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BOOK REVIEW COMMENTARY OPEN ACCESS

Social Casework: The Indian Paradigm and Practice

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Abstract

This commentary builds on the discussion started in Pulla, Das, and Nikku's 2022 essay "Indigenous or Blended Model for South Asian Social Work?", which questioned the dominance of Western social work paradigms in South Asia. The authors emphasised the limitations of these models in dealing with the region's diverse socio-cultural realities, arguing for a hybrid approach that combines Indigenous epistemologies with global views. Building on this foundation, the current study examines Social Casework: The Indian Paradigm and Practice, a seminal contribution to the developing *Bharatiyakaran* movement—the Indianisation of social work. This emergent paradigm highlights a decolonised, culturally embedded practice model based on Indian philosophical, spiritual, and ethical traditions, such as seva (selfless service), danam (altruism), vasudhaiva kutumbakam (universal family), and concepts from the Bhagavad Gita.

The book entitled *Social Casework: The Indian Paradigm and Practice* by Ranjana Sehgal and published by Today & Tomorrow's Printers and Publishers, New Delhi, documents efforts to create a uniquely Indian casework technique, providing empirical findings, theoretical critiques, and culturally appropriate frameworks from throughout the subcontinent. The authors in this volume delve into classical Indian notions such as *karma, ashramas, purusharthas, syadvada*, and Ayurvedic principles, offering them as the foundation for a holistic and context-sensitive approach to casework. This review essay emphasises the urgent need to transcend Western individualistic ideas and interact with the spiritual and community ethos inherent in Indian culture. This paradigm shift not only enhances the cultural relevance and effectiveness of social work practice in India, but it also contributes to larger worldwide efforts to diversify and decolonise professional knowledge systems. By integrating with Indian traditions, this movement encourages practitioners to reframe social work as both a professional discipline and a spiritual practice, grounded in collective well-being and ethical responsibility.

Keywords: Western Paradigm of Casework; Indian Casework; *Bharatiyakaran* of Social Work; Blended Social Work

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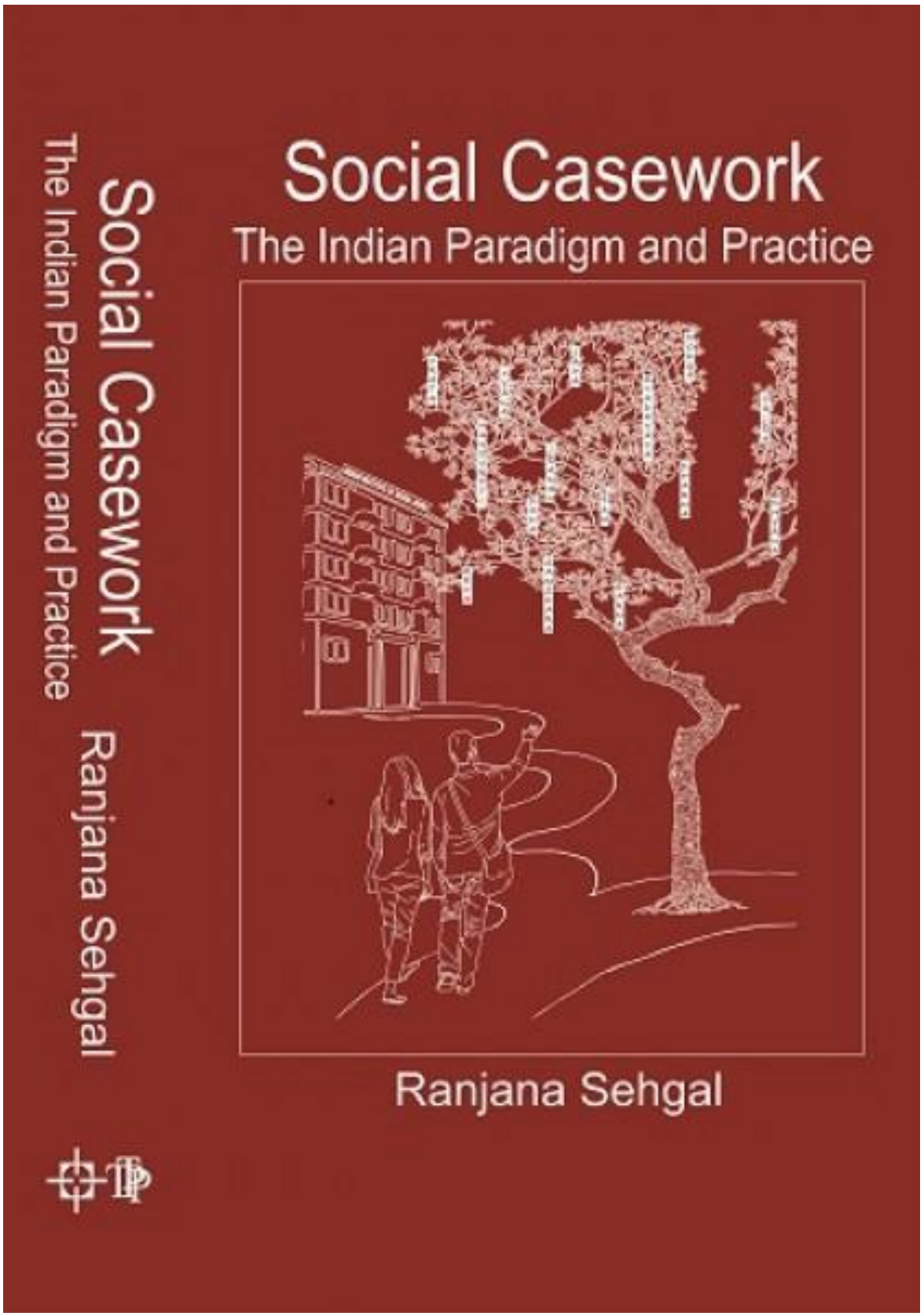
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Introduction

In 2022, this Journal carried an article titled *Indigenous or Blended Model for South Asian Social Work?* that the first author wrote along with two other subcontinental social work educators, Tulshi Kumar Das, and Bala Raju Nikku. We explored the tension between Western-influenced social work education and the need for culturally grounded practices in South Asia.

Our review indicated that Western models have long dominated social work education and practice in South Asia, a dominance that emerged largely through early, uncritical adoption supported by American aid. This unreflective transplantation has not resonated with the region's intricate socio-cultural landscape, as these frameworks often overlook the nuanced social issues intrinsic to local contexts. Our interviews and studies involving stakeholders from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives revealed a collective call for curricula authentically incorporating native knowledge and practices. Despite discussions of decolonisation and Indianisation, actual curricular adaptations remained sporadic and limited. As authors, we advocated for a blended approach that synthesises the salient global insights with localised epistemologies, exemplified by Indigenous systems (Pulla et al., 2022).

The Concept of *Bharatiyakaran* of Social Work refers to the process of reorienting social work education and practice in India to align with its native philosophies, values, and methodologies. This approach seeks to move away from the predominantly Western-centric frameworks that have historically influenced the discipline, aiming instead to develop a model that is more attuned to India's unique cultural and societal contexts. This movement envisages broader efforts to decolonise education and professional practices, challenging the dominance of Western epistemologies and advocating for the inclusion of diverse, native perspectives. The Indian social work, uncritical adoption of Western, individualistic, and universalist models, obscured the complex socio-cultural and spiritual realities of local communities, and has not changed much in the last hundred-odd years of teaching social work in the Indian soil. Over time, persistent critiques have underscored a disconnect between several of the imported paradigms and the lived experiences of Indian society, prompting calls for a transformative reorientation. This emerging paradigm, encapsulated in the concept of *Bharatiyakaran* integrates the interrelated principles of Indianisation, Indigenisation, and decolonisation.

Bharatiyakaran advocates for adapting social work practices to tune into the spiritual values rooted in traditions such as the Vedas, Upanishads, and the Bhagavad Gita. In doing so, it offers a counter-narrative to the technical and individual-centred approaches that have long characterised the discipline.

Indigenous Frameworks

The push for indigenous frameworks has gained further momentum amid broader socio-political shifts, including the rise of nationalist discourse, which has reinvigorated debates about decolonisation across academic and professional spheres. Although resistance remains within established circles—where attachment to traditional Western paradigms is reinforced by institutional privileges—the limitations of these models in addressing local challenges are undoubtedly increasingly surfacing. This evolving critical stance has opened a strategic opportunity to recalibrate the epistemological foundations of social work education and practice in India.

Social Casework: The Indian Paradigm and Practice is a book of great labour dedicated to the very concept of working with individuals in need, in a case-management framework that we have inherited from the Western world.

Western Model: Challenges in India

The challenge for social work students in India is how to connect with India's philosophy and cultural heritage, and for social work educators is how to make social work education more meaningful and relevant for them. As stated above, the Western model of social work is being

challenged through a movement of *Bhartiyakaran* (Kumar, 2019), which has gained momentum owing to the concerted efforts of social work educators and practitioners across the country. *Bhartiya Samaj Karya Parishad'*, the popular face of this movement, has been tasked with preparing teaching materials in India based on local experiences and conditions. We believe that the resurgence of the current interest in who we are and from where we come to have lasting beneficial effects on social work's status and role as an organised profession. As a nation, we are well poised, both in terms of what we can offer to the conversation on *dharma* and development, and what the world can gain from our vast and tremendous diversity, culture, and traditions. In the field of social work, it is a watershed moment in the journey of traditionally trained social workers for the resurgence of education from a *Bhartiya drishti*.

Questions abound! How relevant is the Western model in contemporary Indian society? What should be fundamental of how the social work methodology is taught and practised in India? What are the Indian approaches that can be used in helping and problem-solving? How can we integrate them into social casework practice and education? What are the perceived strengths and gaps in the existing social work curricula about innovative Indian social work practice models? What opportunities and challenges do the current curriculum present for an Indian model to be constructed and delivered to social work students? To what extent will practitioners connect with and appreciate the Indian social work models? *Social Casework: The Indian Paradigm and Practice* delves deeply and comprehensively into the integration of Indian cultural, spiritual, and philosophical traditions into social casework. This review explores several subtle Indian principles and how they can be used to promote social casework while remaining culturally and spiritually respectful.

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam The notion of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* emphasises everyone's interconnectedness while advocating for a global view of compassion and inclusivity. This principle, as conceptualised by ancient Indian texts, is extremely important in social casework. It instils in them a sense of belonging and collective responsibility, eliciting an empathetic desire to discover common answers. The ethos can help the social worker create interventions that bring together support networks from both the family and the community, so that care and empowerment become a shared experience for the client.

Concept of Danam: Altruistic Giving

In Indian philosophy, *danam* is elevated to a spiritual practice that embodies the art of giving selflessly. *Danam* has several levels, including *bhoutikdan*, or material giving; *vidyadan*, or knowledge sharing; and *abhayadan*, or fearlessness. These are not charitable deeds but examples of mutual progress and ethical behaviour. Workers can include *danam* into their practice by promoting resource-sharing practices, creating safe spaces for vulnerable people, and encouraging a culture of mutual support and gratitude at the community level.

Seva: Service as Sadhana for Moksha

Seva, or selfless service, is profoundly rooted in Indian traditions as a spiritual practice for reaching *moksha* (freedom). Unlike transactional generosity, *seva* emphasises dedication without regard for benefits. Social workers who represent this idea approach their profession with humility, compassion, and genuine concern for their clients' well-being. This technique promotes true relationships and transformative outcomes, making clients feel deeply loved and understood.

***Rtam*: Cosmic Order**

Rtam transmits universal truth and order, and it guides an individual's actions in accordance with cosmic harmony. It consequently serves as the foundation for ethical decision-making and comprehensive issue solutions in social casework. With the introduction of *rtam*, the practitioner will be able to design interventions that ensure human well-being as well as societal and environmental sustainability, while striking a balance between immediate needs and long-term goals.

Bhartiya Drishti: The Indian Perspective

The *Bhartiya drishti*, or Indian perspective, includes cultural, spiritual, and ethical components in case work. The method recognises the importance of understanding Indigenous culture, the complexities of traditional family life, and, most importantly, the spiritual outlook while interacting with clients to assist them overcome adversity. Engaging a *Bhartiya drishti* will allow for interventions that respect their customers' realities while also nurturing them holistically.

Pancha Rinas, Pancha Yagnas

The ideals of *Pancha Rinas* (debts owing to deities, ancestors, humans, guests, and nature) and *Pancha Yagnas* (offerings to divine beings, ancestors, elements, living creatures, and humanity) reflect the Indian ethos of appreciation and accountability. Social workers can include these ideas in interventions by encouraging clients to engage in sustainable living, community service, and acts of appreciation consistent with their commitments, generating a feeling of purpose and interconnectedness.

Purusharthas: Four Goals in Life

The *purusharthas* include four major life pursuits: *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *moksha*. This framework serves as a road map for living a fulfilling and balanced life. Social caseworkers can help their clients understand and balance various objectives to promote holistic development, ethical living, and meaningful involvement with life's difficulties and possibilities.

Ashramas: Four Stages of Life.

The Vedic ashramas describe four stages of life: *brahmacharya* (student), *grihastha* (family), *vanaprastha* (retirement), and *sannyasa* (renunciation). If social work interventions are matched with these periods of life, the practitioner will be able to give age-appropriate and context-sensitive interventions to clients going through life transitions, as well as meet their needs and ambitions with sensitivity and foresight.

Karma & Rebirth

The principle of *karma* elaborates on the interdependence of actions and consequences, which extends to rebirth. This cycle philosophy assists casework clients in behaving ethically while being resilient and attentive to their activities. A practitioner might engage a client in pursuits that result in personal and collective well-being by emphasising the long-term impact of their decisions.

Shodasha Samkaras: Rituals of Passage

The 16 *samskaras* outlined in the Vedas provide a systematised manner of life that promotes progress and works with the four *purusharthas*: *dharma*, *artha, kama*, and *moksha*. A social worker can also use the rituals to keep track of the client's history and psychosocial progress. This way, the client will not feel disconnected from their roots when coping with current challenges.

Ancient Indian Practices for Helping Professions

Traditional Indian assistance is founded on the philosophical concepts of relatedness, community, and spirituality. The rituals of community living, resource sharing, and spiritual mentoring can teach us a lot about developing long-term, culturally relevant solutions. These activities remind us that old wisdom can help solve modern-day social challenges.

Indian Self-Concept

Indian philosophy incorporates material, social, and spiritual components into the self-concept, balancing individual goals with collective obligations. This comprehensive framework enables social workers to help clients match their aspirations with societal ideals, developing a feeling of identity and purpose beyond monetary concerns.

Principles of the Bhagavad Gita

Lord Krishna's counsel to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita provides timeless guidance for social casework. The ideas of empathy, ethical action, self-awareness, and empowerment that it addresses are particularly relevant to client-centred practices and inspire practitioners to

handle client difficulties in a compassionate, duty-bound, and solution-focused manner.

***Syadvada*: A Pluralistic Perspective**

The Jain concept of *syadvada* promotes comprehending diverse views, empathy, and nonjudgmental interventions. This pluralistic approach is consistent with the underlying objectives of social casework, allowing practitioners to accept varied client experiences while fostering inclusive solutions.

Indian Social Casework Skills

The most common and traditional strategies in Indian casework are *shravana* (listening), *manana* (reflection), *aaptha samalochana* (counselling), *prashna* (enquiry), and *pariprashna* (depth questioning). Culturally sensitive talents improve customer engagement, build trust, and promote understanding.

Indian philosophy gives the ideal instruments for *mouna* (quiet), *tarka* (reasoning), and *samalochana* (constructive conversation). These approaches enable the development of mindfulness, ethical decision-making, and clarity of thought to the point where practice is enriched with deep-rootedness and authenticity.

Yoga & Yajña Therapy

Each yoga practice, including *asanas* and *pranayama*, improves emotional stability, bodily health, and mental clarity. Yajña therapy aligns group healing with physical, subtle, and causal bodies, seamlessly integrating into group casework principles. This highlights the importance of comprehensive approaches in promoting individual and group well-being.

Panchmahabhootas and Tri-Doshas

The balance of the five elements (earth, water, fire, air, and space) and three doshas (*vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha*) is the cornerstone of Indian health systems. Social workers can apply these ideas to their work to address the physical, emotional, and environmental aspects of well-being, fostering a harmonious and sustainable living.

Integrating Indian principles into social casework will deepen the discipline's cultural and spiritual expertise. Guiding concepts such as *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, *seva*, *danam*, and *rtam* can be used to create interventions relevant to clients' lived experiences. This culturally sensitive approach would ensure a healthy balance between ancient wisdom and modern approaches, catering to India's population's specific and diverse requirements while paving the road for global relevance. Much of what we have inherited from the past will have to be contextualised to the present for a promising future, with a review of current areas of activity of the professional social caseworker in India. This book's Indigenous and innovative models provide only a few examples of numerous practices and approaches identified and analysed to build an Indian social casework theory and practice paradigm. The analysis and presentation reveal features of the different approaches, institutions, and practices, their current application, and their strengths and weaknesses.

Summaries of Each Book Chapter

Each chapter is summarised in a few lines.

Foundations of Social Casework (Chapter 1 by Ranjana Sehgal): Here, Sehgal lays the basis by introducing the conceptual frameworks for social work and casework. She investigates the fundamental assumptions, dimensions, and qualities from both an Indian and Western perspective. This dual analysis lays the groundwork for later chapters, which advocate for an Indian perspective in practice.

Western Theoretical Perspectives (Chapter 2 by D. P. Singh): In this chapter, Singh briefly summarises key Western social casework ideas and models. His presentation offers readers the fundamental knowledge required to comprehend the prevailing ideologies that have historically formed the field.

Challenges of Using Western Models (Chapter 3 by Ranjana Sehgal): Building on the foundational works, Sehgal questions the suitability of Western models in the Indian setting. She proposes an alternative paradigm incorporating Indian values, ethos, and philosophies into social

casework, ensuring culturally acceptable and effective interventions in India.

In Chapter 4, Ranjana Sehgal discusses the practical application of social casework principles in India. She emphasises the significance of contextual understanding, suggesting that effective practice must be adjusted to the socio-cultural reality of Indian people.

In Chapter 5, V. Sayee Kumar analyses the Indian model of social casework and provides detailed criticism of its virtues and flaws. This sparks a more in-depth conversation about how Indigenous viewpoints might influence and enhance practice.

Psychosocial Evaluation and Traditional Practices (Chapter 6 by Mohan Kunder and Laxmi):Here, the authors explore the psychosocial components of evaluation and therapy in Indian casework. They emphasise crucial process features and attract attention to traditional cultural practices that can help modern solutions.

Developing Indigenous Social Casework Skills (Chapter 7 by Mohan Kunder and Laxmi): Continuing their exploration, Kunder and Laxmi talk about how social casework abilities might be reimagined through the perspective of Indian philosophy. Their argument is focused on establishing an Indigenous epistemic framework for the profession.

Bhagavad Gita and Social Casework (Chapter 8 by Late Naveen Chandra Bhatt):In a highly personal and moving chapter, Bhatt—whose services are being recognised posthumously—examines the Bhagavad Gita's relation to social casework. His comments underline the movement towards *Bhartiyakaran* (Indianisation) and serve as a lasting testament to his dedication to infusing social work with Indian philosophy.

Buddhism and Casework (Chapter 9 by S. R. Billore and Ranjana Sehgal): Here, Billore and Sehgal analyse Buddha's teachings and compare them to traditional social casework. They examine how the eight-fold path offers valuable insights into resolving human suffering in a therapeutic setting.

Empirical Insights into the Indian Model (Chapter 10 by V. Sayee Kumar): In his PhD research, Kumar proposes an Indian casework model based on encounters with professional social workers. His findings highlight the practical value of Indigenous viewpoints in developing good casework.

Yagna Therapy in Social Casework (Chapter 11 by Digvijoy Phukan, Archana Kaushik, and Bhumesh): This chapter introduces *yagna* therapy, which is based on ancient ritual practices, as a therapeutic method. The authors examine its scientific foundations and psychological benefits, arguing for its incorporation into contemporary casework approaches.

Ancient Indian Knowledge and Therapeutics (Chapter 12 by Shankar Das and Shveta Sharma): Here, Das and Sharma advocate for incorporating *yogic* and meditational practices into practitioner training and intervention procedures, highlighting their therapeutic potential.

In Chapter 13, Gangabhushan M. Molankal discusses the transformative power of *Swadhyaya* (self-study), an Indigenous practice that promotes personal and professional development in social work.

Chapter 14 by Snehlata Tandon explores the use of Indigenous social casework methods in correctional settings in India. By sharing case studies and success stories, she demonstrates how culturally based techniques can better address the complexity of rehabilitation work.

In Chapter 15, Sagarika Saha explores the relationship between traditional social casework procedures and local Bengali traditions. Her presentation focuses on how cultural legacy might be used to add depth and contextual relevance to modern practice.

Integrating Ayurvedic Concepts in School Social Work (Chapter 16 by Pradeepta and Shankar Das): In the final chapter, the authors argue for adopting Ayurvedic concepts, notably the

Panchmahabhootas (five great components) and the Tri-doshas (three physiological humours), into the School of Social Work. This holistic approach seeks to improve student well-being by aligning intervention tactics with native concepts of balance and health.

Discussions

Each chapter in the book offers a unique viewpoint on redesigning social casework in India by drawing on local knowledge systems. This work provides a persuasive call for Western audiences to reevaluate current paradigms, emphasising the benefits of incorporating culturally specific beliefs and practices into social work. The combination of traditional Indian values and global methodology not only improves theoretical and practical approaches but also marks a radical change towards more holistic, culturally sensitive social work practices worldwide.

This introduction chapters mark a critical and creative intervention in Indian social work education. The aim is not to reject Western models outright, but to enrich and localise them, grounding practice in Indian philosophical, cultural, and spiritual traditions. The book stands as a watershed contribution to the *Bhartiyakaran* of social work—laying the groundwork for an Indigenous paradigm that is both rooted and globally relevant.

One of the text's significant merits is its clear conceptualisation of societal problems, highlighting that such concerns are frequently systemic rather than the result of individual misbehaviour. By distinguishing between symptoms and causes, the approach is consistent with contemporary understandings of structural inequities and the necessity for collective action. Incorporating fundamental beliefs about social work, such as the value of self-help, relationships, and a holistic perspective of the individual, gives practical relevance to the theoretical framework.

Discussing the Western origins of modern professional social work is offered as a sophisticated critique, not a rejection. The historical assessment emphasises the value of structured training and technique while highlighting the difficulties of universally applying Western methods, particularly in nations with profoundly different social, cultural, and spiritual paradigms, such as India.

The treatment of *Danam* and *Seva* as Indigenous, philosophical, and practical means of social engagement is both refreshing and intellectually rigorous. These ideas, far from being acts of charity, are revealed to be ethical imperatives rooted in the cultural and spiritual fabric of Indian society. The connection of *Seva* to "practical spirituality" and self-realisation provides a rich ethical and motivational framework for practitioners, capable of inspiring actual development in both the giver and the receiver.

The book under review presents social casework as a foundational method in social work (very western though), underlining its individualised, person-centred, and dynamic nature. Rooted in understanding of the complex interplay between individual needs and societal structures, this framework effectively traces both the historical origins and contemporary practices of casework, while also acknowledging semantic challenges, methodological nuances, and evolving professional standards.

Overall, the framework presents a comprehensive argument for reconfiguring social work practice by embedding Indigenous Indian knowledge systems into every facet of the discipline. It calls for a transformative shift—from curricula to field practice—that refocuses the discipline on holistic, culturally congruent methodologies. This integrated approach not only enhances the relevance and effectiveness of interventions but also actively contributes to broader decolonial efforts in academia and practice, ultimately fostering a more equitable and spiritually grounded field of social work.

Society acts as a vessel for culture, shaping unique ways of life and social norms. Indian and Western societies differ fundamentally in their cultural orientations and value systems. While Western culture emphasises individualism, materialism, and impersonal social relations, Indian culture is deeply collective, family-centric,

and rooted in spiritual and *dharmic* values that foster unity and social cohesion. Indian thinking tends to be holistic, flexible, and intuitive, contrasting Western analytical and rational approaches.

India's cultural identity is shaped by a long, continuous civilisation emphasising interconnectedness—where the individual is inseparable from the collective, influenced by spiritual beliefs and social duties (*dharma*). This contrasts with the Western view of the autonomous individual.

For social casework in India, understanding these cultural distinctives is crucial. Indian clients often have complex family dynamics and socio-economic challenges that require culturally sensitive interventions. Western social work models, rooted in individualistic norms, are often inadequate for India's collectivist context. Therefore, there is a pressing need to develop an Indian framework for social work, drawing on Indigenous philosophy, history, and cultural knowledge such as the ethical teachings in epics like the Mahabharata and Ramayana.

Despite globalisation and western influences, Indian social work must prioritise homegrown values and practices to address its unique social realities. Social workers should integrate India's rich cultural heritage and dharma-based perspectives into their methods, tailoring interventions to local needs rather than adopting wholesale Western models.

In essence, the path forward requires reclaiming Indian knowledge systems and traditions to build a culturally appropriate social work practice that supports social well-being rooted in India's own civilisational context.

This book on Casework models attempted to explore the Indian perspective on the self, which is deeply metaphysical and intertwined with religion (especially Hinduism). It offers a unique framework for understanding human behaviour in casework practice. The authors, each one of them, deserve to be celebrated for developing an inward eye into the cultural matrix of the *Bharatiya* culture.

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Conflict of Interest

Neither of the authors has contributed to the current volume of articles under review. There has been no pecuniary interest in undertaking the review.

Author Contribution Statement

Venkat Pulla and Subash Sharma have rendered the article in its present form.