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SOCIAL WORK IN CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

HERBERT H. APTEKAR

Dr. Aptekar was in India for some time as a member of the team of consultants to Indian Schools of Social Work, sent by International Cooperative Mission. The author had had an opportunity of studying basic similarities and differences between Social Work in the United States and India. "I think, in fact," says Dr. Aptekar, "that Indian School Work can gain much through psychological, psychiatric and psycho-analytical thinking, as well as from an understanding of method in these fields... their (Indian) whole way of living is more other-centered. "After posing a few questions, the author says that Labour Welfare has not attained a true identity yet. He believes that India could demonstrate through its labour welfare programme what a tremendous instrument for social good Indian Social Work can be.

Dr. Aptekar is Professor of Social Work Practice in the Florence Heller Graduate School for Advanced Studies in Social Welfare, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts, U.S.A.

There are many definitions of social work, and as one examines them, one finds many interesting points of similarity and difference. A rather recent article by S. K. Khinduka called "The Meaning of Social Work"[1] presents at least fifteen different definitions, including several from Indian sources. The great majority, however, come from the United States and Canada. One might expect, in view of this fact, that they would be particularly reflective of the culture from which they emanate. The fact that they are not strikingly so may be indicative of a certain lack of concern with the cultural component in social work on the part of the authors of these definitions. It may also point up a conviction held by many social workres that there are certain universal characteristics of professional social work and that these will be found wherever and whenever one stops to look at his field of human activity.

Whatever the reason may be for the likeness which one finds in many of the definitions of social work, there has been a surge of interest in recent years, on the part of American social workers, in the cultural components in social work practice, particularly in the field of casework,[2] and this has led to an emphasis upon ethnic differences rather than similarities. In the United States and Canada, as in India, there are many classes as well as religious differences, and differences in national background. It is exceedingly important, therefore, for the social worker in practice to know the implications of such differences, as far as attitudes and expectations on the part of the client are concerned. The possibilities for misinterpretation and misunderstanding on the part of both client and worker are very great because of such differences, and this is apt to be particularly true when client and worker come from radically different religious or national backgrounds or from different social and economic classes. The emphasis on cultural difference and distinctiveness which one finds in American social work literature of the past decade is therefore very well taken, It is fully justified from a methodological standpoint and there are probably few professional social workers who would want to quarrel with it.

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[1] S: K. Khinduka, (ed.), *Social Work in India,* Jaipur, Sarvodaya Sahitya Samaj, 1962. 1962.

[2] Cf. Council on Social Work Education, *Socio-cultural Elements in Casework, A Case Book of Seven Ethnic Case Studies,* 1955; also, Stanley H. King and Eleanor E. Cockevell, *Perception of Culture: Implications for Social Case-workers in Medical Settings,* Monograph V, National Association of Social Workers, 1960.

But social work is more than method. It is a. *modern social institution,* and it needs to be understood as such. This means that it must be understood in terms of its psychological and cultural sources as well as in terms of its purpose and function in present day societies all over the world. Unlike certain other social institutions, such as the family, social work did not always exist *as a social institution.* As a recognized profession, social work has not yet come into its own in certain modern societies, for example, the U.S.S.R.,[3] although many forms of social work practice may be observed in these societies. In other societies its professional status varies greatly and the education of social workers is in some instances more like preparation for the crafts or trades than it is for any of the recognized' professions.[4] But despite such differences social work has taken root in most modern societies. It has established itself quite firmly in relation to other social institutions and it probably will not be many years before a modern society without a profession of social work will be unthinkable.

This does not mean that social work will be one and the same thing wherever one may find it. What probably will occur is that it will take on many distinct forms in different societies, as indeed it does today. But with all its varied forms, it probably will be clearly recognizable as social work. I believe that this will be so for several reasons. One is that I have been fortunate enough to see social work in different forms, in India and the United States, and still to recognize basic similarities, and another is that I see the roots of this modern social institution embedded deeply in what might be called the common human condition. Social work has emerged in modern societies as a social institution because human beings have a need for it. In the simpler societal state, it was not necessary to have such an organized institution. But in primitive societies, the dependence of man upon man was recognized in many ways and primitive, if not professional, forms of social work did exist and exist today. Even among animals, W. G. Atlee[5] notes "a sub-structure of social tendencies leading to mass protection among bacteria, planarian worms, certain fish and simple crustaceans." Crawford[8] observed cooperative problem solving and food sharing among chimpanzees, and even as early an observer as Kropotkin, whose interesting book, *Mutual Aid,*[7] stresses cooperative manifestations among animals and men, recognized a need of men to act on the basis of "mutual aid" as well as self-assertion. Charles Robert Aldrich, an English psychologist, speaks of "an unconscious bio-morality, in which the primitive members of any social group cooperate instinctively."[8]

Much ethnographic evidence could be cited to show that precursors of modern social work exist in primitive societies. For example, the Kaingaing of Brazil, an extremely hostile and suspicious people, among whom there was a great deal of killing on a blood-feud basis, nevertheless manifested a cooperative attitude with regard to the sharing of food. The anthropologist Jules Henry tells Us:[9]

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[3] Cf. Bernice Madison, "Welfare Personnel in the Soviet Union," *Social Work,* Vol. VII, No. 3, July, 1962.

[4] United Nations, *Training for Social Work,* Second International Survey, Part II, 1955.

[5] W. C. Atlee, *The Social Life of Animals,* New York, W. W. Norton, 1938.

[6] M. P. Crawford, "The Cooperative Solving of Problems of Young Chimpanzees," *Comparative Psychology Monographs,* 1933-34, pp. 1-78.

[7] Piotr A. Kropotkin; *Mutual Aid,* London, W. Hinemann, 1916.

[8] Charles Robert Albrick, *The Primitive Mind and Modern Civilization,* London, 1931, p. 235.

> "When a hunter kills an animal he rarely keeps it—even though he has no meat himself. Instead he gives it away to a member of the band. He knows he will get a piece himself, but if it is a bird and the recipient's family is large, it will be a little piece. . . Sometimes the butcher is influenced by the amount of meat he knows to be in the hands of other people. .. . relatives must be fed when they are hungry; he must give to anyone who asks him, and he must always have regard to the demands of hospitality."

For our purposes, however, it may be sufficient simply to point out that the modern institution of social work has deep roots in human experience, and that it reflects inborn need, not only on the part of human beings, but perhaps all forms of life.

What all of this means, in other words, is that the social institution which we call social work has its roots in the psychological and social, if not the biological needs of human beings. In simpler societies it is possible to meet such needs without an organized institutional structure. Each man, as it were, recognizes need on the part of the other and is prepared to meet it through socially caste behaviour, or custom, rather than through the development of an organized institution or profession. In complex societies, social and psychological need cannot be met in so direct a manner. Provision is therefore made through the creation of a social institution or profession for the meeting of need through an intermediary. Doctors, nurses, teachers, social workers—all intermediaries come, into being and carry out special functions with institutional, or professional equipment. They become society's agents for meeting the need in a specially tutored, which is to say, an institutional way. Whether the same means are used or not, whether given the same names or not, intermediaries art always used in complex societies and some organized or institutional scheme, involving social distance, takes the place of direct, man-to-man behaviour shaped by custom.

We may say, therefore, that in one sense social work has always existed. It has existed as long as there has been human society, as long as the needs of one individual being have been met by others. What we now know as social work, however, is quite a recent phenomenon. But while it is recent, and in many parts of the world first coming into being as a profession, it is still universal. Even those societies which do not recognize social work as a profession, which have no special name for it and no special type of academic preparation, nevertheless do have it. In the Soviet Union there are welfare workers of various types, since there are many social insurance and welfare schemes, but as yet there is no organized profession of social work, and no professional schools in which workers are trained. A need is felt for more thorough-going training[10] than is now offered, but as yet there are no schools of social work.

We thus see that social work, *in essence,* has always existed. It is as though man cannot live without it, any more than he can without water, food or air. Built as a social being he needs both to help and be helped in social living. And that is what social work is all about. It is man's way of recognizing that under any and all circumstances he must be his brother's keeper—not just in a physical sense but in a psychological and social one. Just as there cannot be a society of a single sex or single age group, so there cannot be a social situation in which one does not find the essence of social work, the sexes helping each other, age groups caring for one another.

[9] Jules Henry, *Jungle People,* New York, J. J. Augustine, 1941.
[10] *Ibid,* p. 61.

haves feeding have-nots, the more secure providing strength for the less secure, the knowledgeable providing opportunity for the unknowing, the even-tempered allaying, anxiety of the harassed. Life is full of social exigency and social work is man's way of meeting such exigency—no matter what he may call his way of doing it, how complex that way may be, or how many forms it may take.

What this means is that social work is not a Western institution. In Eastern countries it is not simply an import, grafted on, as it were, to an indigenous Eastern tree. It is true that what we know as professional social work has had its most complex and its most organised development in the West. And it is true too that social workers of other countries have sometimes looked upon social work as a Western phenomenon which needs only to be imported and adopted to be useful. I think this is an erroneous view of social work and that real understanding of the part it can play in any society, and the form that it should take, can come only from an appreciation of inherent human needs in *all* societies. No matter what the economic or political or social structure of a society might be, there will be social exigencies and these are what social work is intended to meet. The significant questions, therefore, are (1) what special exigencies are there in all human life—what must one society do, as all societies must, to meet them and (2) special needs do we as a society have—what special needs can social work serve at this time and place? In other words, generic human need arising out of the fact that we can live only in relation to others, that is to say, in societies, may be postulated, and a means of meeting such need which will be *basically* the same in all societies must be developed. No people can live without it—none wants to—and the only essential difference one finds among peoples in this respect is in their conscious attention to such need and the kind of investment they are willing to make in meeting it. All do, and must recognise it in one way or another, and all have found some way, or ways of reacting to and dealing with the essential social needs which they recognise. That way, whatever it is, is the essence of social work. What I am saying here is that the *essence* of social work may be found *anthropologically*. It may be found in what inheres in human relationship, direct and simple or distant and complex. It may be found in any human society. The social institution, or the profession which we know in modern societies is simply a development of or an elaboration upon a common theme.

Perhaps what we should now address ourselves to is the kind of development or elaboration on the common human theme which we know as Indian social work, and perhaps we can best do that by comparing it and contrasting it with social work as one finds it elsewhere. Certain similarities between Indian social work and American have been pointed up at various times and there can be no doubt that the two have had a close relationship. Both countries prepare people for the profession through graduate training, whereas in most other countries academic preparation for social work is undergraduate.[11] Many outstanding social workers in India have come to the United States for special preparation, and the Team of Consultants to Indian Schools of Social Work, sent by the International Cooperation Administration and the Council on Social Work Education, brought a great deal of American orientation to Indian social work. As a member of that team it was possible for me to study certain basic similarities, and certain differences between social work in the two countries and I should like to offer some of my observations.

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[11] United Nations, *Training for Social Work*, Second and Third International Surveys, 1955, 1958,

We in the West live in what we have termed "the Freudian era." We live and breathe psychology, psychiatry and psycho-analysis. Newspaper and popular magazine articles, fiction, the theatre—all reflect our preoccupation with mental processes. I do not mean to imply that there is something wrong with this, although it certainly has led to a kind of hyper-self-consciousness on the part of many Westerners. In any case, our social work is strongly influenced by this dominant trait in our culture, and it is not surprising that the field of casework which has called more on psychiatry and psycho-analysis than any other type of social work should be our most developed form of professional social work.

India does not live in "the Freudian era." Psychology, psychiatry and psycho-analysis have not reached the same proportions and they do not play the same role in societal life that they do in the West. It is not that I think India cannot gain from further development of these fields, or that Indian social work should not be at all influenced by them. I think, in fact, that Indian social work can gain much through psychological, psychiatric and psycho-analytical thinking, as well as from an understanding of method in these fields. But Indian social work must work with people who are not imbued with such thinking and who do not necessarily want to be. They have other predominant interests and other concerns. In fact, their whole way of living is more other-centered. Their relationships within the family, in the small group and in the community are less self-conscious and perhaps less ego-centric in character. In any case, what the Indian social work must do in working with an Indian individual or group is to relate to what is a predominant interest or concern on his or their part, and this will not be apt to be primarily psychological. It will rather be sociological—not individually centered but *socially* oriented.

A true Indian social work in 1963, therefore, should be, in a very real sense, even more culturally oriented than American social work needs to be. I should like to repeat that I am not speaking against psychological understanding on the part of Indian social workers. I think they need a great deal more of it than many Indian social workers do have. But what they need most of all, I think, is what is perhaps even more difficult to acquire, and that is a thorough understanding of the culture in which they live and work. I say this is one of the most difficult of all things to acquire, because one thing that we know through Freudian orientation is that people in a culture live that culture on the whole *unconsciously.* Most of us are not aware of what our culture is actually like and we come to some understanding of it only through comparison and contrast. Living in another culture for a period of time is rewarding in many ways. One of its principal benefits, however, is the fact that it permits one to see his own culture through different eyes, so to speak. For the first time after returning to one's own culture it is possible to see it as others who are oriented differently might see it. It is possible to contrast it and compare it with something else, in other words to understand it differently and more fully, perhaps more sympathetically.

In any case what the social worker in India needs is the kind of understanding of his own culture which can come through anthropological study.[12] He needs to understand man *in* society. He needs understanding of the individual, yes, but he also needs understanding of the social orientation of that individual, understanding of the individual in relation to his family, group and community. He needs the kind of understanding of personality which can be acquired through cross-cultural study.[13] The horizons of American social workers can also be broadened through such study. In my judgment, however, it is even more essential and more appropriate for the Indian social worker because of the highly social orientation of Indian social life. Modern India is a socialistic society (in more than a political sense) and its social work must be so oriented.

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[12] Isabel Kelly, Suggestions for the Training of Village-level Workers," *Human Organization.* Vol. XXI, No. 4, Winter 1962-63.

Now a question arises, namely, how does this apply to the practical working situation in which the Indian social worker finds himself. Since he is not, as he would be in America, a specialist in casework, or group work or community organization, but rather a combination of all three, since he is a generic social worker, in other words, how will he apply his understanding of Indian personal needs as contrasted with American, or Russian or French?[14] As an Indian himself, will it be possible for him to see Indian culture in operation, and while accepting it and affirming it, still to maintain a certain objective attitude towards it—to view it from a distance, as it were, and to see what effect it has upon the individual and the group or community? One thing is certain and that is that he will not do so easily. It is equally certain, however, that he will need to do so in order to be as effective as he can be in any Indian social work situation.

I referred above to the generic character of Indian social work. Yet as everybody knows, Indian social work is more specialized in some ways than the social work of other countries. One acquires training as a labour welfare officer, for example, or a medical social worker, and in the process often does not acquire what one needs to know as a child welfare worker or a family planning worker. Except for a few instances, where Indian schools of social work are geared to generic training, and not to specialization, Indian social work training is less generic than American. This represents quite a paradoxical situation, since on the whole Western life is known for its highly specialized character and Eastern life for its more general and less specialized nature. One can only speculate as to whether this will always remain so. For the time being, however, it would seem that what the Indian social worker needs is wider prespective and not. narrower. He needs to know human life in his own culture, and in others, by way of comparison and contrast. He needs to think psychologically to some extent, although probably not to as great an extent as in the West, and he also needs to think anthropologically, that is to say with understanding of the demands made by his own and other cultures upon the individual. He must also understand the goals of his own culture, as well as the direction in which it is moving. Is it tending to become more Westernized? Then what conflicts and anxieties are found in Western culture and what ones might he expect to find among his clients? Is there a trend to preserve its Eastern values while taking on Western material aspects? If so, what effect does material change have upon value-orientation? What is the position of any individual vis-a-vis the group in such a situation?

These are the essential questions which I believe Indian students of social work should be addressing themselves to, because these are questions they will have to contend with in any specialized field. Labour welfare workers need to find their own answers to them and so do medical social workers and child welfare

[13] Bert Kaplan, (ed.), *Studying Personality Cross-Culturally,* Evanston, III., Row-Peterson 1961.

[14] See Inkeles, Alex; Hanfman, Eugenia; and Beier, Helen; "Model Personality and Adjustment to the Social socio-Political System" and "An American in Paris: Interviewing Frenchmen." both in Kaplan, Bert, *Studying Personality Cross-Culturally.*

workers. Let a student find for himself a satisfactory answer to such questions and he will have something that will serve him in good stead whatever he may do in Indian social work.

Let us consider the specialities in Indian social work and let us think in terms of the kind of understanding of personality and of culture which is required in them. Let us think too in terms of why these particular specialities are so important in Indian social work? What are the cultural purposes which they serve? Let us begin with rural welfare, or rural community development. Does American, psychologically oriented social work, have anything to contribute to the rural social worker in India? Does an understanding of culture, such as that afforded by anthropology, have value for him?

I am quite certain that an American trained in an American school of social work could not do a satisfactory job as a village level worker in India. I am doubtful too as to whether an Indian, trained only in an American school of social work, could perform satisfactorily as a village level worker. Both would be oriented to a different type of culture and to different personality needs. I am equally sure, however, that an Indian trained in a Community Development Institute in India, would make a better village level worker, theoretically speaking, or better block development officer (were he to be employed as such) if he had the type of training which he could get in an American school or social work, in other words, if he had such psychological and cultural understanding to complement his practical training.* Rural social work as it is now carried out in India is on the whole non-psychological, and to a very great extent is non-culturally oriented. It is concerned with practical change and development, among a people who are of idealistic or philosophical disposition, a people to whom cultural traditions are exceedingly important, and yet it bears little of the influence of the psychologist or the cultural anthropologist. In a sense it attempts to superimpose pragmatic, which is to say, Western values upon a non-pragmatic culture, and to the extent that it attempts to do so it cannot succeed. The only way it will succeed is through adaptation of the pragmatic to the idealistic, the philosophical and the traditional. This can only take place when the worker is conscious of the meaning of all these values in the life of the individual, the group and the community, that is to say, when he is psychologically and culturally as well as pragmatically oriented.

In the field of labour welfare some very interesting cultural questions arise. It is a curious fact that in a highly industrialized society such as the United States there should be no field such as labour welfare. There are personnel officers in many large industries and commercial establishments, but their function is quite different from that of the Indian labour welfare officer. They have no legal status and they are employed by the owners of private business with the understanding that their orientation will be a business one rather than a social one. If it can be social in the interests of the business there will be no objection. But it is not social in the sense that there is legal recognition of societal obligation to be carried out through the employer, to the employee.

There are many Indian labour welfare officers who function as though they were personnel officers, in the American sense of the term. In so doing, however, they are not carrying out the intent or the spirit of the legal and social institution known as labour welfare in India. There are many reasons why Indian labour welfare, which was intended from the beginning to be socially oriented, sometimes becomes distorted, one might say, in the image of American business-oriented personnel work. When it does, however, it patterns itself after what we know in America as "big business" rather than social work. I know there are many persons in India who question whether labour welfare is social work. In the process of becoming acquainted with this field during my own stay in India, however, I found nothing in it antithetical to my own American conceptions of social work, and a great deal in it that I could recognize as nothing else but social work. It is proper, it seems to me, that labour welfare should be taught in schools of social work and that the specialized institutes and schools of labour welfare should be completely identified with the *social* institution of social work.

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*The illustration is not particularly apt because of the practical considerations involved in the employment of such persons. Theoretically speaking, however, it does apply.

Why is it, then, that labour welfare becomes identified at times not with labour, or with welfare, but with the interests of business? This is a phenomenon, as I see it, which must be understood in terms of cultural mixture. It is a phenomenon with a historical background and also a political and economic one, rather than a pure intellectual or educational one. Intellectually and educationally there can be no question that labour welfare *is* social work. Historically, politically and economically one can see how the less stalwart labour welfare officer might find himself caught between the interests of his business employer and his employee clientele. The legal set-up of labour welfare in India would be much clearer and simpler and certainly lead to more effectiveness if the business employer were defined as a client too. The labour welfare officer would then become a government employee, responsible to government and to those whom the government means to serve, namely the employees, with the social work instruments which it puts in the hands of *its* agent, the labour welfare officer. At present it is easy for the labour welfare officers to be confused as to whose agent he is. This problem should be remedied by law. But law can only reflect the orientation of a society. If its orientation is clear, then the law will be clear. If it is not, if it is a mixture of antithetical interests, then the law will have the same character.

Derived from English and European sources, rather than American, labour welfare in India has not attained a true identity as yet. It is somehow almost characteristically American in that it protects the interests of business, yet it will not go the whole way, and in English or European fashion, it attempts to protect the interests of the employee. What it should do is to protect the interests of society (it is *social* work in that sense) and when it reaches that stage of development, perhaps it will be characteristically Indian, rather than any mixture of English, European and American. I believe that India could demonstrate through its labour welfare program what a tremendous instrument for social good Indian social work can be. In order to do so, however, it will have to clarify the labour welfare program, through legal means. It will have to overcome some of the cultural confusion which surrounded its origin, set aside influence from any other society and think in terms of the purpose which labour welfare can serve in India, and under Indian social and economic conditions. Payment of the labour welfare officer by the employer will then end, and instead payment by the government, whose agent the labour welfare officer is, will be instituted. This will give the labour welfare officer a clear mandate, it will establish the employer and the employee as his clients, and it will leave no doubt in anybody's mind as to whose agent he is. He will be the agent of society and he will therefore be, in the truest sense of the term, a social worker. Nowhere would this be more appropriate than in the socialistic society which is India.

In the realm of child welfare one meets with an extremely interesting phenomenon in India, namely the prevalence of institutional care. Is it not interesting that in a culture which stresses the closeness of family life, the principal social work provision for the care of dependent children should be a non-familial one? There are, of course, many reasons why the child care institution is predominant in Indian child welfare at present. There is the economic one, there is the lack of room in Indian households, and there is the lack of a tradition of foster home care. Nevertheless, the child care institution would seem to be a kind of cultural anomaly in India. In some respects, at least, it is non-Indian. I do not mean to suggest, even remotely, that some fine work is not being done in Indian child care institutions. I know that it is, and I admire profoundly the spirit with which I have seen Indian child care workers go about their work. But it has always seemed to me that what they are doing-is, in a certain sense at least, non-Indian. The institution with its necessarily highly formal character substitutes structure for relationship. It is true that certain social structures of the past, the caste system, for example, were characteristic of Indian life. But it is also true that much of modern Indian life is built upon propositions contrary to the principle of rigid social structure. It is built upon principles of fluidity and mobility, which are contrary to the formal character of the child care institution. In the better Indian institutions one finds a great deal of flexibility and freedom. But no institution can permit the kind of freedom which the Indian child in a family setting experiences. And no matter how interested or how supporting and understanding the worker in an institutional setting may be, he cannot provide that essential ingredient of Indian personality, namely, the closeness and security of Indian family life.

The Indian child care institution must be viewed, therefore, as a kind of cultural transposition. It is not indigenous in the sense that it reflects the character of modern Indian social life, as the *kibbutz*, for example, does in Israel. India is a nation of families, not of individuals or institutions, and one might therefore expect that Indian child care would partake of and reflect this very basic fact in Indian life. Perhaps Indian child care of the future will do so. Perhaps some of the present Indian child care institutions will become family institutions (as certain mental hospitals now being operated along experimental lines have in the West) and families rather than individuals will move into them. When the child is without a family, perhaps he will be absorbed into such a family. In time foster home care may flourish, as it has in other societies. In any case it would seem that the present picture of Indian child care, with the congregate institution predominant, will evolve in the future, and it is to be hoped that in doing so it will take on the character not of a cultural import, but rather one which is reflective of the very nature of Indian social life. Nearly all societies have cultural manifestations which are tangential rather than indigenous to the culture itself. They somehow remain outside the mainstream of societal life and they are quite like the tangent on a circle. The present-day Indian child care institution is like that. As it undergoes transformation, perhaps it will fit better within the circle of Indian culture.

This brings us to a consideration of several forms of social work which have become exceedingly prominent in Western cultures and to some consideration of the role they might play in India. I am referring to medical social work, child guidance, and family casework and counselling.* Of the three, medical social work has progressed farthest in India. There are few child guidance clinics and few family casework agencies. Undoubtedly the future will bring a considerable development in all these fields, and Indian social work education will have to modify itself to meet the needs of these fields as they develop. For the time being, however, one can see Indian medical social work as representing something in the - nature of universal social need in modern times and it is perhaps logical that it should develop fastest. Medical social work is always practised in relation to physical as well as social and psychological need, whereas as child guidance and family casework or counselling are concerned primarily with the social and psychological. In the long run however, child guidance and family social work have a significant contribution to make to the social welfare of a nation and it may be expected that these fields will develop as they have in the West. When they do so, however, they probably will have more of the character of importation than of indigenous cultural development. There is, of course, nothing wrong with importing something good. And child guidance and family social work may be looked upon as being good, in India, as well as in the West. They should be looked upon as products of cultural diffusion, however, accepted as such, adapted to Indian culture, differentiated in terms of the specific Indian content of practice in these fields as contrasted with the content of other cultures, and developed in accordance with Indian societal needs.

A word should be mentioned about the field of family planning which might be considered as a special form of medical social work. In the West family planning is not regarded as a field of social work. In India, however, it is an exceedingly important one. How can work in a field be regarded as social work in the one case but not in the other? The answer, it seems to me, is to be found in the *conditions under which practice takes place.* In the United States, family planning is long established, fully accepted, except by certain religious groups who officially oppose it, or at least oppose the use of certain methods, information is voluntarily sought and there is little sense of problem or social struggle in connection with it. Husbands and wives are likely to be of the same opinion, they are supported in their opinions by cultural sanction and the whole matter reduces itself to a non-problematical one. In India, on the other hand, family planning is distinctly a problematical area for many families. Husbands and wives are often not in accord with respect to it, there is doubt in their minds on many grounds, resistances are likely to be prominent in the situation and the skills of social worker as well as those of other professionals are needed. Family planning in India *is* social work and Indian schools of social work ought to give attention to the field and help to develop personnel for it, with certain knowledge that they are making an exceedingly important contribution in this way. The fact that it is not an important part of social work in the West should have nothing to do with the full development of this particular form of social work in India.

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*These particular forms of social service are chosen for collective treatment here, but my doing so does not imply that other forms of social work such as the correctional field, for example, are not important in India. Nor does it imply a greater concern on my part with what may be done under private sponsorship and on a limited scale, as compared with what may be done under government auspices and on the widest possible scale. Within the confines of an article one can deal only with a limited number of fields of social work.. At least fifty different forms of social work are distinguished by the United Nations.[15] Some are prominent in certain countries and others take on greater significance elsewhere. The fields chosen here permit us to observe certain similarities and contrasts.

[15] United Nations, *The Development of National Social Service Programs,* United Nations Publication, Sales No. 60, IV, 1.

Having considered very briefly some of the forms of social work with their likenesses and differences in two cultures, primarily, it is perhaps pertinent to ask now, what is the essence of social work? Can we arrive at an all-inclusive definition, one which would be valid in any time or place, one which transcends the bounds of culture? I do not know whether it is possible, or even desirable, to do so, and if given such a task I do not know exactly where I would choose to put my own emphasis. I am inclined to think that it would be, however, upon what I regard as the inherent problem of social living, upon the relation of man to man, which I think must always involve problem, no matter what cultural forms there may be for dealing with or affecting such problems. Social work has developed everywhere as a means of which man is aware of. Without a problem, perceived as such, there is no social work. social work comes into the scene. In simpler cultures, it does so unprofessionally and through behaviour reflective of societal mores. In complex cultures, the social problems which must be faced are more complex and an organized profession—a social institution called social work in most cultures of the world—is developed to deal with them in specialized ways. The ways of social work are many and various, and they probably always will be. This is because cultures, societies, are many and various, and what is a vast social problem in one society may not be any at all in another. But each society has its problems and its characteristic ways of handling them. Occasionally one society tries to handle its problems in another society's way, just as individuals do not always act in a manner that is true to themselves. In the long run, however, each society must ask itself, what is our characteristic way of handling this problem? Is it a good way and do we want to perpetuate it? Is it a way which requires specialized knowledge and understanding of particular social problems? If so, the next step is to entrust the problem to society's organized arm for meeting such problems, namely, social work. This means that social work appears in many different forms in many different places. It will always be an organized way of meeting problems of the particular culture, however, a self-chosen way, and a way that emphasizes well-being in man to man relationships. In other words, it will always be characteristically human.

Dr. Aptekar in his paper has made the following, among other, observations about the labour welfare officer in the Indian setting :

> "The legal set-up of labour welfare in India would be much clearer and simpler and certainly lead to more effectiveness if the business employer were defined as a client too. The labour welfare officer would then become a government employee, responsible to government and to those whom the government means to serve, namely, the employees, with the social work instruments which it puts in the hands of *its* agent, the labour welfare officer. At present it is easy for the labour welfare officer to be confused as to whose agent he is" and, later on, "derived from English and European sources, rather than American, labour welfare in India has not attained a true identity as yet. It is somehow almost characteristically American in that it protects the interests of business, yet it will not go the whole way, and in English or European fashion, it attempts to protect the interests of the employee. What it should do is to protect the interests of society (it is *social* work in that sense) and when it reaches that stage of development, perhaps it will be characteristically Indian, rather than any mixture of English, European and American."

The following comments relate to these observations:

Rarely does one read in social work literature such a penetrating and profound analysis of the nature and scope of social work itself in the cross-cultural context, presented with so clear an understanding and such deep sympathy. It is an illuminating and refreshing study, and the examination of the theme is of genuine interest and rare quality which can truly serve as a model to social work educators in India.

But there are some observations and generalisations which are basically questionable in the context of the present-day Indian situation and the field of professional social work as it has developed in the course of its first 25 years since 1936. The paradox of professional social work as seen by Dr. Aptekar is partly due to the fact that the birth and early growth of professional social work in India was not the product of indigenous inspiration.. It took place under the influence of an American missionary working in a settlement house in Bombay. This naturally involved two serious drawbacks, namely, that professional social work was primarily urban in its origin and content and foreign in its philosophy and technique. It can therefore hardly be in tune with the culture pattern.

Dr. Aptekar's analysis of labour welfare officers and medical social workers is enlightening, but his suggestion that the former should be paid by Government so as to make them social workers in the truest sense of the term is rather strange. But by the same token, all social workers will have to become government servants, if employers must also become clients of social workers. Even in private hospitals or welfare institutions there are employers as in industry or business. It is not the paymaster, but the role and status of the professional social worker which decide the nature of professional service whether in industry, hospitals, prisons or welfare institutions. There is no doubt that both labour welfare and personnel service are part of social work.

L. S. Kudchedkar,
. Lecturer in Personnel Development
and Management, Tata Institute of Social Sciences.

Dr. Aptekar's paper raises certain very significant points regarding the development and practice of labour welfare in Indian cultural complex. The diversity in orientation of various parties engaged in industrial activity towards this institution, the legal basis and the functions of the labour welfare officer are a product of interaction of peculiar Socio-cultural forces:

The orientation of the welfare practitioner is influenced and conditioned by the overall existing social policy. Welfare services in India are meant for traditionally underprivileged groups or for the handicapped individuals. Labour, as a class, suffers from various limitations. The rural background; the difficulty in adjustment to industrial urban life; the lack of education and organisation and the economic vulnerability are among its major maladies. Labour welfare in this contact has to be worker *centred* and labour oriented.

The creation of a legal halo round the institution of labour welfare has been considerably influenced by the Socio-cultural factors peculiar to India. The initiation of an organised legal base for labour welfare in India can be traced back to the year 1948 when the vastly amended Indian Factories Act was adopted. The importance given to labour welfare was in consonance with the crucial role that workers have to play in the economic and social advancement of a nation affluent with human resource.

In India a choice had to be made out of the two available alternatives for development of labour welfare, viz: (a) persuasive education of the industrialists, and (b) laying down a minimum standard of welfare services through legislation. Legislation is not an ideal means of introducing an innovation. But in the Indian context, when other areas are being planned and directed through state action, legislation in the field of labour welfare is in ideological conformity with the overall social policy.

The functions of the labour welfare officer have to be considered in the above perspective. The experimental nature of the legal innovation required the building up of a proper environment for its implementation.

The multi-functional nature of a welfare officers' job in industry—leading sometimes to conflicting demands—is not denied. Also the discharging of personnel and industrial relations functions by the labour welfare officer place him in an unenviable and delicate situation. But these difficulties are, in the nature of overhead costs of this ambitious experiment—more so in the initial stages. These demands will continue to be made in the present context of our industrial complex. If the stage of development of industry in the country is important, if the employers' attitude towards this institution is important and if the return that they would like to have for investing in employing a labour officer is important, we will have to sacrifice—at least for a transitory period—the clarity, precision and definiteness about the functions of a labour welfare officer. The socio-economic forces today demand that the welfare officer should be a multiple functionary. If the institution of labour welfare has to function within this social, economic and cultural framework, it will have to satisfy these demands.

O. P. Dingra,
Lecturer, Delhi School of Social Work.