



Jnanadeepa

Pune Journal of Religious Studies

ISSN P-2249-1503

www.punejournal.in

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.4272081

Stable URL: <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4272081>

Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies Jan-June 2013 16/1

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Abstract: This paper is an attempt to explore the connections between religion, spirituality and ethics in the paradigm of professional social work. In the first part I will present an overview of historical trends of the connection between spirituality, religion and social work profession. Then I will give the definitions of the terms religion, spirituality and ethics as found and widely used in the literature on social work profession. In the second part I will draw on some ideas about ethico-spiritual paradigm of social work. To understand religion and spirituality in professional social work, it will be proper to briefly discuss the role of religion in today's world, the nature of spirituality, and the historical trends of connection between religion, spirituality and social work.

Keywords: Ethico-spiritual paradigm Religion Spirituality Contemporary relevance of spirituality Social Work

Cite as: Pathare, Suresh. (2013). Religion, Spirituality and Ethics in Social Work (Version 1.0). Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies, Jan-June 2013 (16/1), 31-49.
<http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4272081>

2013-01-10 | Updated on Nov 10, 2020

Religion, Spirituality and Ethics in Social Work: Exploring the Connections

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This paper is an attempt to explore the connections between religion, spirituality and ethics in the paradigm of professional social work. In the first part I will present an overview of historical trends of the connection between spirituality, religion and social work profession. Then I will give the definitions of the terms religion, spirituality and ethics as found and widely used in the literature on social work profession. In the second part I will draw on some ideas about ethico-spiritual paradigm of social work.

To understand religion and spirituality in professional social work, it will be proper to briefly discuss the role of religion in today's world, the nature of spirituality, and the historical trends of connection between religion, spirituality and social work.

1. Religion and Spirituality in Today's World

Religion has very important role in determining the lives of individual and the formations of structures of present society. It has always been holding important position in the socio-political milieu. This can be understood from the religious forces at work throughout the world. The major happenings such as the interest of the west in Buddhism and eastern spirituality, the Islamic resistance in Afghanistan and its support from Islamic countries, the establishment and continued support of Israel by Judaism, the role Christianity played in the upheavals of Eastern Europe, inter-

religious (communalism) and intra-religious (caste based) conflicts in India, a call for vengeance in the name of Islamic *fatwa*, and the rapid growth of Christianity and Islam in the subcontinents of Africa are indicative to know the role of religion in present socio-politico milieu.

Religion plays important role in social life of an individual. Common beliefs and shared experiences are the basis for a community. The religious community share common beliefs, symbols, rituals, rhetoric and scripture. Such common beliefs and traditions normally help in developing cultural norms within a religious community regarding observances of important days, diet, feast and festivals, marriage, political ideology, etc.

Religion shows strong cohesive power, as it plays a particularly significant role in giving distinct identity. Persecuted because of their religion, Jews have maintained a sense of cultural and religious identity in spite of anti-Semitism throughout history (Dubois 1999: 192). Empirical studies (such as Zelliott 1977; Burra 1984; Jogdand 1991) in Indian context show that the Neo-Buddhist movement among Mahars has provided for both the distinct identity and a sense of belonging. Such a distinct identity leads to formation of association or alliance with social or political colour.

Spirituality and Religion: Definitions and Distinctions

The term spirituality is familiar to all of us. Hence we take for granted that we know what it means. It's important to clarify what we mean by "Spirituality" and "religion" before thinking specifically about how they might be part of the social work practice. The dictionary defines spirit as: animating force; incorporeal consciousness, i.e., lacking material form or substance, intangible [out-of-body experience]; heavenly mindedness; and that which "belongs to the church". The spirituality is defined as the 'state of being concerned with the soul'. This does not really help us to understand the meaning. While referring to spirituality often people say that they were seeking or had a spiritual experience. In this they usually talk about (1) a feeling or

experience of unity or closeness with God or whatever they regarded as eternal and transcendent, or (2) a feeling or experience of lightness or joy, absence of mundane consciousness, and diminution of anxiety and fear. For some people, spiritual experiences are described in terms such as enlightenment, cosmic-consciousness, harmony with the universe, or communion with God.

In literature we find various explanations and definitions for spirituality. In the context of social work there has been explanations in which the terms spirituality and religion are commonly used. Spirituality was often equated with sectarian religious beliefs and practices, usually of a Christian or Jewish form (Canda, 1997). According to Canda (1998, 1999), spirituality involves understanding the interconnectedness of all people; compassionate concern rises from soulful awareness of interconnectedness and the realization that self and others are inseparable. Spirituality moves us towards the realization of integration of all our aspects while being in connection and communication with all others.

In India, spirituality is a *marga* or way of knowledge (*Jnana*), love (*Bhakti*) and action (*Karma*). A way supposes a goal towards which one is on the way. The goal is imaged as the realization of the Self. The Self is complex concept that includes God or the Ultimate as the center of Being, but also the human person or self in whom the Self is present and becomes manifest. In the Self, the self is related to other selves and to the whole universe (Amaladoss, 1997). It is proclaimed that man is essentially a spiritual being. His physical possessions and physical satisfactions, i.e. *artha* and *kama* are not the only objects to be sought by him. He has also to acquire *dharma* and *moksha*, i.e. moral and spiritual fulfillment of life. In this sense, spirituality involves the search for a sense of life purpose, meaning, and fulfilling relationships between oneself, other people, the universe, and the ultimate ground of reality, however one understands it. Thus Spirituality is an aspect of the person. Spirituality moves us toward realization

of the integration of all our aspects into a whole being in connection and communion with all other beings.

Religion as commonly understood is a formal set of beliefs, doctrines, laws, practices, rituals, and assignments of authority, which are linked to an explanation of the creation and governance of the universe. The basic definition of “religion” is to bind, in the sense that we are bound to the promises we make. So it is that virtually all religions seek to bind their members or followers to vows or covenants of acceptance. In this sense religions are institutionalized and organized patterns of belief, morals, rituals, and social support systems. Religions are shared by groups of people and are formed and transmitted over time. Thus it is an association or alliance. Ambedkar (Moon 1989, IV: 407- 9) in his writings argued that religion is social ‘in the sense that it primarily concerns society’. He separated religion from theology and argued that the primary things in religion are the usages, practices and observances, rites and rituals. Theology is secondary’. Religion is not supernatural, but its primary content is social. According to him religion like language is social for the reason that either is essential for social life and the individual has to have it because without it he cannot participate in the life of the society’. Religion emphasizes, universalizes social values and brings them to the mind of the individual who is required to recognize them in all his acts in order that he may function as an approved member of the society.

The connection between spirituality and religion is often argued. Spirituality and religion are separate, though often related, dimensions. Spirituality can be defined, as “the general human experience of developing a sense of meaning, purpose, and morality” Key components of spirituality are the personal search for meaning in life, a sense of identity, and a value system. In contrast, religion refers to the formal institutional contexts of spiritual beliefs and practices (Zastrow 2000: 113). An organized religion encompasses formal beliefs and practices held in common with others. Often religious beliefs evolve within a particular

religious denomination and may involve affiliation with a religious body such as a Church, synagogue, temple, or mosque. People can and do raise spiritual questions or questions about meaning in their lives outside the purview of organized religion. In the present pluralistic world it is found that some people support the teachings of their own community of faith, following the rituals and religious practices and yet holds personal beliefs that are entirely different from that faith or even contradictory to it. Often they call this phenomenon as understanding of difference between religion and spirituality.

2. Religion and Social Work: Historical Linkages

Religion has certainly played a central role in the development of social work as a profession (Midgley & Sanzenbach 1989). Historically, Social Work has its roots in religious organizations. It was originated under the inspiration of the Judeo-Christian religious traditions of its philanthropic founders. The Charity Organization Society and the settlement house movement originated through the work of clergy. Later, the American social gospel movement played a key role in supporting the development of public social services and a legislative remedy for social problems (Dubois 1999: 197).

Midgley (1989) has given the detail account of the role played by religiously inspired individuals and organisation in the emergence of social work in the Western industrial countries during the nineteenth century. A Scottish clergyman, Thomal Chalmers, is generally acknowledged to have formulated the basic principles of social visiting which subsequently evolved into social casework (Young and Ashton, 1956). The clergy were will represented among the formative leadership of the Charity Organisation Society, and it was another clergyman, the Revd Stephen Gurtee, who first imported the Charity Organisation Society concept to the United States (Leiby, 1978). Yet another clergyman, Samuel Barnett, conceived the idea of the settlement house while serving in St. Jude's Parish in the East End of London.

Barnett was also known for his progressive, reformist activities and, aligned with the Fabians, he supported state intervention in the economy and in social affairs (Bruce, 1961). In this regard, his work paralleled the progressive reformism of the American Social Gospel movement which championed the creation of public social services, and the extension of legislative authority to remedy social problems (White and Hopkins, 1976).

Religious ideas have also informed the development of social work's concepts, and particularly its values and ethics. Biestek's (1957) exposition of social casework which emphasized compassion, love, understanding and acceptance is perhaps the best example of the infusion of religious notions into social work (Midgley and Sanzenbach: 1989). The welfare services during the initial period of the profession were more in the nature of amelioration, by and large carried out by semi-religious organizations and well-intended philanthropic citizens (Vakharia 1999: 8).

In India also the religious organizations, and indigenous religious movements have played a major role in the development of social work. The major schools of social work in India were founded under religious auspices and they combined a religious orientation with secular professional education. Missionaries of American Marathi Mission established the first school of social work in Asia - Tata Institute of Social Sciences at Mumbai. It was Dr. Manshardt of Marathi mission who conceived the idea, prepared the blue print and provided leadership during its formation stage. Among other schools are the Delhi School of Social Work at Delhi University founded by the YWCA, the Department of Social Work at Vidyalaya Arts college in Tamil Nadu, founded by the Shri Ramkrishna Mission, Center for Studies in Rural Development, Ahmednagar, founded by the Missionaries of American Marathi Mission, Nirmala Niketan at Mumbai, Loyola College, Madras Christian College, Rajgiri college of social work and Stell Maris the department of social work, all started by catholic missionaries, Jain Vishwa Bharati Institute (Deemed

University) at Ladnun, came into being, under the inspiration of “Gurudev Tulsi” the ninth Acharya, the Supreme Head of the Jain Terapanth religious sect, and though not religious in the usual sense of the word, the schools at Gujrat Vidyapith and Vishwa-Bharati drew inspiration from the moral philosophical teachings of Gandhi and Tagore.

In the literature there has been attempts to establish that the major religions show compatibility with social work. Canda (1988) has argued, that the teachings of Judaism, Shamanism and Zen Buddhism are highly compatible with social work and should be incorporated into professional practice. According to Mazumdar (1999: 72) ‘the basic tenets of Hinduism and the cardinal values of social work flow from one common premise, that is upholding the dignity of the human being’. Liberation from enslaving conditions has been one of the goals of Hinduism that has endured down the centuries (Chethimattam 1974:6). Liyanage (1974) in his article on “Buddhism and Social Work Education” shows the relationship between Social Work values and Buddhism not only in work with individuals and groups but also in tackling social policy and planning issues at macro level. The teachings of Buddhism give values of *ahimsa* (non-violence), *karuna* (compassion and benevolence), and *Samata* (equality). These values form integral part of social work values. Basic Islamic concepts likewise are shown as much related to social work values as well and to the larger issues of development (Darwish 1974). Hasegawa (1974) discusses that Zen Buddhism reminds us the importance of meditation, through which the inner eye is kept open to the universe, deep insight into one’s humanity attained, and compassion for other and public welfare is born. Desai (1974) has pointed out that Zoroastrianism clearly enjoins social work and social action in relation to society’s problems.

3. Spirituality and Social work: Connectivity and Trends

Spirituality for its connections with social work has been a matter of discussion throughout the development of social work. During the recent years there is promising literature from the West (Canda, 1998; 2002; Canda & Dyrud Furman, 1999; Hickson & Phelps, 1998; Powers, 1995; Radford Ruether, 1995; Ressler, 1998; Roberts, 1999; Asher, 2001) on the subject of spirituality in social work and spiritually sensitive social work practice. We will now present the historical trends of connection between spirituality and social work.

In the literature we find different phases of discussion on the matter of spirituality and social work. Canda and Furman (1999) have identified three broad phases in the development of connections between spirituality and social work in the United States. In the first phase, up to the early twentieth century, social services and charities that addressed spirituality were mostly based on Christian and Jewish sectarian beliefs and institutions. The governmental social welfare systems often drew on these religious traditions implicitly or explicitly. But also, some prominent advocates of social welfare and social justice, such as Jane Addams, promoted humanistic and nonsectarian approaches. In the second phase (1920s to 1970s), as social work formed into a profession and the governmental social welfare system became more extensive, professional social work education became gradually separated from explicit religious connections. Professional skepticism grew about the dangers of religious proselytization, moralistic judgmentalism, threats to separation of church and state, and theological explanations of human behavior and social problems. By the 1970s, the topics of spirituality and religion had taken the flipside in social work education. However, social work services continued to be provided within various sectarian agencies. Social work literature included occasional calls for addressing religion or spirituality and some new spiritual

perspectives were being introduced, such as existential and humanistic spiritual perspectives and Zen Buddhism.

During phase three (1980s through 1990s), there was an increase of calls in the social work literature and professional conferences to reconnect with our roots in spiritual perspectives. Religion-specific approaches to social work continued, but what was new in this third phase was a clear articulation of the need for approaches to spirituality in social work that are respectful, knowledgeable, and inclusive of diverse religious and nonreligious spiritual perspectives. During the 1990s, the Society for Spirituality and Social Work and other networks were established to link up and synergize the various kinds of scholarly and practitioner approaches to spirituality in the United States. The pace of publications in social work on spirituality increased dramatically (Canda et al., 1999), the Council on Social Work Education re-introduced language about spirituality and religion into its accreditation standards, and the number of MSW educational programs around the country with courses on spirituality increased significantly (Russel, 1998). Many social work practitioners and educators remained unaware of these developments, but momentum and conspicuous visibility of spirituality in social work grew tremendously (Canda, 2002).

Canda (2002) in this new century have added a fourth phase of development in Spirituality and social work. During the 1990s, leaders in religion-specific approaches to social work (for example, Buddhist, Christian, Islamic, Jewish, and First Nations) increased international networking. The Society for Spirituality and Social Work, dedicated to respectful inclusion of diverse religious and nonreligious spiritual perspectives, held its first international conference in 1990. A series of annual international symposia on spirituality and social work also began during this time under the auspices of the Inter-University Center of Dubrovnik, Croatia. This trend has accelerated around the world up to the present.

Ethics in Social Work

It is important at this juncture to define the term 'ethics' as used in the context of social work profession. "Ethics is moral philosophy or philosophical thinking about morality, moral problems, and moral judgments" (Frankena, 1973, p.4). Ethics is hence knowledge based and moral judgments, which involve the criteria of right and wrong, are derived from this knowledge. Every profession is characterized by a perspective and set of beliefs and by a collective conscience with which to make these beliefs stick. We call this a *professional philosophy*. It provides a rationale, articles of faith, and ideals by which to work and to give meaning to one's work. Also provided are certain essential models and standards for use in describing and measuring reality, and in the making of moral- evaluative judgments. These later kinds of standards we call norms, precepts, or moral and ethical principles. Social work philosophy is primarily a moral and social philosophy, an axiology and ethics. The distinctive and characteristic social philosophy that has evolved within social work is marked by a set of basic value orientations, norms, and ethical principles that are held in common by professional social workers. The ethical practice principles are accepted as obligations, standards, duties, and responsibilities for application in all helping relationships and situations, with clients, collateral others, and professional colleagues (Siporin, 1972 p.62, 74).

In social work the values and ethics have been central since its formal inception. Historical accounts of the profession's development routinely focus on the compelling importance of social work's value base and ethical principles. Although the theme of values and ethics has endured in the profession, social workers' conceptions of what these terms mean and of their influence on practice have changed over time. The evolution of social work values and ethics has had several key stages (Reamer, 1998). In the first stage during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, social work was much more concerned about the morality of the client than about the morality or ethics of the profession or its

practitioners. Organising relief and responding to the “curse of pauperism” were the profession’s principal missions. This preoccupation often took the form of paternalistic attempts to strengthen the morality or rectitude of the poor whose “wayward” lives had gotten the best of them. In the second key stage during early twentieth century, the aims and value orientations of many social workers shifted from concern about the morality, or immorality, of the poor to the need for dramatic social reform designed to ameliorate a wide range of social problems. The third key stage which began in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the concern focused much more on the morality or ethics of the profession and of its practitioners. This was a significant shift when in 1947 the Delegate Conference of the American Association of Social Workers adopted a code of ethics. In the 1960s social workers shifted considerable attention toward the ethical constructs of social justice, rights, and reform. This was the beginning of the fourth key stage in the evolution of social work values and ethics. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) adopted its first code of ethics in 1960. (Reamer, 1999).

Religion, Spirituality and Ethics: The Connectivity

Let’s explore the connectivity between religion, spirituality and ethics in the context of social work profession. As we presented above spirituality and religion are separate though there are often attempts to combine them. Spirituality if considered as an experience or feeling of unity or closeness with God, it becomes very personal aspect of an individual. This experience moves the person towards the integration of all the aspects of his being in connection and communication with all others. This is realization of the true nature i.e. man is a spiritual being. This experience is often said to be beyond comprehension or explanation. Israel Salanter, a 19 century rabbi, wrote: “Spirituality is like a bird: if you hold onto it tightly, it chokes; if you hold onto it loosely, it escapes”—which sounds like a very tricky business. Possibly he was trying to explain that the experience of unity with God is not

something to be organized or captured. Whenever there is an attempt to organize this spiritual experience in the institutional context, it takes the form of a sect or religion.

Thus, religion refers to the formal institutional contexts of beliefs and practices. Religions are shared by groups of people and often are group affiliations. To make these group affiliation stronger and organized religions needs some binding force. Therefore all religions seek to bind their members or followers to vows or covenants of acceptance. These vows embrace acceptance of authority, acceptance of belief systems, and acceptance of definitions of appropriate individual and collective behaviour. In this context ethics as moral judgments, which involve the criteria of right or wrong, becomes an essential for organized religions.

In professional social work somewhat similar to religions we attempt to organize, formalize and apply values (such as compassion, love, justice, etc.) on a large scale through professional ethics. By doing so social work as a helping profession trying to establish a monopoly on helping. Often through the code of ethics social work try to legislate it, control it and sell it.

Ethico-Spiritual Social Work: Points of View

Based on the discussion above I would like to present some points with regard to the ethico-spiritual paradigm. Firstly, the historical facts and trends shows that religion has certainly played a central role in the development of social work as a profession. Religious ideas have informed the development of social work's concepts, and particularly its values and ethics. There have been attempts to establish that the major religions show compatibility with social work. Social workers and religious professionals often perform functions complementary to each other. They are significant sources of referrals to each other. Individuals mostly seek initial guidance from their priest or clergy at the time of crisis. The social work profession in the process of helping the client may and do make use of the resources available through the religious community. These facts show that religion and social

work goes hand in hand, they support the survival of each other and in the process social work gives an impression of a sectarian image.

Secondly, spirituality and religion are separate phenomenon. Spirituality is beyond religion and it cannot be organized. Spiritual experience leads the people to naturally relate with themselves, all fellow beings and the great mystery that infuses all. One might say that spirituality is conscious living. Awareness and living naturally yield a sense of love, compassion and service. Religion is more of organized and institutional context. However in the context of social work the terms spirituality and religion are commonly used. Spirituality was often equated with sectarian religious beliefs and practices, usually of a Christian or Jewish form.

Thirdly, Spirituality if considered as an experience or feeling of unity or closeness with God, it becomes very personal aspect of an individual. This experience is often said to be beyond comprehension or explanation. Whenever there is an attempt to organize this spiritual experience in the institutional context, it takes the form of a sect or religion. Religions are shared by groups of people and often are group affiliations. To make these group affiliation stronger and organized religions needs some binding force. In this context ethics as moral judgments, which involve the criteria of right or wrong, becomes an essential for organized religions.

Fourthly, the compassionate help and love are our natural way of life. Compassion is the source of all genuine helping, whether informal or professional. Ways of compassion existed even before professional helping. Natural compassion is our human nature. Mencius said that if any person with a humane heart sees a baby dangerously close to falling into a well, that person will automatically go to save that child. This is a natural response, arising from our sense of fundamental connectedness. But with the code of ethics we become dependent on social constructs of morality and lose our true nature. Natural compassion is reduced

to artificial, interventions as we become role-bound, rule-bound, categorized and socially controlled. Lao Tze, the Chinese founder of Taoism, paradoxically said that immorality and cruelty came into being when codes of conduct and social control were invented.

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Religion, Spirituality and Social Work Ethics: The Indian Perspective

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The phenomenon of globalization has changed Indian people's world into a place of abundance and plenty. On the one hand, unprecedented growth of the knowledge and privileges of man have been taking place, and on the other hand, restlessness and maddening tensions have also increased. The mental deformity impulse opposing ethical values and the destructive instincts are on the rise. People in general are being confronted with concerns such as trauma, illness, insomnia, stress, depression, substance abuse, aggressiveness, violence, suicide, loss or grief etc. In such situation people may likely to seek solace in spiritual and religious beliefs and support systems as it provides relief to their body and peace to their mind.

It is common observation in India that people; irrespective of intellectual or illiterate are happier discussing their personal psycho-social problems with priests, astrologers, tantrics etc, than competent social workers. People have no hesitation in paying them. Therefore the "Religion and Spirituality" of the client in India is an important issue to be acknowledged.