

Vimla Nadkarni: Compassionate and Assertive Doyen of Social Work

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Professor Emeritus Professor Vimla V. Nadkarni, former President of the International Association of Schools of Social Work, (2012-2016), former Dean & Retired Professor, School of Social Work, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), is no more. She breathed her last in the early hours of the 20th of November 2021. More recently, in 2019, the NAPSWI Lifetime Achievement Award for protection and promotion of the rights and interests of the social work profession and its members at different levels was conferred by the National Association of Professional Social Workers in India, New Delhi. Vimla was a former Fulbright Fellow, East-West Centre Population Seminar to attend the Training Workshop on Strengthening Multi-Sectoral Responses to HIV/AIDS. Vimla delivered many important lectures such as the 2nd Annual International Hokenstad Lecturer, Council for Social Work Education, USA, and the Gauri Ranee Banerjee Birth Centenary Celebrations Oration, 34th Annual Conference of the Indian Society for Professional Social Work (IPSW), Central University of Rajasthan, Kishangarh in February 2016. In the year 2016, Vimla contested for the second time to become President of the International Association of Schools of Social Work.

As a staunch supporter of her candidacy, I addressed the fraternity of social work. I highlighted her achievements that I reflected upon in her first term and her exuberant enthusiasm, warm and friendly approach, adaptability, and ability to keep a south-south and north-south dialogue in international social work consistently in the correct pitch.

In Vimla, I saw a clear leader who practiced transparency and integrity and had the wisdom that has endeared her to southern and northern social work academics. She had a pragmatic vision, as evidenced by her statement seeking for re-election that I reviewed. In the world with the current refugee- crisis and social work agenda in human rights- her indication that Schools of Social Work envision work more closely with UN agencies was of paramount significance. I am sure my Asian and Pacific

nations and South Africa powerfully wrote to tell the world that we would support Vimla see through a second term

Personal Biography

Vimla Nadkarni was born in 1948 and raised in the heart of urbanised South Mumbai (formerly Bombay), India, in a large middle-class family. Her family, which included nine sisters and two brothers, was originally from Sindh (now in Pakistan); her father, Mohanlal Lala, was a gold-medallist engineer who created India's first branded ice cream, "Joy." In the family, the values of girl-child education and respect for the impoverished were prioritised. Vimla married Vithal, a writer and journalist. Ambika, their daughter, is a scientist who lives and works in Berkeley, California (USA).

During her retirement years, Vimla Nadkarni continued to live in Mumbai, spending time at the grassroots and passionately contributing to social work policy and development. I have seen her immense involvement with the social work council in recent years and guiding all leading professors in India around social work education.

Professional Biography

In 1969, Vimla earned a bachelor's degree in Psychology with Honours from St. Xavier's College, Bombay University. She then pursued a law degree after becoming aware of the inequalities that many vulnerable people in the community face. In 1976, she earned a Bachelor of Law (General) degree from Kishinchand Chellaram College of Bombay University. She received her PhD in Social Work in 1996 from TISS.

Vimla began practising social work in 1971. She worked as a medical social worker at King Edward Memorial Hospital from 1971 to 1976. She was a member of a multidisciplinary team working on epilepsy research sponsored by the USA PL 480 Funds, among other things. She began working in the Department of Social Work at the Orthopaedic Centre in 1974, where she established a school for the children on the ward

(with the support of the Rotary club). She was recognised for reactivating a group of palliative care patients with paraplegia who had been relegated to a remote corner of the ward and were largely ignored. She also worked in the KEM hospital's Skin and Burns Unit, where she mobilised community resources and established a regular equipment system such as wheelchairs and callipers. In addition, she supervised fieldwork for social work students at TISS and the College of Social Work in Mumbai.

Vimla started teaching in 1976 as a Lecturer at Nirmala Niketan (NN), Mumbai University's College of Social Work and then moved to TISS in 1985 as a Reader in the Department of Medical and Psychiatric Social Work. She was the Department's Head from 1987 to 2006. She was named the first Dean of the newly restructured School of Social Work in 2006, and she retired as a Senior Professor in 2013.

Vimla stated that feminist theories from the 1970s influenced her. As a medical social worker, she became aware of the need to work on environmental issues that affected the onset and spread of diseases such as tuberculosis, which was common among KEM Hospital patients. Vimla's perspective shifted from individual problem-solving at micro-level social work to developmental and macro-level social work and then to human rights and social justice. Vimla is a firm believer in the symbiotic relationship between teaching, practise, and research, arguing that these three components of social work education make the educator effective. Her approach to social work education was to promote a participatory rather than a didactic lecture-based teaching method.

International level

Vimla's leadership was motivated by her deep and sincere desire to guide the IASSW towards becoming an effective organisation in promoting academic excellence. Her mission was to advocate for improved academic training in social work education worldwide, with a particular emphasis on developing countries. She was invited to speak on various topics, including social work theory and diversity, in countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia, and

Malaysia. She presented strategies to strengthen social work education in Cambodia in front of ministry of education officials. UNICEF and the Bhutan Institute of Education invited her to educate faculty, NGO representatives, and community volunteers about social work education and its potential development in Bhutan. Vimla's journey into the IASSW was recognised in 2008 when she was elected as Member at Large for four years in the organisation.

Vimla was instrumental in promoting and strengthening IASSW's role in UN bodies. She was able to negotiate a three-year Memorandum of Understanding with UNAIDS for joint projects. This initiative resulted in the organisation of two conferences and the publication of a book in 2017 titled *Getting to Zero: Global Social Work Responds to HIV*. Her leadership also facilitated the establishment of Regional Resource Centres within countries that could serve as regional hubs for training and mentoring countries in need of social work education development and strengthening.

A Few Salutations

After meeting Professor Nadkarni in person, I was deeply impressed by her social work research at the TISS and invited her to teach the master students in social work at the University of Antwerp, Belgium. Her lectures, her experience with all the facets of social work and, above all, her love for the profession of social work were a revelation for many audiences in Belgium. As (past) president of the IASSW, Prof Nadkarni has demonstrated an extremely strong global leadership. The IASSW became an important international player when social problems are at stake, as well in cosmopolitan and rural areas of the world, as well as ongoing problems as in moments of crisis and catastrophe. Vimla Nadkarni's greatest achievement during her presidency is that an open culture of debate is fully realized, the pillar of

further professionalization of social work in the 21st century.

Herman Meulemans, Emeritus Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Antwerp, Belgium

During her term Vimla Nadkarni served as the President, IASSW, we have noted practical restructuring of the various committees under which the IASSW executed its functions. These have been realized through a democratic process that is inclusive of all IASSW regions. The presence of IASSW has continued to be felt in all IASSW regions as well as in the United Nations thus ensuring that the voice of social work is heard at the regional and global levels. These, amongst many other notable achievements, have been done through teamwork under the leadership of Vimla Nadkarni'.

Gidraph G. Wairire, Associate Professor, University of Nairobi, Kenya, and Vice President-IASSW, President-ASSWA

I had the privilege of engaging with her and paying tribute in the written media to Prof Nadkarni's leadership in social work education. The tribute, titled 'Be fearless and forthright, and rule the world' was published in the Post Newspaper in SA on 23 August 2017, during Women's Month, as part of my media opinion pieces and acknowledgements to women who have made notable contributions to society.

'Prof Nadkarni has demonstrated a passion for realising the development and upliftment of the social work profession. Her presentation at the ASASWEI 2017 Conference on the decolonisation of social work education contributed immensely to discussions and advancements on detaching from the hegemony of colonial and western knowledge systems in the Global South, which was particularly prevalent in South African education at the time. These discussions continued during our meetings in Mumbai, India in September 2019'

Varoshini Nadesan, PhD, Faculty of Humanities, Department of Social Work, University of Johannesburg, South Africa; Past Treasurer and current President of the Association of South African Social Work Education Institutions (ASASWEI)

References

Profile of Vimla Nadkarni for IASSW website compiled by, Nadesan, Varoshini PhD, Lecturer: Department of Social Work at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa, President of the Association of South African Social Work Education Institutions (ASASWEI). These are from notes of November 2019.

My personal Communications 2016 with Vimla didi and my Campaign notes for her second term when I was in the coordinating position at Brisbane campus of Australian Catholic University, social work programme.