER IN A SCHOOL SETTING- A SCHOOL COUNSELLOR'S JOURNEY IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

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## **Introduction**

In today's rapidly changing educational landscape, the role of a social worker within a school setting has evolved into something far more dynamic, responsive, and essential. Working as a school counsellor for over a decade, particularly in an international context in the Middle East, I have witnessed firsthand how schools are no longer just centres of academic learning they are complex ecosystems where emotional wellbeing, safeguarding, and social development are just as critical as academic success. At the heart of this role lies a simple but powerful objective: to ensure that every child feels safe, heard, understood, and supported. However, achieving this requires far more than one-on-one counselling. It demands a whole-school approach, strong systems, collaboration, and a deep understanding of child development, trauma, and mental health.

## **Understanding Behaviour Beyond Discipline**

A common misconception is that school counsellors are responsible for managing behaviour or enforcing discipline. In reality, our role is rooted in understanding behaviour rather than controlling it. Behaviour is often a form of communication an outward expression of unmet needs, emotional distress, anxiety, or past experiences. When schools shift from a punitive approach to a more reflective and supportive one, students begin to feel seen rather than judged. In my work, I focus on creating safe, non-judgmental spaces where students can explore their emotions, develop self-awareness, and build coping strategies. Over time, students begin to recognise their emotional patterns, identify triggers, and regulate their responses skills that are essential for lifelong wellbeing.

## **Safeguarding and Student Protection**

Safeguarding forms a critical pillar of the school counsellor's role. As part of the safeguarding team, I work closely with leadership, staff, and external agencies to ensure that every child is protected from harm. This includes responding to complex and sensitive cases such as self-harm, neglect, abuse, and suicidal ideation.

However, safeguarding is not only reactive it is deeply preventative. A key aspect of this work involves educating students about how to recognise risks, understand boundaries, and seek help. Children often notice distress in their peers before adults do, but without guidance, they may not know how to act. By building awareness and confidence, we empower students to take responsible action and support one another, fostering a culture of care and accountability.

## **Crisis Management and Emotional Support**

Crisis situations within schools require a structured, compassionate, and collaborative approach. Immediate risk assessments, safety planning, and close coordination with families and external professionals are essential. Equally important is the long-term support provided to students as they recover and reintegrate into the school environment.

The counselling space becomes vital during such times a place where students can process emotions, feel contained, and gradually rebuild their sense of safety. This ongoing support ensures that

interventions are not temporary solutions but part of a sustained journey towards emotional recovery and resilience.

### **Collaboration and Advocacy**

Effective school counselling does not happen in isolation. Collaboration with teachers, inclusion teams, and parents is central to ensuring that students receive consistent and holistic support. Teachers often provide valuable insights into changes in behaviour and engagement, while inclusion teams help tailor support for students with additional needs. Parents are key partners in this process. Building trusting relationships with families allows for open dialogue, shared strategies, and a consistent approach between home and school.

At the centre of all this work lies advocacy. As counsellors, we often act as the voice of the child particularly for those who struggle to express themselves. Advocacy ensures that decisions made within the school prioritise the emotional and psychological wellbeing of students, creating a more compassionate and equitable environment.

### **Preventative Work and Whole-School Wellbeing**

A significant portion of my role focuses on preventative interventions and promoting a culture of wellbeing across the school. Workshops on emotional regulation, resilience, social skills, digital wellbeing, and mental health awareness are embedded into the school experience.

These initiatives are informed by data such as student voice, behavioural trends, and referral patterns, allowing for targeted and meaningful interventions. Whole-school programmes, including mental health exhibitions and awareness campaigns, play a powerful role in normalising conversations around mental health and reducing stigma. The introduction of student-led initiatives, such as the Mental Health Ambassador Programme, has further strengthened this approach. By training students to support their peers, we create a network of empathy and understanding within the student body. These ambassadors not only provide peer support but also develop leadership, emotional intelligence, and a strong sense of responsibility.

### **Implications for Social Work Practice and Education**

While this model of school counselling is well-established in many international settings, there is a growing need to integrate similar approaches within other educational systems, particularly in India. The role of a social worker in schools must evolve to meet the increasing mental health needs of students.

This requires significant changes in social work education. The Master of Social Work (MSW) curriculum should place greater emphasis on safeguarding, child protection, advocacy, counselling skills, and case conceptualisation. These are not supplementary skills but essential competencies for working effectively with children and families. Fieldwork placements should include structured experiences within school settings, allowing students to develop practical skills and gain exposure to real-world challenges. Incorporating counselling techniques into social work training will further enhance practitioners' ability to support children's emotional and psychological needs.

### **The Growing Importance of the School Counsellor's Role**

The presence of a trained school counsellor within an educational setting is no longer optional it is essential. With rising awareness of mental health and increasing pressures on young people, schools must prioritise emotional wellbeing alongside academic achievement. A strong counselling framework within schools not only supports individual students but also transforms the overall school culture. It encourages empathy, reduces stigma, and fosters an environment where students feel safe to express themselves and seek help when needed.

**Conclusion**

The role of a social worker functioning as a school counsellor is multifaceted, demanding, and deeply impactful. It extends beyond individual support to shaping the emotional climate of the entire school community. Through safeguarding, advocacy, collaboration, and preventative work, counsellors play a pivotal role in nurturing resilient, self-aware, and emotionally healthy individuals. As educational systems continue to evolve, integrating structured counselling and safeguarding frameworks will be critical. By reimagining the role of social workers in schools and strengthening their training, we can create environments that truly support the holistic development of every child.

Ultimately, when schools invest in mental health and wellbeing, they are not just educating students they are shaping compassionate, capable, and resilient future generations.

# GRASSROOTS SOCIAL WORK AND WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT: REFLECTIONS FROM PRACTICE WITH SEWA

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## **Introduction**

In many rural contexts in India, women are central to agricultural production, yet remain on the margins of recognition, decision-making, and access to resources. Their labour sustains households and local economies, but their identities as farmers often remain unacknowledged within formal systems. It is within this contradiction that social work practice in livelihood contexts becomes both necessary and complex—requiring engagement that is not only participatory but also attentive to structural realities. Organizations like the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) have attempted to address these gaps through collective organizing and farmer-centric initiatives. This article reflects on my experience as a Project Consultant with SEWA's Kheti (agriculture) team, working under the Farmers' Forum project.

## **Nature of Social Work Practice**

As a Project Consultant, my role involved a combination of field-based engagement, facilitation, and programmatic coordination. I worked closely with women farmers across multiple villages, engaging with them through structured and informal spaces to understand their lived realities and support their participation in collective initiatives.

A core component of my work was designing and conducting focus group discussions (FGDs), which served as critical tools for identifying key issues, capturing community perspectives, and informing intervention strategies. These discussions were not limited to data collection but functioned as participatory spaces where women could voice concerns and reflect collectively.

I also facilitated awareness sessions on financial literacy, access to government schemes, and improved agricultural practices. These sessions required contextual adaptation—translating technical information into locally relevant and understandable formats.

Additionally, I played an active role in supporting the Grassroots Trading Network for Women, which aimed to enhance women's engagement with local markets. This involved continuous coordination with field teams, follow-ups with community members, and addressing practical challenges that emerged during implementation.

Documentation and reporting were integral to my responsibilities. I was involved in systematically recording field insights, preparing reports, and contributing to internal reviews. This positioned me at the interface of grassroots realities and organizational decision-making, requiring both analytical and communication skills.

## **Key Issues Observed**

Field engagement consistently highlighted the lack of formal recognition of women as farmers. Despite their extensive involvement in agricultural work, women were often excluded from official identification systems, limiting their access to schemes, credit facilities, and training opportunities.

Structural constraints such as limited land ownership, gendered division of labour, and restricted mobility further shaped their participation. In several instances, even when opportunities were made

available through collective initiatives, these underlying inequalities influenced the extent of women's engagement. Another critical observation was the gap between policy provisions and ground-level awareness. While schemes exist, many women lacked access to reliable information or faced procedural barriers in availing benefits.

### **Challenges in Practice**

Practicing social work in this context involved navigating both community-level and institutional challenges. Building sustained participation required continuous engagement, especially in contexts where women's time and mobility were constrained by household responsibilities. At the programmatic level, aligning structured project frameworks with dynamic and diverse community realities posed challenges. Interventions often needed to be adapted in real-time, based on feedback and contextual variations. There were also challenges in translating awareness into action. While initial sessions generated interest and participation, sustaining engagement—particularly in collective economic initiatives—required consistent follow-up and reinforcement.

### **Impact and Outcomes**

While changes in such contexts are often gradual, the interventions contributed to visible and meaningful shifts at the community level. There was a noticeable increase in women's participation in group discussions and community-level meetings, with many women gradually becoming more confident in expressing their views and sharing experiences. Awareness sessions led to improved understanding of financial practices and available schemes, enabling some women to take initial steps toward accessing institutional support. The Grassroots Trading Network for Women created opportunities for women to engage more actively in local market processes. In several cases, women began exploring collective approaches to selling agricultural produce, which helped strengthen their bargaining position and visibility within local economies.

Additionally, the Farmers' Forum spaces facilitated peer learning and collective reflection, allowing women to exchange knowledge, discuss challenges, and support each other's participation. While these shifts may appear incremental, they represent important steps toward greater agency and participation.

### **Learning and Reflections**

This experience reinforced the understanding that social work practice in livelihood contexts is deeply process-oriented. Change is not always immediate or easily measurable; it often emerges through gradual shifts in confidence, participation, and collective consciousness. The role of the social worker, therefore, extends beyond implementation. It involves facilitating dialogue, adapting interventions, and recognizing the value of community knowledge. Women's lived experiences often provided insights that shaped more effective and contextually relevant approaches.

At the same time, the experience highlighted the limitations of short-term project-based interventions in addressing deeply embedded structural inequalities. While initiatives such as the Farmers' Forum and Grassroots Trading Network create important entry points, sustained impact requires long-term engagement and systemic support.

### **Conclusion**

My engagement with SEWA's agricultural initiatives highlights the significance of grounded, field-based social work practice in addressing issues of gender and livelihood. The experience demonstrates that while collective platforms and capacity-building efforts can create meaningful shifts, they must be complemented by broader structural changes to ensure lasting impact. For social workers, this underscores the importance of being both reflective practitioners and effective facilitators—capable of bridging the gap between institutional frameworks and lived realities. Strengthening this connection remains central to advancing more inclusive and responsive social work practice.

# THE PROFESSIONAL AND MODERN LENS- A SYSTEM OF SUPPORT

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Social workers are found in every facet of community life, including schools, hospitals, mental health clinics, senior centers, elected office, private practices, prisons, military, corporations, and in numerous public and private agencies. Some social workers help clients who face a disability or a life-threatening disease or a social problem, such as inadequate housing, unemployment, or substance abuse. Social workers also assist families that have serious domestic conflicts, sometimes involving child or spousal abuse. Some social workers conduct research, advocate for improved services, engage in systems design or are involved in planning or policy development. Many social workers specialize in serving a particular population or working in a specific setting.

## **Administration and Management**

Social work administrators are proactive leaders in public and private agencies that provide services to clients. Many elements of this area of social work practice are common to administration in other organizations. However, administration and management also require knowledge about social policy and the delivery of social services, vision for future planning, an understanding of human behavior, and commitment to social work ethics and values.

## **Advocacy & Community Organizing**

Advocacy is one of the keystones of social work practice. Social work advocates champion the rights of individuals and communities with the goal of achieving social justice. Community organizing and advocacy work with the power of numbers—many people thinking, working, and acting together—to counterbalance wealthy and powerful groups and the means they have to protect and extend themselves.

Historically, community organizing and social work were responses to the many forces that created inequality in our society. They remain as necessary and effective as ever today.

## **Aging**

Social workers link older adults with services that help them live independently and with dignity, thereby maximizing their quality of life and participation in society. Social work with older adults focuses on the physical, psychological, social, and economic aspects of daily living.

## **Child Welfare**

Child welfare social workers serve some of the most vulnerable children, youths, and families. Social workers specialize in building on the strengths of families and helping them to provide a safe and nurturing environment for children and youths.

However, when families are unable to do this, social workers must intervene to protect the children from harm. Child welfare social workers ensure that children and youths who have experienced abuse or neglect are supported through a range of services.

### **Developmental Disabilities**

Social workers also help parents of children with developmental disabilities understand their legal rights. They help parents learn to be advocates and find special services that enable their children to be as independent as possible.

### **Health Care**

Since the early 1900s, professionally trained social workers have helped people deal with personal and social factors that affect health and wellness. Some health care social workers are in direct services and concentrate on individuals, families, and small groups.

Others work in settings where the focus is on planning, administration, and policy. In the health care setting, social workers may conduct research, develop programs, and administer social work and other departments.

### **Justice and Corrections**

Social workers who work in justice and corrections can be found in courts, rape crisis centers, police departments, and correctional facilities.

### **International Social Work**

The functions of social work in international development are diverse. They include direct services in communities, refugee camps, orphanages, hospitals, and schools, as well as supporting the efforts of national governments, intergovernmental organizations, and non-governmental organizations to enhance social well-being

### **Mental Health and Clinical Social Work**

Clinical social workers are one of the nation's largest groups of providers of mental health services. They provide mental health services in both urban and rural settings, where they may be the only licensed provider of mental health services available.

### **Mental Health and Substance Use Social Work**

Social workers help individuals, families, and communities find ways to recover from substance use. They provide a much-needed ecological perspective to treatment that focuses on the client in relation to family and neighborhood environments, community support systems, cultural attitudes, and policies.

Consequently, social workers trained in treating alcohol, tobacco, and other drug addictions can be found doing case management, group and individual therapy, family counseling, advocacy for jobs and housing needs, community resource development, education, and policy making.

### **Occupational and Employee Assistance Program (EAP) Social Work**

Occupational social workers help organizations re-engineer their structure and methods to improve efficiency, creativity, productivity, and morale. They may also work for a union and be involved in job counseling or organizing.

### **Policy and Planning**

Social workers analyze policies, programs, and regulations to see what is most effective. They identify social problems, study needs and related issues, conduct research, propose legislation, and suggest alternative approaches or new programs. They may foster coalitions of groups with similar interests and develop organizational networks.

## **Politics**

There is a natural progression in the careers of many social workers from activism to leadership. Increasingly social workers are holding elective offices from school boards to city and county governments, from state legislatures all the way to the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate. Social workers also play leadership roles in local, state and federal agencies.

## **Public Welfare**

Social work in public welfare entails planning, administering, and financing programs, training and supervising staff, and setting and evaluating standards and criteria for service delivery. Public welfare offers many challenges that require creative thinking and leadership from professional social workers.

## **Research**

Social workers in research typically tend to be academics with postgraduate degrees in social work. Research provides the framework for effective practice. Although considered an art by some, social work is also a science based on evidence.

## **School Social Work**

School social workers act as the connection for school, home, and community services to help children with emotional, developmental, and educational needs. Most school social workers practice in public and private schools, although a small percentage may work in social services agencies or other service sites such as a preschool program or residential treatment center's for children who are emotionally disturbed.

## **Criminal Justice Social Workers**

Criminal Justice Social Workers

Criminal justice social workers can be found in many workplace settings, including courthouses, domestic violence support centers and correctional facilities. Each role comes with unique responsibilities. Those in correctional facilities, for instance, support incarcerated individuals. That can include conducting psychiatric evaluations and eventually preparing inmates to transition back into society. They may also hold support groups for individuals dealing with substance abuse or anger management issues to prevent the cycle of reincarceration. To become a criminal justice social worker, you'll need at least a bachelor's in social work. It's also helpful to enroll in criminal justice courses. You may choose to minor in criminal justice or choose to double major. Keep in mind, some positions, like those dealing with investigative work or legal counsel, may require a master's degree. Obtaining a master's degree can accelerate your earning potential in the field as well.

## **Gerontological Social Workers**

While this social work field may be unfamiliar to some, gerontological social workers (opens in a new window) will continue to be important as the baby boomer population ages. These professionals help elderly individuals maintain quality of life and live as independently as possible. Whether their clients live at home, with family, or in an assisted living facility or nursing home, social workers in this field connect their clients with various services like grocery delivery, help them apply for housing, and determine long-term care options.

Many geriatric social workers find themselves assisting clients in long-term care facilities, outpatient services, or adult protective agencies. If you're hoping to work in this area of social work, you'll need to have a master of social work (MSW) degree.

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# THE SILENT MANSIONS OF PALLATHUR: A GLIMPSE INTO INDIA'S AGEING FUTURE

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## **Introduction**

As a part of our field visits, this was one of our typical day in Pallathur Panchayat, Sivagangai District, Tamil Nadu. We knocked one of the hind doors of a grand Chettinad mansion. Each street of Pallathur were joined together by lavish Chettinad home at an average length of 100 to 150 feet. An elderly women sneaked out of a small front room. Upon a minute of conversation, she had the belief and courage to open up to us. As social workers, our interpersonal skills were on point that we could convince her on our purpose of visit. A preliminary skill that every social worker should master at.

The survey was in collaboration with Hepa Age India, an NGO working for elderly population age with dignity and respect. Pallathur is one of the Towns in Tamilnadu with significant elderly population. One in every few households have elderly couple or elderly men or women residing mostly alone. They have their children working abroad or employed in metro cities like Chennai and Bangalore.

The grandma that we were having conversation with, married and got settled in her husband's home town Pallathur in early 80'. She is now in her late 70's and her husband is close to 85 years of age. She had two sons; one settled in another country and the other working in a metro city. They both visit them on their summer holidays which for them is best time of the year. They occasionally receive financial help from both their children and are mostly dependent on their old age pension. With every visit they will receive a thousand or two from their children. Fortunately, the health status of the couple is perfectly alright, while her husband is dealing with fluctuating sugar levels. Both could communicate well in English. Most of the homes, we could find these elderly having very good standards of education and having a strong command in English, both men and women. Out of the entire old age population, Only very few countable numbers had smart phones, remaining had basic "button type" phones both of which were neither useful. Inside their homes, due to poor connectivity, they could not dial or receive any calls. Because of poor connectivity, they must move out of their homes and onto the roads to get a signal. Due to narrow roads and lack of public transport, entire Pallathur is accessible only by auto's. In case of any medical emergency, they need to come to the roads and make a call for an auto. It could obviously take 10 to 15 min based on the availability of vehicles.

## **The Community Lifeline: Of One-Rupee Care and Shared Kitchens**

Regarding daily food requirements, every elderly household is taken care by their community kitchen. All together pay a minimal sum of Rs. 1000 or Rs.3000 based on their financial availability. Rainy or a sunny all 3 meals a day would be handed over to them in carriers. After every other meal, empty carriers at the doorstep will be replaced with filled ones. This was an awe factor for us, where a community helps itself in times of need.

The medical needs of the old age population is taken care by AMM hospital in Pallathur, a remarkable philanthropic healthcare institution. The hospital takes care of basic medical needs of all the population in and around Pallathur, popularly known as "1 rupee hospital" as a due credit for providing accessible healthcare services at such a nominal fee. Day 1 of every month, those houses with elders would receive their necessary medicines at free of cost their doorstep. The hospitals do have mobile vans to help those in need. A call to the hospital, vans would reach their doorstep with no travel charges.

### **The Digital Divide and the Distance of Care**

The grandma's only concern is the need of public transport and financial assistance to lead both of their later years. At Pallathur, Out of 1 in 3 home share a similar story. Although some of their needs are being met, a few critical gaps still require a closer look.

India's elderly population (60+) is projected to grow by 134% from 2022 to 2050, surging from roughly 149 million to 347 million, according to the UNFPA India Ageing Report 2023 . The town of Pallathur represents our future India. A significant percentage of the population are turning out to be in their late 60's and 70's. In its provision of essential food and medical care, Pallathur serves as an inspiring model for elderly support across the country, Yet a holistic evaluation is needed in many other factors such as social and emotional wellbeing and financial independence and security, physical safety and assistance, cognitive and legal support. With a long-standing reputation for excellence in geriatric care, HelpAge India has intervened to further strengthen the support systems for the elderly.

As India approaches a demographic shift where one in every five citizens will be a senior citizen by 2050, the quiet streets of Pallathur offer both a roadmap and a warning. The town's success in weaving a safety net of "1-rupee" healthcare and community-funded kitchens proves that grassroots empathy can solve the most basic hurdles of survival. Our visit made it clear that a truly supportive environment for the elderly requires more than just basic care; it demands a holistic ecosystem that fosters emotional well-being and personal autonomy.

“India's journey toward 2050 must be paved with policies that treat the elderly not as a burden to be managed, but as a legacy to be cherished”.

(We sincerely thank the Chairman of Pallathur Panchayat, Ms.Shanthi Sivashankar for helping us successfully complete the survey)

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# FROM DEVOTION TO DIGNITY: THE SOCIAL WORK PHILOSOPHY OF SAMPURNA

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## Introduction

This article focuses on our most distinctive and award-worthy intervention: the *Bhagwan Ki Poshak* Project: a programme that converts ritually retired divine garments (*poshak*) into handcrafted bags and fashion accessories, thereby simultaneously solving a religious-waste pollution crisis, generating dignified employment for women, and redefining sustainable fashion for a new generation.

At *Sampurna*, our work is organized around three core programmes: Skill Development, *Jal* (Water Conservation), and *Bhagwan Ki Poshak* each rooted in cultural context, each driven by data, and each designed to generate sustainable livelihoods for marginalized women while addressing an environmental crisis that mainstream society has yet to fully acknowledge. We are also running a #BhagwanKiPoshak on this project.

## The problem: what the river carries that we never counted

Every year, millions of devotees across India offer new garments richly embroidered, brocaded, and *zari* worked to their beloved deities in temples. When these garments are considered *sewa nivratt* (ritually retired), tradition has long called for their immersion in a sacred river. The intention is pure devotion. The consequence, however, is an environmental emergency. India generates approximately 7.7 million metric tons of textile waste annually roughly 8.5% of global textile waste with only 59% being reused or recycled in any form. A significant and largely unquantified proportion of this waste stream is composed of religious and ritualistic textiles: idol garments, festival decorations, and ceremonial fabrics that enter rivers, ponds, and open grounds as part of cultural practice. These are not cheap materials. They are synthetic-heavy, dye-rich, non-biodegradable fabrics brocades threaded with metallic *zari*, velvet embossed with chemical dyes, polyester woven with plastic-based glitter. When immersed in the Ganga or any sacred water body, they do not dissolve in piety. They disintegrate into micro plastic fibers and toxic effluents.

Research confirms that the Ganga ranked among the world's top ten contributors to marine plastic pollution receives an estimated 315 tons of plastic debris daily, with textile fibers (synthetic micro plastics from washing and river disposal) identified as among the dominant pollutants. Over 90% of micro plastic debris recovered from the Ganga is composed of plastic fibers. Religious textile waste, though not always separately categorized in government data, forms a measurable and growing part of this load one that, unlike industrial discharge, happens with the blessing of faith and the sanction of tradition. This intersection of sincere devotion and inadvertent environmental harm is precisely where a social work intervention is not just useful, but essential.

## The Case Study: When the truck was already booked

This is a field report from *Sampurna's Bhagwan Ki Poshak* Outreach Team. On an otherwise ordinary morning, members of *Sampurna's* outreach team received information that the management committee of a prominent temple had arranged for a truck to collect a large accumulation of retired divine garments beautifully crafted *poshaks* that had dressed their beloved deity through seasons of prayer and celebration. The truck's destination: the Ganga River, for the traditional ritual *visarjan* (immersion). The booking was confirmed. The date was set. The outreach team moved quickly. They arrived at the temple, requested a meeting with the management, and were received with the courtesy

that has always characterized our engagement with religious institutions. The team did not lead with criticism. They led with data, and with the *thaila* (Bag) the specially designed, branded *Sampurna* collection bag, crafted to receive donated *poshak* fabric with the reverence it deserves.

**The presentation that followed was meticulous:**

1. They explained what actually happens to synthetic garments when submerged in river water the breakdown into micro plastics, the chemical release from synthetic dyes, the clogging of aquatic ecosystems.
2. They shared data on the scale of India's textile-to-river waste challenge and the Ganga's already critical pollution load.

They showed the temple committee examples of what *Sampurna's* trained women artisans had already created from previously donated *poshak* fabric: clutch bags, tote bags, *potlis*, cross body bags, and home décor pieces each one carrying the original embroidery, the original brocade, the original divine energy, transformed into a new life.

3. They explained that the programme gives direct employment and income to women from economically marginalized communities, who are trained in design, cutting, handcrafting, and quality control.

They explained that each product is a unique, one-of-a-kind piece because no two *poshaks* are identical, and because handcraft resists replication.

The temple management listened. They were, by their own admission, amazed.

They had not thought of this. In their world, the ritual was the answer the river was the resting place. No one had ever brought them an alternative that was simultaneously more environmentally responsible, more creatively meaningful, more economically productive for vulnerable women, and crucially more respectful of the sacred textile itself. The truck's fabric would have dissolved anonymously into pollution. *Sampurna's* intervention would ensure it lived on, worn and admired, carrying blessings into the world in a form that people could see, touch, and treasure.

**The innovation: Up cycling as social work**

What makes the *Bhagwan Ki Poshak* project a model of innovative social work practice is its integration of multiple fields of intervention within a single creative programme:

1. Environmental Social Work: Intercepting a specific, culturally embedded waste stream at its source not through prohibition, but through partnership and persuasion grounded in data.
2. Livelihood Generation: Every donated *poshak* generates paid, skilled work for women. The process collection, sanitization, design analysis, cutting, handcrafting, quality checking is an entire value chain, and every step employs a woman who might otherwise be without formal livelihood access.
3. Cultural Competence: Social workers are trained to work within cultural frameworks rather than against them. *Sampurna's* team does not ask devotees to stop their practice. They offer a practice that is richer, more purposeful, and more aligned with the deeper values of devotion which, at its heart, wants the beloved deity's garment to be honoured, not dissolved.
4. Community Mobilization: The outreach model moving temple to temple, community to community, equipped with the *thaila*, the data, and the story is classic community organization. Each converted temple becomes an ally, a donor, and often an advocate.
5. Economic Empowerment: The finished products the Krishna *Bhagwan Poshak* clutches, the Temple Brocade Handbags, the Ram *Saubhagya Thailas*, the *Sita Potlis* are not charity goods. They are artisan products of genuine quality and cultural value, sold and gifted with pride.

### **Redefining fashion: Sacred up cycling for gen Z**

One of the most exciting developments emerging from the *Bhagwan Ki Poshak* project is its resonance with India's younger generation. Gen Z globally known as the most sustainability-conscious consumer cohort in history is also a generation deeply interested in identity, heritage, and meaning. They are drawn to fashion that has a story.

*Sampurna's* poshak-up cycled products offer exactly this: a garment that once dressed a god, now carried by a human. A brocade that once swayed in a temple's sanctum, now worn through a city's streets. This is not nostalgia. This is reimagined devotion what might be called spiritual street wear, or more specifically, a form of fashion rooted in faith and made ethical by craft. Through its engagement with design-conscious consumers and youth communities, *Sampurna* is helping define a new subcategory of sustainable fashion one that is distinctly Indian, spiritually grounded, and environmentally accountable. It is a message that resonates powerfully: **you can carry your faith, and sustain your world, at the same time.**

### **Challenges in the field**

Social work is never without friction, and the Bhagwan Ki Poshak programme has taught us much about the specific challenges of working at the intersection of religion, environment, and livelihood:

1. **Cultural resistance:** Convincing devotees and temple management that ritual alternatives can be equally valid requires sustained relationship-building, not one-time advocacy.
2. **Trust-building with religious institutions:** Temples operate within hierarchies and traditions. Our team learned that arriving with respect, data, and tangible examples not lectures is the only effective approach.
3. **Scale vs. quality:** As demand for the products grows, maintaining the handcrafted quality that makes each piece unique requires ongoing training investment and quality management.
4. **Data gaps:** There is currently no comprehensive national dataset tracking the volume of religious/ritual textile waste entering Indian water bodies. This is a gap that academic social work research urgently needs to address.

### **Reflections on social work practice**

In thirty-two years of this work, the lesson that has embedded itself most deeply into my practice is this: **the most powerful social work interventions are those that refuse to separate the personal from the political, the spiritual from the environmental, and the individual from the community.**

The Bhagwan Ki Poshak project is not just an environmental programme. It is a statement that a woman's hands have the power to transform a crisis into a creation. That devotion, rethought with data and compassion, can become conservation. That the river Ganga Mata, our sacred mother can be protected not by asking people to be less devout, but by helping them be more so: more conscious, more creative, more complete.

*Sampurna* means complete. In every truck we redirect, in every poshak we upcycle, in every woman who receives her first payment for a bag she stitched with her own hands, we move one step at a time toward that completeness.

# SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND ESG CAREERS IN INDIA

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## **Introduction**

Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks have emerged as key mechanisms for evaluating organizational performance in the context of sustainable development and responsible business conduct. In India, regulatory initiatives led by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) have institutionalized ESG reporting through the Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR) framework, mandating such disclosures for leading listed companies. Despite these advancements, awareness and integration of ESG within social work education remain limited, highlighting a critical gap between evolving industry practices and academic preparedness. This paper examines the conceptual foundations of ESG and assesses its relevance to social work education and practice in India. It analyzes the alignment between traditional social work domains and emerging ESG career opportunities, while outlining key competencies, learning pathways and institutional strategies required for sustainability-oriented roles.

## **1. Introduction**

Social work education in India has historically evolved through its engagement with welfare institutions, non-governmental organizations, and grassroots development processes. Its primary orientation has been toward direct service delivery, community participation, and the implementation of social welfare programmes aimed at addressing inequality and vulnerability.

Within this framework, specializations such as Human Resource Management (HRM) emerged in response to industrialization and labour welfare concerns. Initially focused on improving working conditions, ensuring fair wages, and safeguarding employee rights, HRM has progressively transformed into a strategic function encompassing organizational development, workforce planning, and institutional effectiveness.

However, the broader understanding of “development” has undergone a significant shift. Social impact is no longer confined to state-led or non-profit interventions. Instead, it is increasingly embedded within corporate structures (CSR), financial systems, and global governance frameworks (SDGs). This transition has paved the way for ESG to emerge as a critical interface between social responsibility and organizational performance.

One of the most significant developments in this context is the rise of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks, which are widely used to evaluate how companies impact the environment, society, and ethical governance structures. In India, ESG disclosure is primarily implemented through the Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR) framework mandated by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) for the top 1,000 listed companies. This regulatory coverage is expected to expand rapidly in the coming years as sustainability reporting becomes increasingly integrated into corporate governance norms. The BRSR framework includes structured indicators (around 140 disclosures) covering environmental, social, and governance aspects, making corporate reporting more standardized and comparable.

This regulatory shift has increased demand for professionals skilled in sustainability data analysis, impact assessment, and ESG reporting. As a result, new career opportunities have emerged for graduates from social work, social work, environmental studies, management, and related disciplines.

## 2. Understanding ESG as an Applied Framework

The concept of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) emerged from growing global concerns regarding the role of corporations in contributing to environmental sustainability, social well-being, and ethical business practices. Over time, stakeholders (including investors, policymakers, and civil society) began to question whether “*companies helping the planet or harming the planet?*” (Das, 2025).

### In simple terms:

*Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) refers to a set of standards used to evaluate a company's operations and performance from a sustainability and ethical perspective (Friede, Busch, & Bassen, 2015).*

ESG consists of three interconnected dimensions that collectively evaluate organizational performance beyond traditional financial indicators. These dimensions are discussed below.

### 2.1 Environmental Dimension

The environmental dimension focuses on how organizations interact with and impact ecological systems. It includes:

1. Climate change mitigation
2. Carbon emissions management
3. Resource efficiency (water, energy, land use)
4. Waste management and pollution control
5. Biodiversity protection

Companies are now increasingly required to assess environmental risks and integrate sustainability considerations into their operational and strategic planning processes.

### 2.2 Social Dimension

The social dimension focuses on the impact of organizational activities on people, including employees, communities, and society at large. It includes:

1. Labour rights and working conditions
2. Health and safety standards
3. Community engagement and development
4. Diversity, equity, and inclusion
5. Human rights compliance

This dimension directly aligns with the core principles and competencies of social work practice, particularly in areas such as community development, social justice, and human well-being.

### 2.3 Governance Dimension

The governance dimension focuses on the systems, structures, and processes through which organizations are directed and controlled. It includes:

- a. Transparency and accountability
- b. Ethical leadership and decision-making
- c. Anti-corruption mechanisms
- d. Compliance systems
- e. Corporate board effectiveness

Effective governance ensures that environmental and social commitments are not merely symbolic but are implemented through accountable and ethical organizational practices.

### **3. ESG Career Demand in India: Current Scenario**

The demand for Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) professionals in India has increased significantly in recent years, driven by regulatory mandates, investor expectations, and the growing integration of sustainability into corporate strategy. ESG is no longer a peripheral function but is increasingly becoming central to organizational decision-making and long-term value creation.

#### **At present, some of the most in-demand ESG roles include:**

1. ESG Analyst / Sustainability Analyst
2. ESG Reporting Specialist (BRSR, GRI frameworks)
3. CSR Manager / CSR Executive
4. ESG Risk and Compliance Officer
5. Sustainability Consultant
6. Climate Data Analyst
7. ESG Assurance / Audit Associate

These roles are particularly prominent in consulting firms, multinational corporations, banking and financial institutions, and large Indian conglomerates, where sustainability reporting and compliance have become integral to business operations.

#### **The key drivers for these demands include:**

##### **3.1 Regulatory Requirements**

A key driver of ESG career demand in India is the introduction of the Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR) framework by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) in 2021. This mandate requires large listed companies to disclose detailed information on their environmental, social, and governance performance.

As a result, organizations require professionals who can systematically collect, analyze, and report sustainability data. The increasing adoption of ESG frameworks has therefore reshaped sustainability practices across corporate and development sectors. In India, ESG is increasingly influencing hiring patterns, organizational structures, and professional competencies required in sustainability-related roles.

##### **3.2 Corporate Integration of Sustainability**

Organizations are gradually moving beyond viewing ESG as an extension of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Instead, ESG is being integrated into core business functions, including:

1. Human resource systems
2. Risk management frameworks
3. Supply chain governance
4. Financial decision-making

This integration has created demand for professionals who possess an interdisciplinary understanding of both social systems and organizational operations. Such roles require the ability to connect sustainability goals with business strategies.

##### **3.3 Expansion of Sustainability-Oriented Employment**

The scope of ESG-related employment has expanded across multiple sectors. Key areas of growth include:

1. Corporate CSR departments
2. ESG consulting firms
3. Banking and financial institutions
4. Infrastructure and energy sectors
5. International development organizations

This expansion reflects the increasing importance of sustainability considerations in both domestic and global markets.

### **3.4. Salary Trends and Career Growth**

ESG-related careers in India offer competitive salary structures, which vary depending on experience, specialization, and industry. Entry-level positions typically range from ₹4–9 lakh per annum (LPA), while mid-level roles may range between ₹10–25 LPA. Senior-level positions, particularly in consulting and multinational organizations, can exceed ₹25–40 LPA.

Industry data also suggests that ESG analyst roles may begin at approximately ₹3–6 LPA, with significant growth potential as professionals gain experience and develop specialized expertise. Career progression in ESG is relatively rapid for individuals who combine technical competencies such as data analysis and reporting with field-based understanding of social and environmental issues.

## **4. Building a Career in ESG: Learning Platforms and Skill Development Pathways**

A successful transition into Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) careers requires structured learning beyond traditional social work curricula. While social work education provides strong foundations in community engagement and social analysis, ESG roles demand additional exposure to sustainability frameworks, corporate reporting systems, and data-driven impact assessment. In recent years, multiple global and regional platforms have made ESG education more accessible through online, short-term, and often free learning models (United Nations, 2015; World Bank, 2022). These platforms enable students to build foundational knowledge without significant financial barriers.

### **4.1 Global Learning Platforms**

**SDG Academy** (Free Learning Platform: <https://sdgacademy.org>):

The SDG Academy offers free Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) developed by experts affiliated with institutions such as the United Nations, Harvard University, and the World Bank. These courses cover sustainable development, climate change, global inequality, and public policy frameworks relevant to ESG practice (**SDG Academy, 2024**).

This platform is particularly useful for beginners, as it helps build conceptual clarity on sustainability before progressing to technical ESG frameworks.

### **4.2 Regional Learning Platforms Offering ESG and Sustainability Learning**

**South Asia Sustainability Academy (SASA)** – [www.sasaeearth.org](http://www.sasaeearth.org)

A regionally significant initiative is the South Asia Sustainability Academy (SASA), which focuses on practical, short-term, and applied ESG and sustainability training. SASA is designed specifically for learners in South Asia and emphasizes:

1. Practical ESG implementation in developing economies
2. Short-term certificate courses
3. Real-world case studies from South Asian industries
4. Application of sustainability in CSR and development projects
5. Skill-building for entry-level ESG roles

Unlike purely theoretical programs, SASA emphasizes hands-on learning and applied skills, making it particularly relevant for social work students seeking to transition into ESG practice (South Asia Sustainability Academy, 2024).

### 4.3 How Students Should Structure Their Learning Journey?

A clear, phased learning pathway is essential for students of social work and related disciplines who wish to enter ESG and sustainability careers. ESG is inherently interdisciplinary, requiring a combination of conceptual understanding, technical skills, and field-based experience. Therefore, ESG learning should not be approached as a single course but as a structured progression that gradually builds competence and employability.

The following three-stage model provides a practical framework for developing ESG capabilities:

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Focus area</b>	<b>Learning Platform</b>
<b>Stage 1: Conceptual Foundation</b>	Understanding sustainability systems, SDGs, and basic ESG concepts	SDG Academy; UN sustainability learning resources; basic ESG introductory modules
<b>Stage 2: Skill Development</b>	ESG reporting frameworks (GRI, SASB, TCFD), CSR systems, data analysis, and impact measurement	Online courses: South Asia Sustainability Academy; Coursera , edX
<b>Stage 3: Applied Practice</b>	Field experience, CSR/NGO internships, sustainability projects, ESG case studies, BRSR Report analysis	South Asia Sustainability Academy (SASA), Sustainability consulting firms;

## 5. Conclusion

The institutionalization of ESG through the BRSR framework by SEBI has created structured reporting systems and increased demand for skilled professionals across corporate and development sectors. For social work education, ESG represents an expansion of professional scope rather than a departure from traditional practice. It enables social work graduates to engage with sustainability at institutional, corporate, and policy levels. The integration of ESG into social work curricula requires structured learning pathways combining conceptual knowledge, technical skill development, and applied field experience. Platforms such as SDG Academy and SASA provide accessible entry points for students.

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# THE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY CRISIS: WHY INDIA'S SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS CAN NO LONGER WAIT FOR A NATIONAL COUNCIL

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## **The Reality We Face**

Social work in India is spoken about frequently, yet consistently misunderstood as a profession. Every year, thousands of students commit to this field and undergo rigorous academic and practical training — studying psychology, sociology, law, and policy, and logging hundreds of fieldwork hours across hospitals, schools, communities, and institutions.

And yet, upon graduation, most of us enter a system that offers no legal recognition of our profession. Our roles remain ambiguous, our training overlooked, and our expertise undervalued. This is not a peripheral academic concern — it is a structural failure. A draft National Council for Social Work (Education and Practice) Bill has existed since approximately 2020, but it has not become law. In the absence of a statutory framework, social work continues to operate in a professional grey zone, unregulated and chronically undervalued.

## **Volunteer or Professional?**

Among the most persistent challenges facing social work students is the need to justify what we do. In India, anyone engaged in acts of community service is commonly referred to as a “social worker.” While the impulse to help is commendable, it is not equivalent to professional social work.

Professional social work demands a foundation of formal education, ethical competency, counselling skills, and systematic assessment, documentation, and accountability— capabilities built over years of deliberate training. Because the title “social worker” carries no legal protection, there is no enforceable distinction between a trained professional and a well-meaning volunteer. This ambiguity does not merely affect our careers; it directly compromises the quality of care and support received by the most vulnerable people in society.

## **The Telangana Reality**

Telangana offers a particularly stark illustration of this problem. Even educated individuals, government officials, and established hospitals frequently fail to understand — or make effective use of — the skills a trained social worker brings.

Across government departments, roles that demand counselling, casework, or rehabilitation planning are routinely assigned to individuals without any social work background. In several major hospitals, social workers are confined to administrative tasks — paperwork and financial coordination — while their core competencies in counselling, family support, discharge planning, and patient advocacy are left entirely untapped. This is not a matter of social workers being unnecessary. It is a matter of no systemic standards existing to define, protect, or enforce their role.

## **A Fragile Educational Base**

The crisis extends into education as well. Under Osmania University, Roda Mistry College of Social Work

is the sole institution offering a BSW programme in Telangana — and even it faces ongoing difficulties with student recruitment and enrolment numbers. Across the entire state, fewer than twenty colleges offer social work education at any level. For a state of Telangana’s scale, with its complex and layered social and healthcare needs, this is deeply inadequate. When institutions are scarce, the profession remains invisible. And when students and their families perceive no clear career pathway, they choose other fields — a cycle that perpetuates the very shortage it reflects.

### **What We Lose Without a National Council**

The prolonged delay in enacting the National Council Bill has left social work suspended in an unresolved professional space. Without a statutory body:

1. Employers face no obligation to hire qualified social work graduates for social work roles
2. There are no uniform national benchmarks for education quality or fieldwork standards
3. Indian social work qualifications face significant barriers to international recognition

These are not abstract policy gaps. They translate directly into lost employment opportunities, suppressed salaries, professional disrespect, and stunted career trajectories for an entire generation of trained social workers.

### **Why Students Are Speaking Up**

We can no longer afford silence. Social work students are the emerging workforce of this profession, and we are absorbing the consequences of this regulatory vacuum in real time. Advocating for a National Council is not about professional prestige or institutional power. It is about establishing clear roles, enforceable standards, and the basic professional dignity that our work demands and our clients deserve.

Medicine has the National Medical Commission. Law has the Bar Council of India. Social work — a profession engaged daily with the most marginalised and vulnerable populations — deserves nothing less than a statutory body of its own.

### **Conclusion**

The draft National Council for Social Work Bill already exists. The legislative groundwork has been laid. What is absent is political will and timely action. India’s social work students are prepared to contribute meaningfully to society — to communities, institutions, hospitals, and policy. But we need a system that recognises our training, protects our professional identity, and treats our work as the essential service it is.

**The delay must end. The time to act is now.**

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*Social Work Digest is a thematic publication of the National Association of Professional Social Workers in India (NAPSWI), created to provide a dedicated platform for scholarly and reflective articles by social work professionals and members across the country. It focuses on critical discussions, professional experiences, and emerging perspectives within the field of social work in India. Each issue highlights a specific theme to encourage meaningful academic dialogue and knowledge sharing. The Digest complements NAPSWI's newsletter and supports the growth of professional learning, collaboration, and documentation of best practices, helping strengthen the social work community and guide the future development of the profession.*

## **Call for Articles**

*The National Association of Professional Social Workers in India (NAPSWI) invites its members and professionals to contribute articles to the Social Work Digest. You may submit your articles based on the specific theme announced for each month.*

*Kindly send your contributions to [napswi@gmail.com](mailto:napswi@gmail.com) with the subject line:*

***“Article for [Month] – NAPSWI Social Work Digest.”***

*We encourage well-structured, insightful, and practice-oriented articles that contribute to the growth of the social work profession. Your valuable contributions will help strengthen academic dialogue and knowledge sharing within the community.*

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