History of Community Organisation

Introduction

The previous chapter have given you a bird’s eye view of the concept of community organisation and its various principles. It has been practiced as a method of social work in the western countries; especially in England and USA. However, little has been written about the history of community organisation. Community organisation is a process and is all about solving the present day problems of common interests by means of adopting democratic principles and people’s participation. People have used this method in the past and have attained desired results. Thus, it is important for the students of community organisation to understand the past, draw lessons from it and develop and experiment with new models and methods required to work with community.

In this chapter, we will be dealing with the History of community organisation in England, USA and provide you with a brief idea about the community organisation practice in India. In the later part of the chapter, we will also discuss some of the models and approaches of community organisation.

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**Why Should We Study History**

We can learn a lot from history, that variety of social change groups faced with many odds and with poor beginnings have won in the end. History makes us clear that slow progress need not mean the death of hope. But lends us patience while teaching us persistence. The strategies adopted in the past provide us concrete lessons on tactics and approaches allowing each generation to build on the knowledge of its predecessors. It is all about the problems the people experienced and the success they achieved.

In short, history sensitizes us to the problems and possibilities of change, provides concrete advice for present-day action, and sustain our action with the hope and pride that comes from learning of past experience. Therefore, the study of the History of community organisation becomes essential for a social worker.

**Community Organisation**

The term “community organisation covers a series of activities at the community level aimed at bringing about desired improvement in the social well being of individuals, groups and neighbourhoods”. Community organisation is about creating a democratic instrument to bring about sustained social change. According to Murray G. Ross, “Community organisation is a process by which a community identifies needs and takes action, and in doing so... develops co-operative attitudes and practices.”

**Philosophy of Community Organisation**

The early attempts in community organisation were an outcome of the serious problems i.e. problems of unemployment, poverty etc. faced by the
communities. Thus grew up many organisations and social agencies to provide support to the community. Soon, it was realized that all these efforts need to be co-ordinated and streamlined so as to avoid duplication of work and to reduce the gap in the delivery of services to the community. At one point of time we might ask, what has been the driving force behind all these efforts that prompted the people of goodwill to render services to the community? Let us look at the Philosophy of Community Organisation, which may throw some light on this theme.

- The fundamental aspect of the community organisations is the principle of “Co-operative spirit” which promotes the people to unite together to address a common issue.

- Community organisation recognizes the spirit of democratic values and principles with the focus on creating democratic involvement.

- Organising is about empowering. When people unite together, and get involved in community organisation, they develop confidence. This empowerment comes when people learn skills to help themselves and others. The collective action helps in community building.

- The community organisation recognizes the power of individual. It believes, that through the collective strength of the people, better teamwork and adoption of scientific methods, can provide comprehensive solutions to social problems.

- Another Philosophy is that of coordination. It is concerned with adjustments and inter-relations of the forces in the community life for common welfare.
Community organisation is therefore, a continuous process in which adjustments are made and remade to keep pace with the changing conditions of community life.

**History of Community Organisation**

In a broad sense we can say wherever people have lived together, some form of organisation has emerged. These informal associations of people always tried to do good to the people in need and protect the rights of the society. On the contrary the history talks about the formal organisations which were set up for the welfare of the community. The first efforts at community organisation for social welfare were initiated in England to overcome the acute problem of poverty, which led to beggary.

The first effort of its kind was the Elizabethan Poor Law (1601) in England, which was set up to provide services to the needy. Another important landmark in the history of community organisation is the formation of London Society of organising charitable relief and repressing mendicancy and the Origin of the Settlement House Movement in England during 1880.

In fact, these movements had a major impact in the United States of America. In 1880 the Charities organisation was set up to put rational order in the area of charity and relief. The major community organisation activities in the United States could be classified into three periods:

1) **The Charity Organisation Period, 1870-1917**

This era is the beginnings in social welfare in USA. The first citywide Charity Organisation Society (COS)
was established in the Buffalo in 1877 in USA. This movement was started with the influence of London Charity Organisation established in 1869. In USA, Rev. S. H. Gurteen, an English priest who had some association with London Charity association and had moved to Buffalo in 1873 gave the leadership to this movement. Within a short span of six years the COS had reached to more than 25 American cities.

Charity organisation was concerned about two things:

- Providing adequate personal services to families and individuals in need.
- Take steps to address the issues/problems in social welfare.

Apart from this service, the COS also took initiatives in promoting co-operation among the various welfare agencies. From this movement of charity organisation emerged many such service oriented organisations i.e. Social service exchange, Community welfare councils, Councils of social agencies.

2) **The Rise of Federation 1917 to 1935**

It is a period where we can see the growth and development of chests and councils. It started with the rise of war chests in 1917 and ended with the enactment of social security act, which set the stage for development of the public welfare programmes in 1935. A large number of chests and councils came up after first world war. The American Association for Community Organisation was organised in 1918 as the national agency for chests and councils and it later became known as community chests and councils of (CCC) America. The Cincinnati Public Health Federation, established in 1917 was the first independent health council in American City. It is
in this period that the American Association of social workers organised in 1921, the first general professional organisations, set up its training for the social workers and others who specialized in community organisation.

A community chest is a voluntary welfare agency, co-operative organisation of citizens and welfare agencies, which is the powerful local force for community welfare that handles large funds. It has two functions. It raises funds through a community-wide appeal and distributes them according to a systematic budget procedure. Secondly it promotes co-operative planning, co-ordination and administration of the communities social welfare.

3) **Period of Expansion and Professional Development 1935 to Present Time**

It is in this period that we see the greater use of the community organisation process in the field of public welfare. A marked significance of this era is the establishment of Federal Security Agency where we see maximum involvement of the Govt. in welfare programmes. In 1946 the agency was strengthened and re-organised following which in 1953 Department of Health, Education and Welfare was established.

Another important development during the period is the professional development that took place. Some of the important professional developments were:

The National Conference of Social Work in 1938-39 undertook a study on community organisation, which was later published under the title “Generic Community Welfare Organisation”. Based on this, another study took place in 1940, but due to American
Involvement in World War II an active programme could not take off.

In 1946, at the National conference of social work in Buffalo, the Association for the Study of Community Organisation (ASCO) was organised. The main objective was to improve the professional practice of organisation for social welfare. In 1955, ASCO merged with six other professional organisations to form the National Association of Social Workers. Community organisation has been recognized as integral and important aspect of social work education in the American Association of Schools of social work education. At present there is an active committee of Council on Social Work Education involved in the production of teaching materials in community organisation. The first contemporary textbook on community organisation titled “Community Organisation for Social Welfare” published in 1945 has been written by Wayne McMillan.

Another development in the history of community development is seen in the wake of World War II. Wartime needs were very special and crucial. During this time many councils and community war services came to the forefront. Among them (USO) United Service Organisation is of prime importance as it was the union of many forces that served the needs of the military personnel and defense communities. The other striking characteristics of the period is the immense increase in the volunteer service i.e. defense council, American Red Cross and USO which co-ordinated and recruited the volunteers.

Another development that took place at the wartime is the growth of closer relationship between labour and social work, which is considered a great significant to community organisation.
The other developments that took place after the World War II that are very specific to community organisation area are as follows.

- The rehabilitation of the physically and mentally challenged
- Mental health planning, problems of the aging
- Prevention and treatment of juvenile delinquency.

In order to address these issues separate bodies were set up and we see the entry of international agencies in the field of community organisation. The present situation in community organisation is the emergence of the new community development programmes, which aim at providing services to the less developed areas in international social welfare. Therefore the present agenda is on working with the whole community and greater emphasis is on self-help.

**Community Organisation in UK**

Baldock (1974) has summed up the historical development in UK by dividing it into four phases.

**The first phase**: 1880-1920: During this period the community work was mainly seen as a method of social work. It was considered as a process of helping the individuals to enhance their social adjustments. It acted as major player to co-ordinate the work of voluntary agencies.

**The second phase**: 1920-1950: This period saw the emergence of new ways of dealing with social issues and problems. The community organisation was closely associated with central and state Govt.’s programme for urban development. The important development
in this period was its association with community association movement.

**The third phase 1950 onwards:** It emerged as a reaction to the neighbourhood idea, which provided an ideological base for the second phase. It was a period of professional development of social work. Most of the educators and planners tried to analyze the shortcomings in the existing system. It was also a period where the social workers sought for a professional identity.

**The fourth phase:** It is a recent period that has seen a marked involvement of community action. It questioned the very relationship of community work and social work. It was thus seen as period of radical social movement and we could see the conflicts of community with authority. The association of social workers and the community were de-professionalised during this period. Thus it was during this period that conflictual strategies were introduced in the community work, although even now there is no consensus on this issue (Baldock 1974).

**History of Community Organisation in India**

A historical account of community organisation is not available in India, as there has been only limited documentation on social work literature in general and on community organisation in particular.

Community organisation has its roots in the Charity organisations in the United States. They realized the need of the people and tried to organise the people to co-ordinate their work. The main activities were social welfare, raising funds, seeking enactment for social legislation and co-ordination of welfare
activities. The spirit behind all these activities was charity. In India, the very concept of charity is deep-rooted in the religious philosophy. Even before the commencement of the social work education in India in 1936, the community work was in place, already in existence. But in the first phase from 1936 to 1952 the community work was in a dormant stage. During this period social work was in its infancy and not many were employed in the community settings because there were hardly any jobs that provided an opening for community organisation. Professionals preferred to work in casework settings.

It was in 1952 that the community development project was launched by the government of India and with this we find the emergence of a new era of community work. The basic objective of community development in India was to awaken the rural people of their needs, instilling in them a sense of ambition for better life and making them aware of their right and power to find a solution for their problems. According to Mukerji (1961) “Community development is a movement designed to promote better living for the whole community with the active participation, and if possible, with the initiative of community”. According to him community development can be divided into two process. 1) Extension education, 2) Community organisation. Extension education was expected to improve the quality of human beings by improving his/her knowledge and skills. By community organisation Mukerji had in mind the setting up of three institutions in the village.

- Village Panchayat
- The village co-operative
- The village school
During this period the thrust of the community work remained in rural areas whereas social work remained mostly urban in character.

From 1970 onwards we could see a new trend in the community work practice. The social workers expanded their scope and operational area from their traditional approach of casework to other development fields. For example, people working with school children started working with the community. The NGOs and voluntary organisations adopted community approach. This shift has in-fact led to the use of process of community work. By and large the community work has remained welfare-oriented.

The current phase of community work in India is experiencing a growing dissatisfaction with its own practice or rather the outcome of its practice. So efforts are on to create alternate ways of working with communities. In-spite of these, the professionals are involved in a variety of projects in both rural and urban areas, to promote better living for the community.

Another trend in the community work is the involvement of the Business houses in promoting welfare in their neighbourhood. This is commonly known as CSR. (Corporate Social Responsibilities) The business houses i.e. Tata’s, Escorts, and some of the multinational companies too have joined in this venture. This trend has attracted many professionals in this field.

The main objective of community development is to develop village communities by methods, which will stimulate, encourage and aid villagers themselves to do much of the work necessary to accomplish the desired goals. The changes conceived and promoted should have the involvement of the people and should be acceptable to them and put into practice by them.
There is a common philosophical link between community organisation and community development. Both aim to enable people to live happily and a fully developed life. Both have basic faith in the common man and his right to self-determination within the framework of the society. Both give emphasis to self-help and help the people to help themselves to solve their own problems. However, community organisation and community development should not be considered as synonymous.

- CD is concerned with the promotion of all aspects of life including social, economical and cultural; both in rural and urban areas. While CO is concerned with adjustment of social welfare needs and resources in cities, states, nations as well as in villages.

- CO is practiced in the USA on a voluntary basis, while in almost all the developing countries CD is a government-sponsored programme.

- CO is a product of urbanization and industrialization. Here the main concern is problems of the population mobility, problems of the family, problems of the aged, problems of juvenile delinquency, of unemployment and provision of social security. But CD is concerned with how to induce people to meet their basic human needs.

- CO tends to be more process oriented while CD as practiced in India tends to be target oriented.

**Gandhian Approach to Community Work**

Gandhi has not given a clear-cut definition of the term community. For him the village is the basic community with its geographical limitation where a
number of families come together and co-operate to build a common life. According to Gandhi the basic element of a community is mutual co-operation and common sharing.

The emphasis of Gandhian concept of community work is the reconstruction of the community rather than on organising an unorganised or disorganised community or on the development of an entirely new community. Therefore the Gandhian objective of community work is to reconstruct the village communities spread all over the country. This construction is based on the constructive programmes designed to meet the social welfare needs of the community. It is through the construction of the village community Gandhi aims to realize the goal of reconstructing the “sarvodaya social order”. Gandhi has not given any specific or fixed pattern for the reconstruction programme but left it to the capacity of those community organisers working to suit different conditions and social situations.

The role of the worker in this approach is very distinct. Here, the worker not only deals with those groups of people or communities who seek his guidance but he would also approach those communities, which do not ask for help because his prime work is towards the reconstruction of the society anywhere. In this approach the worker takes initiatives and gradually stimulates the community. It demands regularity and sincerity of the worker in the reconstruction programme in his area of work.

**Models of Community Organisation**

**What is a Model?**

Before we proceed to understand the different methods
and models of community organisation it is good to understand the terminology. What is a model?

**Model**

It is a medium through which a person looks at the complex realities. Model is a simplistic version of a complex situation. Models serve as a reference for the work and give us a clear understanding of what would happen. They describe strategies for accomplishing a vision, and the appropriate steps to be taken to get there. Some models grow out of the specific ideologies of change and some in response to concrete situations.

Jack Rothman has introduced three basic models of community organisation. They are:

- Locality development
- Social planning
- Social action

1) **Model A – Locality Development**

Locality development model is a method of working with community groups. It was earlier used by the settlement houses. Here the important focus is about the process of community building. Leadership development and the education of the participants are the essential elements in the process.

According to Murray Ross the “process of self-help and communal action is valuable in its own right”. The model of locality development is based on this particular thought process. It originated from the traditional community organisation practice. The main
focus of this model is whole community or a part of it. The basic belief is that communities have some common needs and interests and once the people realize this need and work together democratically, they can take appropriate steps to improve the quality of life.

Here the role of the community organiser is to enhance the involvement of the people in the community and help the community members to plan and find a solution to the problem. It is similar to the work of community development, which is done in the underdeveloped world.

It refers to the community organisation practice when a worker or an agency attempts to develop various schemes and programmes to meet the needs of the target population in a defined area. It also includes coordination of the work of various agencies providing a variety of services in the area.

2) **Model B – Social Planning**

It refers to the type of community work where a worker or agency undertakes an exercise of evaluating welfare needs and existing services in the area and suggests a possible blueprint for a more efficient delivery of services, it is termed as social planning. It is concerned with social problems, for example, housing, education, health, childcare and so on. Its aim is to affect a large population. The community planner works in that capacity with the government and is often identified with power structure of the community. But basically he is interested in the needs and attitudes of the community and help them plan their future.
3) **Model C – Social Action**

According to Friedlander, W.A. (1963) “Social Action is an individual, group or community effort within the framework of the social work philosophy and practice that aims to achieve social progress, to modify social policies and to improve social legislation and health and welfare services”. Another model of community organisation suggested by Rothman is that of social action. According to him social action is a strategy used by groups or sub communities or even national organisations that feel that they have inadequate power and resources to meet their needs. So they confront with the power structure using conflict as a method to solve their issues related to inequalities and deprivation.

In this type of community organisation the community organiser uses all means to apply pressure on the power structure to give in to demands. The role of organisers may differ depending on the issues they get involved in. The role may be that of advocate, activist, agitator, broker or negotiator. It is a process. This organising process goes through different stages. So the role of the organiser will also change as per the roles at the organiser is expected to play, depending upon differing social situations.

This model was commonly used during the 1960’s. This has been used as a means to redress the social problems of the nation, redistribute the resources and power to the poor and powerless. Social action as model has an important role in community organisation.
### A Comparative Statement of the Models Outlined by Rothman (1979)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension of Comparisons</th>
<th>Locality Development</th>
<th>Social Planning</th>
<th>Social Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal</strong></td>
<td>Self-help and common integration</td>
<td>Problem solving of substantive community problems</td>
<td>Shifting power and resources Disadvantaged population/society Injustice and inequality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assumptions</strong></td>
<td>Society lacks viable relationships and problem solving capacity Involvement of broad sections of community in determining and solving problems Improve community relations among different groups in bringing consensus confrontation Settlement house, consumer association,</td>
<td>Substantiate social problem that exits like illiteracy, and unemployment Fact gathering, rational decision making, enabling an effective course of action Build consensus or induce conflict Welfare councils, planning bodies</td>
<td>Organise people to take action against targets. Induce conflict through direct action negotiation confrontation Social movements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*Source: Rothman (1979)*
Approaches to Community Organisation

The History has witnessed diversity of efforts in community organisation and the emergence of new initiatives in the field. Most often these community organising efforts are centered on identity communities and issue-specific communities. History gives us a list of different kinds of community organising methods. One such community organising method which the twentieth century has witnessed is the growth of neighbourhood organising.

Neighbourhood Organising

Neighbourhood organising is one form of community organising. This is nothing but an effort by the community to solve the day to day problems and help those in need.

There are three kinds of approaches to neighbourhood organising.

- The social work approach
- Political activists approach
- Neighbourhood maintenance/Community development approach

1) The Social Work Approach

In this approach, the society is viewed as a social organism and therefore the efforts are oriented towards building a sense of community. The community organiser whose role is of an “enabler or an advocate” helps the community to identify a problem in the neighbourhood and strives to obtain the needed social resources by gathering the existing social services and by lobbying with those in power to meet the
needs of the neighbourhood. This method is more consensual and the neighbourhood is seen as a collective client. One example of this approach is the social settlement movement in USA and war on poverty programme of the Johnson administration in the 1960s.

2) **The Political Activists Approach**

Saul Alinsky, the Godfather of community organization is the founder of this approach. He emerged as a community organiser in the 1930s. The basic philosophy of this approach is based on his thinking that “the more the representatives of the organisation, the stronger the organisation.”

In this approach the community is seen as a political entity and not as a social organism. Here, the neighbourhood is viewed as a potential power base capable of getting power. The role of the community organiser is to help the community understand the problem in terms of power and necessary steps are taken to mobilize the community. The problem of the neighbourhood is always identified as absence of power and in the interest of gaining power for the neighbourhood, the organisers are faced with conflicts with groups, interests and elites. Since most of the community organisers come from outside the community, it has faced the problems of equality of power relations and leadership in the community.

Unlike the social work approach to community organisation this approach has the potential to create stable, democratic and effective organisations of neighbourhood residents by seeing its role as “meeting power with power”
3) **Neighbourhood Maintenance/Community Development Approach**

This approach has emerged out of both the previous approaches namely social work approach and political activist within the same neighbourhood movements. It is seen in the form of civic associations. This association uses peer group pressure to provide services in the community. They use this strategy to pressurize the officials to deliver services to the community but sometimes this approach takes the form of political activists approach as they realize that their goals can be only achieved through confrontations.

In this approach we see the characteristics of de-emphasis on dissent and confrontation and these organisations view themselves more as proactive and development minded.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter we have discussed the history of community organisation as the method of social work. We have seen how the early efforts of the social reformers and activists to improve the living conditions of deprived communities in the West gradually transformed into a formal method of social work. The Indian experience is also discussed in detail with emphasis on Mahatma Gandhi’s contributions. We have also seen that there are different approaches within community organisation that can be chosen to deal with social problems. Rothman’s three models of community organisation namely locality development, social planning, and social action have been discussed in detail and their differences have been highlighted.
References


