

Review of: "A Deeper Look at the Origin and Evolution of the Social Work Profession"

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The author provides a refreshing and alternative view regarding the history and evolution of social work. The article challenges the dominant narrative of the Western and European origins of social work practice and of social work education, situating some of social work's beginnings in the East, particularly in India. However, this is covered largely within the realm of poor-relief and charitable programmes, which history shows is a double-edged sword, with some of these efforts being directed at social control of the poor and protection of the interests of the middle and upper classes of societies. While these poor-relief and charitable programmes are important, they do not, in themselves, constitute formal social work. Apart from a reference to the concept "dharma", the author does not acknowledge the rich philosophical base of Indian thought that bears direct relevance for professional social work.

There is much in Indian and Buddhist philosophies that relates to various theoretical underpinnings of social work. There is, in contemporary social work, a predominance of Western and Eurocentric bias on account of colonial and neo-colonial influences. The normalising power of this is such that scholars of the East are either not cognisant of the socio-political power of their philosophies or they seem to not connect the dots between Eastern philosophies and social work theories. For example, recent systems and eco-systems theories are widely applied in social work, attributed to Ludwig von Bertalanffy and Urie Bronfenbrenner. Yet, many Indigenous knowledges, and philosophies of extant spiritualities emphasise interconnectedness, intergenerational equity, and shared responsibility for the planet. The Buddha, who used the concept of inter-dependent co-arising - reflecting the complex chains of inter-dependencies in and across all phenomena - is perhaps the world's most brilliant systems theorist. The Buddha told his followers, "When you look at a leaf or a raindrop, meditate on all the conditions, near and distant, that have contributed to the presence of that leaf and raindrop. Know that the world is woven of inter-connected threads. This is, because that is. This is not, because that is not" (cited in Nhat Hanh, 2018, p. 409)*, reflecting the transcendent excellence of systems thinking and liberation theology. Yet, on account of the presumed superiority of Western knowledges and Eurocentric hegemony in social work practice, education, and research, Indigenous knowledges, like this, are marginalised or totally overlooked.

Similarly, the very art of living, e.g., shifting from a position of duality to non-duality; mindfulness; living not for the fruits of action, but for action alone ... and the theoretical foundations of social work, can be found in ancient Indian scriptures, such as the Bhagavad Gita. The lessons of the Bhagavad Gita are exemplars of modern-day rational-emotive behaviour therapy.

The Indian and Buddhist imperative to "know thyself and be free" is not an ethereal end in itself, as exemplified in Arjuna's

struggles towards dedicated action in the Bhagavad Gita, and in the life of the Buddha. The Buddha used self-enlightenment to educate about witnessing the existence of suffering; recognizing the causes of suffering; having the goal of ending suffering; and ways of ending suffering (Nhat Hanh, 2018). The prominent late Vietnamese monk and social activist, Thich Nhat Hanh, asserts that if those causes rest in socio-economic and political structures that are violating, then our efforts at ending suffering must be located there (Nhat Hanh, 1993), thus supporting social activism, advocacy, and lobbying initiatives. The Buddha was a pacifist and a social activist, and he appealed to kings, politicians, religious leaders, and villagers to adopt values and practices that engender peace, non-violence, non-discrimination, equality, and respect for all life forms (Nhat Hanh, 2018). These underscore modern anti-oppressive theory and emancipatory praxis in social work.

*Nhat Hanh T. (2018) *Old path white clouds: Walking in the footsteps of the Buddha* Full Circle Books.