

Chapter – V

Discussions and Conclusion

The present research study began with setting the theoretical ground for comprehending social work practices in the contemporary era. Theoretical ground or framework is a structure that introduces or describes the theory that why the research problem of the study exists. Social constructivism is a theoretical framework that holds or supports the concept studied in this research.

Social constructivism emphasises two aspects: the role of culture and context in understanding societal events and the construction of knowledge based on developed understanding. According to constructivists, human interactions in society construct reality. Similarly, knowledge is created through human interactions that are influenced by ‘context’. Therefore, according to social constructivism, knowledge is a human product (Ernest, 1999).

Based on the theoretical framework of social constructivism, instead of defining social work as one entity, one practice, and one social system, the researcher argues that social work is continually redefining itself because it is influenced by people, social needs, and social change. Social work activities with various approaches have existed in India for a long time. The lens of constructivism provides a ground for considering the past and present experiences of diverse social work activities and affirms the identities of professional and voluntary social workers in India.

On this argumentative ground, if we examine the evolution of social work in India, it is clear that the emphasis has switched from charity and philanthropy to empowerment, human rights, and social justice. Initially, religious teachings motivated social activities, which shared similar virtues, including charity, assistance for the impoverished and defenceless, brotherhood and compassion for all beings. In ancient India, families and local communities were primarily responsible for caring for the physically and intellectually handicapped and disadvantaged. Later, the king was

accountable for the protection and well-being of everyone. The social scenario during the colonial period is characterised by the growing impact of Christian missionaries in social services and reform movements in Indian society. These two factors played a major role in the evolution of social work in India. A humanistic and rational approach to social work was embraced around the early 20th century. It resulted in the establishment of the first school of social work in 1936. This development in the field of social work had a tremendous impact on the country's existing social work practices, which were synonymous with volunteerism. The tradition of voluntary social work still continues. However, similar to professional social work, its approach has changed. It is no longer restricted to 'unpaid' services. In the modern period, social work in India appears to encompass two coexisting domains of work practices: trained social workers and voluntary social workers.

In this sense, the theoretical foundation of social constructivism allows voluntary social work practitioners to be viewed as a research subject. The current research clearly distinguished between the two categories of social workers on the basis of their training. Those with an academic degree in social work discipline, with or without specialisation, are considered professional or trained social workers. In contrast, voluntary social workers are people who work for a social cause without having any academic degree in the social work discipline.

Both the categories of social workers possess distinctive features. Therefore, this research study explores professional practices of both categories to understand the nature of contemporary social work practices. This study aims to comprehend and explain the professional practices of trained and voluntary social workers in the state of Gujarat. Therefore, the present study has examined the components of the professional practice of social workers, including knowledge, skills, values and ethics, motivation, and commitment.

The methodological approach followed in this study is Narrative Research. As a method, it begins with the experiences represented in individuals' lived and spoken tales and relies on the spoken and written words of participants. It is crucial to clarify the unique nature of the methodology used

for this research. This study is not based on the existing standard approaches. Its methodological orientation is considerably unique, not much used and yet to acquire currency.

In order to lay down a foundation for comprehensively studying professional practices, this research has focused on comparing and contrasting PSW & VSW in Gujarat. The literature review was not helpful, as most studies are done from other standard perspectives. The researcher finds that such a study depends on the life narratives of the research participants. The researcher, therefore, has approached 14 purposively selected individuals (social work practitioners), containing seven participants from each category: trained and voluntary social workers. It is an outcome of a solid filtering process mentioned in chapter 3. The focus is on the breadth and depth of life narratives of the research participants. Each narrative of the research participant is subjected to the researcher's informal critical scrutiny. A balanced view is taken while signifying lived experiences in the context of research objectives.

The life narratives and practices of research participants shed light on six components: knowledge, skills, values, ethics, commitment and motivation. Highlights of each of the components are as follows-

5.1 Knowledge

The present study identifies five distinct types of professional knowledge possessed by research participants: theoretical knowledge, practice wisdom, empirical knowledge, procedural knowledge, and personal knowledge. It is necessary to acknowledge that some of these forms overlap. For example, procedural knowledge contains components of both practical wisdom and empirical knowledge. Similarly, theoretical knowledge incorporates elements of empirical knowledge, practice wisdom, and personal knowledge. According to the data of section 4.3.1 in the present research, trained social workers are more likely to utilise procedural knowledge, empirical knowledge, and practice wisdom. However, it was clear that trained social workers possessed theoretical knowledge but could not consciously use it and instead relied on practice

wisdom. In the narratives of voluntary social workers, practice wisdom and personal knowledge predominate over other types of knowledge. In addition, it was discovered that voluntary social workers gained the necessary procedural knowledge for the intervention over time.

5.2 Skills

Within the framework of the practice setting, this section investigated the micro, mezzo, and macro-level skills that are necessary for social workers. It reveals that trained social workers possess skills at all three levels; however, voluntary social workers are more likely to possess skills in the micro and mezzo levels of intervention than are professional social workers. In addition to that, it provides a categorisation of skills as per the five categories listed below: cognitive skills, administrative skills, interpersonal skills, decision-making skills, and skills in the mobilisation of resources.

However, this is not meant to be an exhaustive list. Instead, it identifies critical aspects of expertise for competent practice. This section's division of skills is interdependent and overlapping. There is evidence that both voluntary and trained social workers possess interpersonal and resource mobilisation skills. In addition, cognitive and administrative skills are evident in the practices of trained social workers. The practice wisdom-based decision-making process is a characteristic shared by both categories of research participants. It implies that participants depend on their experiences and employ wisdom while making crucial decisions.

5.3 Values

The value framework of social work practitioners comprises professional, organisational, personal, and societal values and belongs to both categories of social work. Numerous research studies state that tension exists between the four value systems, resulting in value conflict. In this study, however, the integration of professional, personal, and organisational values is apparent in the participants' actions. It is essential to recognise that the substantial influence of organisational

values on the practices of trained and voluntary social workers directly results from their strong organisational commitment. Participants' adherence to society's values makes their behaviours culturally significant. Nonetheless, it occasionally conflicts with society's values, although research participants demonstrate competence to manage such situations of value conflict.

5.4 Ethics

Problem-solving is central to the profession of social work. The social worker is confronted with a variety of complex scenarios. Ethics help professionals in acting morally under challenging circumstances. Therefore, adopting an appropriate value and exhibiting good behaviour are crucial components of social work practice. In this research study, the participant narratives and field observation reveal three forms of ethics in the practices: (i) Professional ethics, (ii) Organisational ethics, and (iii) virtue-based ethics.

The majority of trained social workers in this study demonstrated a commitment to all three forms of ethical standards. On the other hand, trained social workers do not make conscious use of professional ethics in their practice. The activities of voluntary social workers are typically guided not only by the ethics of the organisations for which they work but also by virtue-based ethics.

5.5 Commitment

The social work profession is marked by uncertainty, ambiguity, and obstacles. Due to the dynamic nature of human beings, rigorous attention to problems, diagnostic or needs identification processes, and intervention tactics are always required. Therefore, a substantial amount of commitment is required in the profession.

The narratives of the research participants demonstrate an emotional attachment and affinity with their organisation and its objectives. It is due to the congruence between individual and organisational values and objectives. Consequently, participants continue working despite the

obstacles. Multiple studies demonstrate a conflict between professional and organisational commitment. It is not found in this study due to the participants' congruence of professional and organisational commitment resulting from a sense of ownership.

In addition to this, a variety of other factors influence participants' commitment, including contentment, a sense of belongingness, ownership, social recognition, fame, and sensitivity to issues. Having a sense of being valued, receiving positive feedback for work, efforts, and persistence, seeing a 'real' difference in people's lives, and the availability of team, community and state support are additional factors that increase the commitment of participants and contribute to the sustainability of the work.

5.6 Motivation

In the field of social work, motivation is an essential component of social work practice in every setting and at every level, including the micro, the macro, and the mezzo. The narratives of the research participants indicate the forces in their lives that motivated them to undertake tough jobs and enabled them to continue. However, motivation is by no means a uniform phenomenon. Therefore, not only do they differ in terms of motivational level (i.e., how motivated they are), but also in terms of motivational orientation (i.e., type of motivation). The type of motivation is concerned with the underlying attitudes and aims that inspire action; in other words, it is concerned with the 'why' behind acts.

The narratives of the research participants show that both intrinsic and extrinsic forms of motivation are present in both trained and voluntary social workers. Throughout the course of practice, they are motivated by a combination of internal and external forces. However, it is necessary to note that the original point or spark that ignited action is always accountable for the intrinsic motivation component in each category. The establishment of the work and its subsequent growth eventually led to the development of extrinsic motivation.

A few studies suggest that external rewards for doing a work one enjoys may minimise the

influence of interior happiness. Only two cases from voluntary social workers and one from trained social workers substantiate this; most social worker accounts deny it. In each instance, it was seen that a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors boosted the work motivation of social workers.

The thesis argument has culminated from the major trends evident in each component of professional practices.

5.7 Thesis Statement

I conclude the thesis by briefly summarising and commenting on my primary efforts in this research. In this study, I intended to examine and comprehend the practices of trained and voluntary social workers in Gujarat. The research-based and conceptual literature about contemporary social work practices is limited. However, several available literatures are limited to the ‘breadth’ of the practices and do not shed light on the attributes of the practitioners. Additionally, indigenous literature on social work in India has not created a space for practices of voluntary social workers, which is a crucial factor in comprehending the nature of social work practices in India. Through narrative inquiry of research participants’ lives, this research charts out the current practices of social work practitioners and highlights the practitioners’ attributes. The core thesis is that trained and voluntary social workers possess several identical and distinct attributes. The faster pace of acquiring knowledge and skill is the strength of trained social workers. While solid commitment, virtues, and practice wisdom make practices of voluntary social workers effective and lead to the eventually acquiring the required knowledge. It highlights contemporary trends of social work practices, which are not limited to philanthropy in the cases of both trained and voluntary social workers.

5.8 Areas Recommended for Future Exploration

This research study is a ground research study based on a smaller magnitude. However, it raises several questions and factors which are not explored due to the paucity of the time and limitations

of doctoral research.

This study provides an idea of the general attributes of the practitioners. It is essential to explore each attribute in relation to the training of the practitioners on a higher magnitude. Additionally, the impact of the ideology of practitioners was encountered during the research inquiry process. Ideology construction among social work practitioners and its influence on the practices is required to explore. Concentrated efforts in the direction of impact of the ideology of educational institutes offering social work programs on practitioners are needed to understand the modern trends of social work practices in relation to education and training. The present research study also raises the question of the distribution of the social work workforce. It is needed to have a macro-level survey to create a database of the social work workforce. It will provide engagements and footprints of social workers in various settings and enable an organised form of the profession. Moreover, the present study set off a methodological innovation, which is a worthwhile contribution to social work research.

Additionally, research on the importance of education and training in the professional development of practitioners is emphasised. On the basis of research data, the significance of social work education and training in the construction of social worker attributes and components of professional practises should be studied in greater depth.

In addition to the areas for further research, it recommends a discourse platform for the voluntary and trained social work practitioners for mutual benefits. However, several attempts were also made in the past, like the Indian Conference of Social Work, which met in 1947. It provided the first opportunity at the national level for voluntary and professional social workers to meet and discuss their ideas.