Radical Social Work in North-East Regions of India

Kamei Samson*

Abstract: *Traditionally, Social Work practices may be seen in the context of the impacts of industrial revolution that transformed the lives of the people. From philanthropists to friendly visits, Casework, as a social work method, emerged to be crucial in addressing the problems of individuals. In industries scarce tribal regions in North-East regions of India traditional village institutions are still relevant and the relevance of certain traditional Social Work practices needs to be examined. Unlike in England and in the USA where due to industrialisation element of individualism affected their societies, major problems in the North-East regions of India may be viewed as results of post-colonial political debacles. Heavy militarisation in North-East regions for building India still marks the core of relation between the Centre and the regions. With growing needs for energy, constructions of dams and consequent displacement of peoples and loss of lands are other major contemporary problems in the regions. Military oppression, fake encounters, killings and extortions by non-state actors, and ethnic conflicts are other major problems witnessed. The nature of the problems of the regions requires contextualising Social Work practices. Social Work cannot be apolitical in North-East regions of India if human rights and social justice are truly the fundamental principles of social work.*

*Kamei Samson, PhD. works with Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, India. Email: samson.kamei@gmail.com

Introduction

Human beings are continuously influenced by various activities in their surroundings. In order to help people, who are incapable of ensuring their needs due to personal weaknesses and social barriers, a professional approach that emancipates the people from perpetual dependent syndrome may be examined in the context of Social Work. Social work as a profession envisages controlling and minimising sympathetic relation between the client and Social Worker. However, an empathetic feeling is expected from a Social Worker so that a genuine understanding and a respect for the plight of the client is realised.

No doubt, Social Work was rooted in Charity and act of benevolence. In this sense, every religion professes Social Work. However, the concept of Social Work and the profession have moved beyond Charity and other acts of benevolence. It has developed into a more scientific approach with diminishing sympathy and with a growing body of scientific knowledge. Social Work does not place needy individuals merely as receivers of services from professional Social Worker. Professional Social Worker works with the strengths and weaknesses of the individuals. Unlike some leaders who help poor and needy people and publicise such acts of help, Social Workers take extreme care to maintain confidentiality about the professional relation with the clients. The professional helps rendered in Social Work practices needs to be understood contextually. The nature of Social Work practices will vary according to the problems and kinds of help required by the people as a group or as an individual. Thus, based on this, Social Work has various methods as: Casework, Group Work, Community Organisation, Social Research, Social Action and Social Welfare Administration.

The application of these methods is not universal in every social context even if the problems are of same kind. The problems may be different in terms of nature. Thus, the problem may be at the community level, but not necessarily of same nature. Thus, professional Social Work is a scientific approach of dealing with problems depending on the state of a client or a group, nature of the problems and social context in which the client or the group is located.

The nature of help offered before the emergence of professional Social Work was more of benevolence. The services were more concentrated in the individual problems and needs of the client. The needs were mostly characterised by basic needs like food, clothing, shelter, employment and psychological needs. This was because the process of industrialisation resulted in excess working hours, mass displacement and high concentration of population in small areas around places of productions. We are now posed with a question about the relevance of professional Social Work in places where there is dearth of industries or sparse population with lesser problems of juvenile delinquency, sanitation, old age problems, etc. How do we conceptualise professional Social Work in areas where the nature of problems is of ethnic conflict, fight for control over natural resources, armed conflict between the state and non-state actors and between the non-state actors? Is there a scope for professional social work to work with political problems characterised by demand for external right of self-determination or autonomy? Can traditional professional Social Work with methods in the form of Casework, Group Work and Community Organisation address the political problems? When the nature of problem faced by the people is of conflict with the State (see Nadkarni 2013: 2), can Social Work continue to be traditional in its practices?

Traditional background of social work
The traditional Social Work approach that attempts to intervene at individual level by examining the problems at individual level was criticised by radical critiques (Fook 2002: 5). Thus, structural social work looked into the 'structural nature of individual and social problems' (Fook 2002: 5). The people ruled by the military might with a legal provision even to kill on mere suspicion will envisage a new structure of political system that truly listens to the voices of the people. The kind of Social Work profession that may be envisaged in such context would be very different from the professional Social Work prevalent in cities that see problems of industrialisation, racial discrimination, economic disparity, sanitation, delinquency, etc. Social Work that emphasises on human rights and social justice is the need of the hour for the people who have been living under the command and mercy of the repressive armed forces since independence.

In social work, 'the current stress on the "person-in-situation" framework lacks both a critical psychology to interpret the social aspects of human behaviour, and more importantly, a critical framework to interpret the "situation" (Karger and Ramanathan 1983: 140). The growth trajectory of social work profession in India too witnessed an adoption of methods developed in highly industrialised nations that did not witness issues ranging from fight for sovereignty to utter human rights violations by the State.

The Community Organisation Society (COS) that started in 1869 displayed all the prejudices of the English middle-classes of the late Victorian era. Thus, the early social workers' main concern had little to do with addressing the factors engendering the problem of poverty and squalid housing conditions which affected several people in the poorer areas of Britain's largest cities than with bringing an end to 'the scandal of indiscriminate alms-giving', (Ferguson 2009: 83) which was undermining individual character and self-sufficiency.

The reason for the emphasis on individual's problems towards the beginning of social work profession in India needs to be understood. Formal social work education in India began during the colonial period in 1936. The state of abject poverty clothed by prolonged colonisation contributed to chronic problems affecting individual and families. Services provided by the institutions of the state and philanthropic organisations became crucial in practising social work (Bodhi 2011: 290). Bodhi continued to contend that the early social workers who were also from among the freedom fighters did not critically question the approach of the state in helping the people as they did not want to be considered 'unpatriotic' (Bodhi 2011: 290). Thus, the early Indian social workers did not address the larger social issue like caste. They were engaged with problems at individual levels. It was probably not appropriate for the Indian social workers to divert their energy in questioning the policies of the state. One might also partly attribute it to the nationality of the person who first started professional social work education in India. Clifford Manshardt, who was an American Missionary, with his Western background of an understanding of human problems as results of industrialisation, in collaboration with Sir Dorabji Tata, an industrialist, probably emphasised on individual problems and

overlooked the larger political problems of colonisation and discrimination in India.

It would be unrealistic to expect the role of social workers to be political in nature on the eve of independence when newly formed government was rampantly and militarily integrating princely states into the new nation. The tribal people who opposed the forceful merger of their lands into India had no one to represent their voices. Those who were fighting against the state began to be looked at as secessionists and it was not easy to voice for those who revolted against independent India. Such approach towards collective action against state was reflected even in the works of scholars. After the independence of India, collective actions against the state were not approved by Indian scholars. Such collective actions witnessed particularly in 1950s and 1960s were begun to be viewed as '*dangerous*' and '*dysfunctional*' for '*civilised society'* (Shah 2002: 21-22). Social work practice with its principle of human rights would have been politically unviable among the tribals when the state was against collective actions for liberation from India.

Juxtaposing individual and social problems
Psychoanalysis theory became very important for social workers engaging with individual problems. Summarising Horney (1943) and Fromm (1955), Karger and Ramanathan averred that psychoanalysis suffered a setback as it failed to analyse the implications of social forces such as 'economic, political and cultural' (1983: 134) on the behaviour of the individuals.

The role of social work is complex and is sometime not defined properly. Social workers also deal 'with the interactions that occur at the junction of people and their environments' (Barlett 1969, cited in Karger and Ramanathan 1983: 134). Thus, social work cannot be always conceptualised as working only with the problems of the individuals. Certain social work approaches like 'behaviour modification, crisis intervention' (*ibid.*: 134) are hard to find any significant relevance in isolation in the aforesaid 'interactions'. Pointing out the irrelevance of clinical social work in dealing with macro political issues faced by the tribal people must not be interpreted as suggesting 'that a therapy dominate social work' (*ibid.*: 135). Clinical social work practices are certainly required, but not as the dominant or an exclusive approach when the social problems are political and not merely psychological or individual. Addressing the problems at macro

level needs to be considered taking into consideration of the nature of problem sometime located at the interface between state and people in the form of conflict.

Traditionally, social work practices gave individual problems a status of priority as social workers were engaged mostly with the basic needs and psychological problems of the individuals. Interestingly, sometime the causes of problems were located within the clients. They did not analyse much the external factors. Thus, Freudian theory that 'the individual is liberated from the unconscious drives that subject people to misery' (*ibid.*: 138) become instrumental in social work theory building and in practice. However, when the practice needs to focus on problems rooted in area outside the individual Marx emphasis on liberation 'from social oppression' (*ibid*.: 138) may be seriously considered. This distinction between individual and social problems, however, must not lead to dissociation of the two perspectives.

Literature review
Let us examine few understandings of the concept of Social Work in relation to other concepts. Social service and Social Work are often misunderstood by politicians and leaders in society.

Malcolm Payne defined social service as
> A broad term, used in the study of social policy and in political debate. It refers to state provision designed to enhance social solidarity and stability, and is usually taken to include education, healthcare, housing, the personal social services and social security. This usage is easy to confuse with the everyday usage of 'social services' to refer to the local government personal social services (2006: 5).

Social Work is defined by Malcolm Payne as
> A service and practice using social and psychological sciences in interpersonal interactions with people, especially from deprived social groups and experiencing practical and emotional difficulties in social relationships. Social work balances three objectives: maintaining social order and providing social welfare services effectively, helping people attain personal fulfilment and power over their lives and stimulating social change (2006: 5).

Another concept that needs to be taken into account in understanding the concept of Social Work is social welfare. Social welfare are '[s]ervices, usually provided by the state, designed to promote

well-being in interpersonal, family, social and community relationships that enhance solidarity and mutuality in society' (Payne 2006: 5). The combination of social work and social welfare has been used to 'appease local communities by offering greater influence and participation in the systems and institutions that govern their lives and environment' (Hutchinson-Reis 1989: 166).

From the above three definitions one may conclude that Social Work profession deals closer with human relations. Social services and social welfare are from the state who may only look at people as Census or Constitutional category. Thus, some individuals do not deserve services provided by the State. Social services and social welfare are based on the policies formulated sometime without even examining the real situations of the potential receivers of the services. Welfare services from the state are used as act of benevolence by some politicians and claim to be Social Workers. Conception of Social Work also depends on the 'assumptions, or expectations' (Pierce 1989: 8) of the people. Thus, politicians are also called Social Workers by people if they get what they expect from the politicians.

Social Work is also defined as being 'concerned with interaction between people and their social environment which affects the ability of people to accomplish their life tasks, alleviate distress, and realise their aspirations and values' (Pincus and Minahan 1973: 9, cited in Noel and Timms 1977: 38). Social Work is not just about helping to fulfil the needs as expected by client. There is a need for analysing the needs claimed by the client. The rationality of the claimed needs and thus the help to be rendered must be seriously considered. Need must imply a goal to be achieved which is measurable deficiency from the expected goal and a means of achieving it (Forder 1974: 39, cited in Noel and Timms 1977: 141).

There is a dilemma on the question if Social Work is a profession. Apart from this dilemma another line of thought is the claim that 'social work is a group of professions rather than a unitary entity' (Hare 2004: 410). Nevertheless, there is a continuous struggle to place Social Work within the domain of profession. Social Work is also considered as 'human rights profession' (Healy 2008: 735) as it is actively engaged in ensuring the human rights of the marginalised people. Similar declaration was made in the policy paper of the

International Federation of Social Workers (*ibid.*: 735). Based on this declaration one might be compelled to assume that every human rights activist is a Social Worker. This might be a fallacious assumption. The domain of professional Social Worker needs to be defined within the context of knowledge and practice as acquired and exercised by a trained Social Worker. Researches are conducted in the field of Social Work to generate a body of knowledge that is scientific in nature and applicable in the field. The profession of Social Work requires not just an empathetic feeling from an individual, but a plethora of values, principle, skills, professional ethics are essential to practise the profession of Social Work. Social Work profession is actively engaged in ensuring the rights of the people and especially those of the marginalised. It takes into account of the Constitutional rights enshrined in the Constitution of the land. It works with the justice system of the land and even voice for changes in the legislation of the land, if necessary, through Social Action as its method. Social Workers help the individuals in ensuring their rights and place themselves 'in the middle of an interaction between the social and the personal' (Payne 2006: 1). They are professional helpers and do not promote dependency. Social Work is not expected to 'foster dependency' but 'deal with those who will help themselves' (Pierce 1989: 9).

The practice of Social Work began in the latter half of the 19th century at two different places- England and in the USA. The 'friendly visiting' of the Charity Organisation was the forerunner to social casework of Social Work profession. The Settlement House movement in industrialised regions was begun in London at Toynbee Hall by Samuel and Henrietta Barnett in 1885. It was also practised in the USA by Jane Addams, who then established Hull House in Chicago, and in 1931 won the Nobel peace prize. In the later part, Addams and Hull House began to symbolise social action and reformed branch of the Social Work profession (Quam, 1995: 2571–2, cited in Hare 2004: 411). The Hull House was begun to 'bridge the gap between middle and working class, the propertied and the poor, the native and the immigrants' (Fook 2002: 3).

The concept of Social Work is not universal. It has several definitions. However, there is a need for a standard definition in order to give professional characteristics to it that will meet the global needs

of the profession. The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of School of Social Work (IASSW) had in their respective General Assemblies in 2000 and 2001 officially approved a definition statement of the concept of Social Work (Hare 2004: 407; Folgheraiter and Raineri 2012: 473). The statement reads as follow:

> The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance wellbeing. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work (Hare, 2004: 418).

The need for the change in the definition of the concept of Social Work was necessitated by the changing trend at the global context known as globalisation (Midgley, 1993, cited in Hare 2004: 407) that required shaping the profession of social work to suit the needs of the international problems (Envall, 2000: 4, cited in Hare 2004: 407). '[R]elational social work' is another concept within 'practice paradigm' that seeks to use 'coping networks' to find solution to various problems. The 'coping networks' are the various relationships between people having common aim. Relational Social Work aims at enhancing the 'resilience and capacities for action at both individual and collective levels' (Folgheraiter 2007, cited in Folgheraiter and Raineri 2012: 474). In a relational Social Work, relationships are crucial in dealing with the problems of the people or the clients. This requires an in-depth understanding of the relations existing between the clients and the people in the surrounding. This may also mean carefully trading on the sensitive matter of confidentiality. Social Work profession requires working not only with the personal traits of the individuals, but also with various external influences from the 'social context in the lives of the individuals' (Fook 2002: 3). This implies several things for professional Social Work. Social Workers are required to have a wide knowledge about human behaviour and social, cultural and political issues surrounding the individual who is the client. Thus, a Social Worker who is well trained in counselling alone cannot be an effective counsellor if there is a dearth of knowledge about conflict management if he/ she were to work in conflict ridden regions.

Social Work is conceived to be '*actional*, and therefore *relational*, because it always presupposes an associated (social) action' (Folgheraiter and Raineri 2012: 476-477). Social Work is not just a theoretical discipline. It is a profession based on critical understanding of the realities and actions of those who desire a better change. The nature of relations will be crucial in determining the nature of professional help to be rendered by the professional Social Worker. A relation characterised by conflict needs an arbitrary position on the part of the Social Worker and may require greater degree of confidentiality.

As the concept of Social Work is closely associated with enabling the people to help themselves, the concept of empowerment is essentialism in Social Work. It is a concept that is popular among the impoverished. Political empowerment is viewed as a significant tool in enhancing various other empowerments. The voices of the people with lesser representatives in the House of Representatives often suffer. Their clarion call for equality and justice is often neglected democratically. The role of Social Work profession in such situations is faced with dilemmas and possible threat from the state. But how do Social Work profession conceptualise the idea of empowerment to emancipate the impoverished people? We may conceptualise empowerment as 'the process of increasing personal, interpersonal or political power so that individuals, families, and communities can take action to improve their situations. It is a means of addressing the problems of powerless populations and the role powerlessness plays in creating and perpetuating social problems in both developing and developed societies' (Gutierrez et al., 1995: 249–50, cited in Hare 2004: 413). Thus, the concept of empowerment is not to challenge the existing establishment with the desire to overthrow it. Here the main task of empowerment is to provide political opportunity to the people so that they can contribute their part in addressing their problems.

The concept of empowerment needs to be further examined in the context of 'masculinising process' of Social Work knowledge that has pushed the profession far from 'caring women's profession' (Fook 2002: 4). In a society where violence dominates, almost every voice that masculinises the helping process may be seriously considered. However, this masculinising of the helping process need not be adoption of violence against the masculine world. Empowering the people with

knowledge to fight for their rights is perhaps the masculine approach Social Work profession needs to adopt.

According to Vimla V. Nadkarni, social work practices went through a change 'from charity and reform to welfare to development and recently to human rights' (2013: 2). She attributed this to the 'changing economic and political developments' (*ibid.*: 2) in India. Social Worker felt the need to engage in 'social action' in order to 'remedy the roots of social malaise and change the social order' and not only resort to 'ameliorative work' (Dasgupta 1967, cited in Desai and Narayan, 1998: 537, 538, cited in Nadkarni 2013: 12). To conceptualise professional social work in North-East regions of India it is essential to realise that "[c]ontemporary social work issues in India cannot be addressed without shift to a more politically aware definition of the profession, guiding both national and international goals for social work. Standards that support equity and human rights as well as focusing on adjustment are necessary to address these issues in the global context" (Alphonse, George and Moffatt, 2008: 10, cited in Nadkarni 2013: 19). In the context of social work with local communities in developing countries the need to abandon the common belief that social work is non-political is also raised (Pawar 2014: 1). The geographical context of the regions also presents itself as another dimension of problem in terms of accessibility and prejudice about it among the outsiders. And in social work 'even geographical factors' (bodhi 2014: 10) need to be engaged with as they present their own problems.

Social Work Field in North-East regions of India
It is more apt to say 'North-East regions' than 'North-East region'. The North-Eastern regions of India have several ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious and geographical entities. Different groups have diverse origins, histories, political aspirations and different traditional social institutions that sometime override the Constitutional provisions of India. And the people in these regions are peoples. It is in this sense of diversity that 'North-East regions' becomes a more relevant and an appropriate tool of analysis.

According to Nari Rustomji, when the merger of the then princely state Manipur into the Union of India was doubtful, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel inquired, 'Isn't there a brigadier in Shillong?' (1973: 109, cited in Baruah 2005: 59). The issue of merger

during the days of nation building process was a political problem. The problem of merger of princely states was not economic or cultural. However, the Indian political leaders chose to ignore this and dealt with the peoples with military force brutally. According to Thongkholal Haokip, the 'political integration' of the North-East regions into India was made worse by economic exploitation that turned the regions into '"internal colony"' (2012: 85). Since independence the outlook of the Indian leaders towards the peoples in the North-East regions has been from strategic point of view and not from the point of view of fraternity or human rights. In such a political milieu, envisaging a social work practice to empower the peoples to help themselves would be difficult to conceptualise. Will social worker willingly help the peoples of these regions to attain their lost sovereignty?

Most of the places once categorised as 'backward tracks' or 'excluded' or 'partially excluded areas' began to emerge as 'autonomous districts and autonomous regions' under the Constitutional provision of Sixth Schedule (Baruah 2005: 184) in the post-colonial era in India. After the independence of India the integration process of the peoples of North-East regions of India took a different turn. Some Indian leaders feared that the peoples from the excluded or partially excluded areas may be 'swamped by outsiders' (Baruah 2005: 189). Thus, the peoples from the North-East regions and especially the tribal peoples experienced political segregation or alienation under the garb of national integration. The major maiden experience of the tribal peoples in the North-East regions with the Indian government was the oppressive military might of India after the Nagas refused to join India and boycotted the first general election. This created severe tension between the newly formed India and the Nagas. The political scenario in the North-East regions turned more sensitive with the Chinese aggression in 1962. These political developments required India to extend 'the institutions of the state all the way into the international border- nationalizing this frontier space- became the thrust of Indian policy ever since' (Baruah 2005: 191). The nature of problems in the North-East regions even after the independence was still the problems of political domination and subjugation and not that of economic or caste problems as witnessed in other parts of India.

The issue of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh was another hotbed of political debacle in Assam or in the regions. However, the approach of the government in dealing with the illegal immigrants was not found to be satisfactory. Under the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act of Assam 'any complaint against a suspected alien must be accompanied by a payment of a fee by the complainant…[and] the accuser must live within four kilometres of the person' (Hazarika 2011: 251) accused of being illegal immigrant. It is difficult to expect professional social worker seeking the help of the government or mobilising the peoples to remove the illegal immigrants when they are expected to extend professional help on humanitarian grounds even to illegal immigrants. But the problems of illegal immigrants are serious for the peoples of the regions. Social Workers certainly will be in ethical dilemma if they were to address the issue of illegal immigrants.

The involvement of central forces in ethnic violence by siding with one group is no longer a classified truth. Black Panther, recognised as the elite counter-insurgency force of the central government, has been reportedly found to be involved in the violent conflict between the Karbi and 'Bihari denizens' in July 2000 in Assam (Baruah 2005: 195). The cause of the conflict was reported to be loss of lands by tribals to the Bihari denizens. Traditional social work professional approach will certainly extend its professional help to both the parties in conflict and not resolve the causes of the problems. The resulting problems of refugees and psychological problems of the individuals certainly need professional social work intervention. However, the role of social work in addressing the root cause of the problem will be extremely limited if political neutrality is claimed to be practised. Should social workers remain as mere spectators and not intervene in addressing the issue of illegal immigrants and fight for control over land and resources between two groups?

Political conflicts between the peoples settled in the North-East regions too contribute to different dimension of problems in the regions. One spectacular political problem that may find mention is the claim of indigenous people. The tribal peoples in Assam such as the Bodos and the Missings do not approve of the Assamese claim of being indigenous. According to the tribal peoples of Assam, the non-tribal peoples cannot be termed as indigenous as 'in international human rights discourse' the Indian tribal peoples are considered as indigenous and not the non-tribal peoples (Baruah 2005: 202).

The myriad of problems faced by the peoples in the North-East regions and especially the tribal are political in nature. There is no denying of other economic, communal, ethnic, land, employment problems. However, a professional social work that truly envisages addressing human problems from rights perspective needs to deal with the aforesaid problems politically.

Contexualising Tribal Social Work
The need to contexualise the practice of Social Work must be acknowledged by professional Social Workers and academicians. In social work practices the need to change the environment is emphasised in order to help the clients. However, the traditional social work approaches of dealing with the individuals did not emphasise at the macro level of policy and governance that are crucial in changing the environment of the tribal peoples who are deprived of their rights. The tribal peoples whose lands are confiscated cannot find solution to their problem with counselling, Casework, Group Work or Community Organisation. What is required is reformation in the Land Acquisition Act of the nation. Some of the laws that still carry colonial approach need to be revamped in favour of the peoples who are marginalised. What is required is a radical change in the governance system, if the system is not in favour of the interest of the peoples.

Beggary is hardly seen in tribal societies in the North-East regions. This may be attributed to favourable social bonding among the tribal peoples. Social security or social welfare systems practised among the tribal peoples are factors for dearth of homelessness or beggary or abandonment of old age people. There is inherent helping tendency among the tribal peoples and such practice is cherished and nurtured. It is also closely associated with morality of the peoples. Tribal belief systems endorse helping others. There is a need to tap tribal welfare activities and use them as knowledge of social work to be practised amongst them.

In social work, the definition of social work may include the dimension of help encompassing even the professional social worker. Thus, in tribal social work the professional social worker is not just provider of help but may also be helped by the receivers of his help. The vulnerability of professional social workers to political alienation or

oppression needs to be acknowledged. The traditional social work practice of locating the problems of peoples in the peoples itself may be extremely unfriendly to the individual and the tribal group. Clinical social work, if it continues to locate the problem only within the individual client will legitimise certain inhumane activities of the State. The mental health of people affected by sustained oppression by military rule is a serious concern. Where would clinical social work locate the source of such health problem is a dilemma. Where would the level of intervention be?

Social work also needs to be conceptualised to deal with the perceived problems too. Failure to do so will render social work only curative in nature and fail to uproot the problems of the people. Tribal social work must aim towards liberation of the tribal peoples from the actual and perceived bondage. 'Liberation means that every interaction or co-action in society must be such as to bring satisfaction to the spiritual need of the individuals concerned by way of fulfilment of their potentialities as moulded by personal history and outward environment of each including physical and social environment' (Ginsberg 1962: 170, cited in Roy Burman 2005: 88).

Considering the nature of problems faced by the tribal peoples even a trained social worker who does not have an experience of working with the tribal facing state repression may be shocked in the field. Most social workers are trained to work for the people as a law abiding citizens. The services provided by the state are also expected to be made available to the clients wherever applicable. Thus, several Non-Governmental Organisations work with the government in order to help the people improve their lives. However, working with tribal peoples who are displaced by the state to facilitate the economic activities of few industrialists under the garb of development will have a very different experience. When peoples are willing to stand against the might of the state to reclaim their rights over land and resources making an effort to help the people with the services of the government would be a mockery to the plight of the peoples. Thus, social workers working with the tribals are often left with no help from the state or minimal support from funding agencies. They also face the chance of being considered as anti-state and anti-national.

Sometime it is doubtful whether social work with the tribal peoples is actually possible. State becomes more and more repressive with ever growing need for energy and power. With overwhelming power of the state and the need of the state being prioritised, the problems faced by the tribal peoples are growing more and more. Their problems are often more severe than those faced by middle class or elite groups of the society. The problems of the tribal peoples are often results of structural dysfunctional while the problems of the middle class or elite groups are sometime results of lifestyles and increased taxation on their incomes. Such different problems of two different groups of people cannot be intervened in similar approach.

Certain problems of the tribals need to be examined by alienating from the problems of the other sections of the society. This is important in order to avert dilution of the problems of the tribal peoples. Certain dominant groups may trivialise the tribal problems by bringing in the problems of the dominant groups. The problem of the black is marked by racism. This is not to rule out the significance of the problems of the black associated with their basic needs. However, the more powerful group has subordinated the problem of racism to issues pertaining to gender or class (Hutchinson-Reis 1989: 168).

Social work practices among the tribals may not expect a rapid transformation of the whole society in a short span of time. What may be considered in approach is the realist perspective of radical social work. Realist perspective acknowledges the growing repressive nature of the state and thus realise the difficulty in realising a 'dramatic transformation of society' (Langan and Lee 1989: 14). It aims 'to defend existing services' (*ibid.*: 14) from the state for the peoples.

For several tribal groups the idea of India as a nation is still unrealistic. Even if they wish to see India as a nation certain political, social and economic forces do not allow them to realise their wish. The tribal or mongoloid racial group of India are still treated as different group of people. They are often sidelined as different racial group. Significant groups of them still do not enjoy equal acceptance by other Indians. Racism, to the extent of killing, against the Mongoloid group of Indians from the North-East regions in other parts of India is a contemporary reality. Thus, the problems faced by the tribal peoples of North-East regions of India are not just development disparity. The problems are not with the peoples from the North-East

regions. The problems must be located within the structure of the society that cherish caste differences and racial distinctions, and political alienation of the tribal peoples. Social workers need to engage with such problems in a very sophisticated manner. The imported Western social work education will not be appropriate in addressing the issues of the peoples. There is a need for structural change accompanied by attitudinal change, not just of the tribal peoples but especially of the dominant groups. This may mean a total revolution of the whole political system of the nation.

The question of integration of the tribal peoples into the larger society is one contemporary issue concerning India. According to B.K. Roy Burman, integration involves the processes of subordination and superordination, socialization, uniformization and liberation (2005: 86). The process of subordination and superordination are of great concern for the tribals with unique history and ways of life. The question of integration is also questioned when it is likely to affect the unique culture and belief system of the tribal peoples.

Spela Urh dealt with the component of ethnic sensitivity in social work in the context of Roma community of Slovenia. The Roma community suffered discrimination from the majority groups in the country. Drawing from Barany (2002) Fonseca (1995) and Okley (1994), Spela Urh stated that the Roma community were 'the most oppressed and excluded ethnic groups in Europe' (2011: 473). Social Work was found to be incapable of addressing the problems of the Roma people. Even when Social Work intervened, it benefitted mostly the majority group (Urh 2011: 477). Thus, 'social work was seen as problematic and was not a priority of local politics' (*ibid.*: 477). Social Workers ignored the 'influence of social pathologies on the Roma' (*ibid.*: 478) while dealing with the problems of Slovenia. Thus, Social Work is also questioned for serving the interests of the 'dominant groups in society' (Fook 2002: 3). This may be further extended and examined in the context of the marginalised people who are displaced in the name of development. We hardly see effective Social Worker unlike in the cities with services like counselling, Home for the children, orphanage, services for the elderly people, etc. With rising number of migrants into the tribal lands and regions the fear of being dominated is not unfounded. Social work that engages with the migrants may be critically questioned by the tribal peoples. Social workers may require addressing the grievances of the tribal peoples who fear domination by the rising migrants. However, considering from human rights perspective the basic rights of the migrants to move in any part of India and earn their livelihood, one just cannot ignore the welfare of the migrants and even those of the illegal immigrants. In such a situation professional social workers face a dilemma. Will social worker empower the tribal peoples and help them protect their employment and livelihood from being taken away by the migrants? Another question is will social workers fight to ensure the rights of the migrants?

Conclusion
The article attempted to create a sense of exigency across professional social workers and academicians in the field of social work education about nature of problems that will appear dominant in the tribal regions of North-East India. The article is not a comprehensive coverage of the problems of North-East regions. However, it carries a picture of areas where professional social workers and academicians both need to be cautious and continuously think on the relevance of traditional social work practices in areas where the problems is more of conflict between state and peoples. Traditional social work often tends to work as extended hands of the state's welfare activities. However, in tribal regions where the peoples are oppressed by the state or affected by the activities of the state the viability of state welfare activities needs to be reconsidered. Rather the organic welfare activities of the tribal peoples may be tapped for social work practices.

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