

BOOK REVIEW**P. K. Visvesvaran**

Faculty Member (Retd.)

Madras School of Social Work

Social Work Profession in India: An Uncertain Future**Edited by T.K. Nair****Bangalore: NIRUTA Publications, 2014****Price Rs.500/-****Pages: 256**

This book is an anthology of ten essays, besides an introduction by the editor himself. The papers authored by social work practitioners and academics deal with varied aspects of the social work profession, as the following table of contents reveals:

M.V. Moorthy	<i>Philosophy of Social Work in Changing India</i>
J. M. Sampath and Kalpana Sampath	<i>Evolutionary Excellence in Social Work</i>
Shanthi Ranganathan	<i>Substance Use Disorders and Social Work Interventions</i>
Nalini Gangadharan	<i>Poverty Alleviation through Skill Building: A Social Work Initiative</i>
Henry J D' Souza	<i>Social Justice in India: Reflections</i>
Annie Namala	<i>Promoting Social Justice, Human Rights and Empowerment</i>
B. Devi Prasad	<i>Voluntary Sector and Professional Social Work: Trends and Challenges</i>
M. Nadarajah	<i>Should We Re-think the Nature of Social Work?</i>
R. R. Singh	<i>Education for Professional Social Work in India: Overview</i>
T. K. Nair.	<i>Humanitarianism Professionalized: Dilemmas of Social Work in India</i>

For convenience and easy comprehension of the latent design of the book, the contents may be grouped as follows:

- Section 1: *Gandhiji's Dreams Shattered!*
 Philosophy of Social Work in Changing India Social
 Justice in India: Reflections
- Section 2: *Whither Social Work Education?*
 Voluntary Sector and Professional Social Work: Trends
 and Challenges
 Education for Professional Social Work in India:
 Overview
 Humanitarianism Professionalized: Dilemmas of
 Social Work in India
- Section 3: *The Way Out*
 Evolutionary Excellence in Social Work Should We
 Re-think the Nature of Social Work?
- Section 4: *Beyond Uncertainties*
 Substance Use Disorders and Social Work
 Interventions
 Poverty Alleviation through Skill Building: A Social
 Work Initiative
 Promoting Social Justice, Human Rights and
 Empowerment

P.S. Please note that the grouping, as well as the captions, are notional and not to be found in the book.

Section 1 may be called 'Gandhiji's Dreams Shattered!,' for Moorthy's paper deals mainly with Gandhiji's concept of social work and sarvodaya, while D'Souza (a former Indian citizen who migrated to the U.S.) points to the morass of corruption, inefficiency and inaction into which the country, of late, has fallen.

Section 2 may be titled 'Whither Social Work Education?' as the three writers seem to share, essentially, the same apprehensions. For example, while Devi Prasad remarks that the quality of most institutions imparting social work education has become a matter of great concern (p.161), R. R. Singh expresses regret over the lamentable

and, clearly, substandard education imparted by social work institutions (p.212), and T. K. Nair, for his part, deplores the commercial interests that drive the running of these institutions (p.253).

Section 3 may be called the 'The Way Out' since the two writers concerned have elaborately outlined the manner in which the profession may still move towards redemption, excellence, freedom from materialism and commodification - and so transform itself into a venture driven by a spirit of brotherhood and compassion.

Section 4 can be aptly titled 'Beyond Uncertainties,' as all three articles deal with concrete services, painstakingly organized mostly by the workers themselves.

While the ideas expressed in Section 3 were mostly theoretical in nature, Section 4 is about the much-needed services provided to clients who are victims of addiction, unemployment and persecutions of a racist and casteist nature.

Beyond Uncertainties:

Anyone who cares to record in detail the achievements of alumni and alumnae will realize that what is perhaps uncertain is only the shape that social work education will take in the future, and not the future of the profession itself, by any means. In this connection, it is quite surprising that innovations reportedly introduced by M. S. S. Nambudiri such as the de-institutionalization of destitute children, to which the editor makes a special reference have not been fully narrated and explained for the benefit of the readers. The editor arouses our curiosity by calling Nambudiri the most outstanding student of MSSW and by dedicating the book to his memory, but the book is, unfortunately, almost totally silent about Nambudiri's professional contributions.

All said and done, it can be reiterated that there is no genuine reason to fear that the future of the profession is uncertain. On the other hand, it is social work education which appears to be beset with numerous problems - such as the mindless proliferation of schools motivated by, in most cases, profit-making, it would appear. But there is reason to

hope that illustrious alumni and alumnae of the various social work education institutions will continue to hold the social work flag high and be shining examples of *professional social work* even as *schools of social work* have failed to cover themselves with glory.

In sum:

This book is both special and remarkable for several reasons. For one thing, all the essays have been well-written and some truly scholarly. Both the essays in Section 3 are novel, innovative and thought-provoking. The first advocates a rational approach to improvement while the second recommends a spiritual remedy.

If Moorthy's article reflects experience and maturity, D'Souza's represents an ex-citizen's resentment of corruption and squalor in the country of his birth. R. R. Singh's vast and varied experience in social work education has resulted in a write-up which is richly textured and suffused with an incontrovertible air of authenticity. He reveals the shocking fact that social work teachers have been subjected to lethal attacks by students owing to the fact that they (students) were not trusted. Curiously, the writer withholds further details of the tragic occurrence.

Devi Prasad gives a lucid account of the role of voluntary agencies in social welfare and how VOs (voluntary organizations) and professional social workers can work together.

Nair's article reflects his first-hand experience with the Association of Schools of Social Work in India (ASSWI) and the raw deal he had received as an ASSWI office-bearer. According to him, the major drawback of social work is that it fails to qualify as a profession in accordance with the criteria laid down by well-known authorities.

All in all, this is a useful book which gives readers ample food for thought. It would have us believe that the profession of social work has an uncertain future. Most readers will not agree with this view which is, nevertheless, disturbing. But then all good books tend to do this: disturb.