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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Indigenizing Social Casework Principles in the Light of Thirukural

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ABSTRACT:

Social Casework is a micro practice in Social work Profession. The seven casework principles namely individualization, acceptance, self-determination, controlled emotional involvement, confidentiality, non-judgmental attitude and purposeful expression of feelings proposed by Felix Biestek is taken up to indigenize with Thirukural. Thirukural a sacred Tamil language literary classic is used for this purpose. Indigenization is a cross-cultural practice. This paper attempts in the line of Global definition of social work to indigenize the western concepts with the treasure trove of regional knowledge.

KEY WORDS: social work, casework, cultural competency, indigenous, social work practice, Thirukural

INTRODUCTION:

Social work bases its methodology on a systematic body of evidence informed knowledge derived from research and practice evaluation, including local and indigenous knowledge specific to its context (British Association of Social Workers, The Code of Ethics for Social Work, 2014). Moreover the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics (2008), Cultural Competence and Social Diversity 1.05 (b) states that Social workers should have a knowledge base of their clients' cultures and be able to demonstrate competence in the provision of services that are sensitive to clients' cultures and to differences among people and cultural groups.

The Global definition of social work approved by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) General Meeting and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) General Assembly in July 2014 (retrieved from <http://ifsw.org/get-involved/global-definition-of-social-work/> last accessed on November 24, 2014) defines 'Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and *indigenous knowledge*, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing' [our italics]. Further, the commentary notes of the definition added that the indigenous knowledge has been devalued, discounted and hegemonised by Western theories and knowledge. This work is an earnest attempt in the line of Global definition of social work to indigenize the western concepts with the treasure trove of regional knowledge.

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Nagpaul (1988) has urged that if social work has to move toward professionalism in any society and has to become effective, it must have indigenous foundations incorporating dominant cultural philosophies. Nimmagadda and Cowger (as cited in Gray *et al.*, 2008) used the term indigenization to 'reflect the process whereby a Western social work framework/or Western practice methodology is transplanted to another environment and applied in a different context by making modifications'. Resnick (1976) has referred indigenization as the 'process of relating social work function and education to the cultural, economic, political and social realities of a particular country'. For this purpose the case work principles proposed by Felix Biestek in his book *The Casework Relationship* (1957), Loyola University Press (as cited in Mathew, 1992) is linked with the ancient enviable collections of Thirukural. In trying to link the western concepts with Thirukural this article also echoes the views of Kuilema (2014) that international social work must respect national and indigenous identities while advocating for real and universal global human rights.

Social Case Work

Casework is the first of the six methods of Social Work. Social casework is a method of helping people individually through a one-to-one relationship (Mathew, 1992). Casework is an approach to working with individuals and families based on relationship and ethical principles such as unconditional regard for the user. Casework originated as a method in the work of the Charity Organization Society in the last quarter of the 19th and early 20th centuries in which the social worker attempted to familiarize themselves with all aspects of family's life and to build a supportive relationship that offered guidance and, occasionally, some material assistance (Pierson and Thomas, 2011).

Thirukural

'Thirukural' a sacred literary text is extolled as Tamil Veda and it is more than 2000 years old. Thirukural consists of three major sections: Arathuppal (of Dharma), Porutpal (of Wealth) and Inbathupal (of Love/desire) which have 38, 70 and 25 chapters punctuating to 133 chapters and each chapter have 10 couplets. Thirukural showers the worldly knowledge hardly in seven cirs (words) in the form of Kural *venba* (One of the basic meters of Tamil prosody, Kural *venba* has an internal rhythm and cadence) and has been translated into many languages. G.U.Pope translated Thirukural in English in 1886, following it many authors translated. Albert Schweitzer asserted, 'there hardly exists in the literature of the world, a collection of maxims in which we find so much of lofty wisdom' (as cited in Zvelebil, 1973).

Principles of Social Casework and Thirukural

1. Individualization

According to Friedlander (as cited in Bhattacharya, 2008), 'the principles of individualization stipulates that the case worker tries to relate and help each client as an individual person in a situation involving a unique combination of biological and social forces. In individualization individuals are to be treated not just as a human being but as a human being with his personal differences'. In addition Mathew (1992) outlined that the ability to see the client as a distinct individual, by being perceptively observant of the distinctive features with a visible readiness to respond to his particular needs is essential in individualization. The chapter forty eight *knowledge of power* and chapter fifty eight *benignity* can be associated with the principle of individualization.

2. Acceptance

Acceptance is the recognition of a person's positive worth as a human being without necessarily condoning the person's actions. In social work acceptance is considered as one of the fundamental elements in the helping relationship (Barker, 2003). Acceptance of the client is accepting with all her/ his good and bad qualities, strengths and weaknesses, regardless of his behavior (Mathew, 1992). Valluvar says to neglect hospitality is the poverty of poverty and to bear with the ignorant is the might of might (couplet 153), furthermore he urges to consider a man's good qualities, as well as his faults, and then judge his character by that which prevails (couplet 504).

3. Non-judgmental attitude

A non-judgmental attitude implies refusal to express disapproval of the person, to insinuate blame through arguments of cause-effect connection, or to pass judgment indicating that the person deserves to be punished for her/ his behavior (Mathew, 1992).

Valluvar warns that no person should be scorned for their size because the world has those who resemble the linchpin of the big rolling car (couplet 667). He drives home his point by comparing the small sized man to that of linchpin. Linchpin however small and insignificant in size the rolling car cannot move safely without it. A society comprises of individuals and a social worker cares for each individual. Chapter twelve 'impartiality' also talks about the non-judgmental attitude a case worker should possess, for example to incline to neither side, but to rest impartial as the even-fixed scale is the ornament of the wise (couplet, 118). We may read here as the least required quality of a social worker. He also adds that equity which consists in acting with equal regard to each of the three divisions of men viz, enemies, strangers and friends is a pre-eminent virtue (couplet 111).

4. Self-determination

Davies (2000) asserted that self-determination is the ethical principle that persons should be permitted, enabled and encouraged to make their own informed decisions about the course of their lives (as cited in Beckett and Maynard, 2005). Social responsibility, emotional adjustment and personal development are possible only when the person exercise his freedom, choice and decision (Battacharya, 2008). Valluvar emphasizes the self-determination in chapter thirty six, *knowledge of the truth*. Also the chapter forty seven *acting after due consideration* discusses elaborately on the principle of self-determination

- He will perish who does what is not fit to do; and he also will perish who does not do what it is fit to do (couplet 466)
- Consider, and then undertake a matter; after having undertaken without due prior consideration, to say "We will consider," is folly (couplet 467)

5. Confidentiality

Confidentiality is the principle of ethics according to which the social worker or other professional may not disclose information about a client without the client's consent. This information includes the identity of the client, content of overt verbalizations, professional opinions about the client, and material from records (Barker, 2003). Valluvar affirms that the respectability of conduct is the seed of virtue and impropriety will ever cause sorrow (couplet 138). The respectability of conduct of the person will definitely lead to the principle of confidentiality.

The couplets emphasized in Chapter nineteen *not backbiting* and Chapter twenty one *dread of evil deeds* is akin to confidentiality in case work.

- His ruin virtue plots who plans, the ruin of another man's (couplet 204)
- The character of the faults of that man who publishes the faults of others will be sought out and published (couplet 186). Couplets 184 and 188 also establish the vitality of confidentiality.

6. Controlled emotional involvement

Emotions of any person are expressed by their verbal and non-verbal cues. Valluvar in chapter twenty *not speaking of profitless word* explains that the words devoid of profit or pleasure which a man speaks, being inconsistent with virtue will remove him from goodness (couplet 194). Chapter thirteen, the *possession of self-restraint* says that who controls himself without diverging from his domestic state his greatness will be loftier than a mountain (couplet 124).

Subsequently the chapter seventy one *the knowledge of indications* perceptibly explains the principle of emotional involvement

- He is to be esteemed a god who is able to ascertain without a doubt what is within one's mind (couplet 702).
- As the mirror reflects what is near so does the face show what is uppermost in the mind (couplet 706)

7. Purposeful expression of feeling

A better communication is a prerequisite for purposeful expression of social worker's feelings. It is dealt in chapter forty two. The power of speech is explained in chapter sixty five. Thiruvalluvar cautions that if a man's speech be productive of a single evil, all the good done by him will be turned into evil (couplet 128). Additionally, Humility and sweetness of speech are the ornaments of man and all others are not ornaments (couplet 95). Valluvar says who can speak on various subjects in their proper order and in a pleasing manner, the world would readily accept that person (couplet 648) and he directs to deliver the speech, after assuring ourselves that no counter speech can defeat our own (couplet 645).

CONCLUSION:

Gray (as cited in Payne and Askeland, 2008) argues that indigenization is a cross-cultural practice. This article has embraced only the peripheries of the indigenous knowledge of the Tamil literature by linking the social casework principles with Thirukural. The long awaited National Council of Professional Social Work in India Bill (1993) Chapter IV 'Functions of the Council' Section 10.10 advocates the *promotion of the production of indigenous literature in all the official languages of the country*. The authors firmly believe that this initiative will be the first step towards appreciating the dream of Global definition of social work in indigenizing the western theories with respect to that of native knowledge.

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