



# *Jnanadeepa*

*Pune Journal of Religious Studies*

ISSN P-2249-1503

[www.punejournal.in](http://www.punejournal.in)

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo. 4272055

Stable URL: <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo. 4272055>

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

## Editorial: Spirituality and Social Work: Interdisciplinary Approaches

Pandikattu, Kuruvilla and Pathare, Suresh

**Abstract:** Over the past three decades there has been extensive exploration of spirituality and religion in its connection with social work.

Religion has played a central role in the development of social work as a profession. Historically social work originated under the inspiration of the Judeo-Christian religious traditions of its founders. Religious ideas and teachings have influenced the development of social work concept in general and the principles and values in particular. There have been attempts to establish that the major religions show compatibility with social work. Thus religion has close connections with social work, workers and exponents of religions often perform functions complimentary and they are significant sources of referrals to each other. The social work profession in the process of helping the needy often makes use of the resources available with the religious organizations.

Spirituality for its connections with social work has been a matter of discussion throughout the development of social work. During the last two decades there is promising literature on the subject of spirituality in social work and spiritually sensitive social work practice.

In the context of social work there has been explanation in which the terms spirituality and religion are commonly used spirituality. As noted by scholars, spirituality involves understanding the interconnectedness of self with others and with the universe.

**Keywords:** Spirituality, Social Work, Religion, Spiritual Resources

Cited as: Pandikattu, Kuruvilla and Pathare, Suresh. (2013). Spirituality and Social Work: Interdisciplinary Approaches (Version 1.0). Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies, Jan-June 2013 (16/1), 3-11. <a href="http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo. 4272055">http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo. 4272055</a>
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ISSN 972-33315

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# ***jnanadeepa***

**Pune Journal of Religious Studies**

**Spirituality and Social Work  
Interdisciplinary Approaches**



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**Volume 16 No. 1**

**January 2013**

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*Jnanadeepa* (=“Light of Wisdom” ) is a biannual interdisciplinary journal of religious studies from an Indian Christian perspective. It is closely associated with Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth: Pontifical Institute of Philosophy and Religion, Pune 411014, India.

*Jnanadeepa* is published biannually, in January and July. Views expressed by the writers are not necessarily those of the editors. Manuscripts submitted for publication should be original and cannot be returned (writers' style sheet is available on request); they could be sent (preferably as a text or RTF file) in a computer diskette or through E-mail as file attachment.

All **correspondence** (requests for subscription, manuscripts, books for review – two copies, please – exchange copies of journals, advertisements, etc.) to:

**The Editor, *Jnanadeepa*, Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune 411014, India** Tel (office): +91-20-27034968, (res): +91-20-27034169 Fax: +91-20-27034801

E-mail:<thomaskuri@hotmail.com>  
<journalpune@gmail.com>

**Subscriptions** could be sent from India either by Money Order or Demand Draft. From foreign countries International Money Order or Crossed Cheque is preferred. From Commonwealth countries British Postal Order is preferred. All payments are to be made in the name of *Jnanadeepa Journal*.

Typeset & print: JDV Computer Centre  
Publisher: Thomas Kuriacose for Jnana Deepa Publications.  
ISSN: 0972-3331

### **Subscription Rates**

<i>Country</i>	<i>One year</i>	<i>Three years</i>
India	Ind. Rs. 80	Ind. Rs. 200
SAARC Countries	Ind. Rs.140	Ind. Rs. 400
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Personal Life Subscription	Rs 3,000(India)	US \$ (Euro)350

## Editorial

Over the past three decades there has been extensive exploration of spirituality and religion in its connection with social work. Religion has played a central role in the development of social work as a profession. Historically social work originated under the inspiration of the Judeo-Christian religious traditions of its founders. Religious ideas and teachings have influenced the development of social work concept in general and the principles and values in particular. There have been attempts to establish that the major religions show compatibility with social work. Thus religion has close connections with social work, workers and exponents of religions often perform functions complimentary and they are significant sources of referrals to each other. The social work profession in the process of helping the needy often makes use of the resources available with the religious organizations.

Spirituality for its connections with social work has been a matter of discussion throughout the development of social work. During the last two decades there is promising literature on the subject of spirituality in social work and spiritually sensitive social work practice.

In the context of social work there has been explanation in which the terms spirituality and religion are commonly used spirituality. As noted by scholars, spirituality involves understanding the interconnectedness of self with others and with the universe.

The connection between spirituality and religion are not clearly understood and therefore often argued. Spirituality and religion are separate, though often related. Spirituality is considered as an experience or feeling of unity or closeness with God, thus it is a very personal aspect of his/her being in connection with others. Whenever there is an attempt to organize this spiritual experience in the institutionalized context, it takes the form of a religion.

From the above discussion a few obvious questions arise: What is the connection between spirituality and religion with social work? What is the extent of inspiration and influence of religion and spirituality on social work education? Does social work education and training have any effect on the practice of spirituality or religion? What are the reasons for social workers showing increased interest in spirituality and religion?

The international conference on ‘Religion, Spirituality and Social Work’ was organized to provide a forum for discussion and deliberations on these and such other questions. The conference highlighted the role of spirituality and religion in social work education and practice. It also sought to explore the connections and inter-linkages between religion, spirituality and social work profession. The focus of the Conference was to bring concerned personnel and institutions on a common platform to debate and discuss issues and practices associated with the conference theme. Eminent scholars, researchers, practitioners, trainers and the representatives of various organizations participated actively in the conference.

So the papers in this volume are selected and revised presentations of the First International Conference on Spirituality and Social Work with the theme “Religion, Spirituality and Social Work: Exploring Connections” December 28 to 30, 2011. It was organized by Centre for Studies in Rural Development-Institute of Social Work and Research (CSR-D-ISWR), Ahmednagar is one of the pioneer institutions in community extension and social work education in India and was supported by Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth Centre for Science-Religion Studies.

The main objectives of the conference are:

- To explore new vistas of Spirituality, religion and its connection with Social work education and practice
- To bring together theoretical discourse and empirical contributions on Social work education and practice

- To discuss the relevance, relations and challenges before social work profession

The papers in this volume, all seeking to delve into the intricate relationship among religion, spirituality and social work are written by social workers and theoreticians.

The first section takes up general themes and relationships on religion, spirituality and social work. In the first paper, Prof Kuruvilla Pandikattu, one of the editors of this book, bases himself on two broad categories of general spirituality – the Eastern and the Western, though he limits the Eastern understanding primarily to the Hindu and Western primarily to the Christian spiritualities. The aim of this chapter is to draw some orientations from both these spiritualities which can inspire contemporary search for authenticity.

Going beyond the popular stereotypes of the spirituality (and therefore, mysticism) of Indian and Western traditions, the author wants to broadly reflect on the spirituality of the Western tradition as that of service. Then he reflects on the spirituality of the Indian tradition as that of silence. This is followed by giving two illustrations of two great spiritual personalities which may be complemented by “Spirituality of Silence,” of the Eastern tradition. He gives examples of two contemporaries seers to illustrate these tendencies. Finally, the author advocates a spirituality that is open to the world and that enters into creative dialogue with other traditions, a spirituality that enhances the living conditions of the poor and at the same time opens them to the interiority of their own beings. Such a spirituality, it is hoped, will contribute towards better human authenticity and sustainability of our world – ecologically, economically and spiritually! That would be a meaningful spirituality for contemporary social work, according to the author.

The second paper, by Dr Suresh Pathare, Director of CSRD and the main organizer of the international conference, is an attempt to explore the connections between religion, spirituality and ethics

in the paradigm of professional social work. In the first part the author presents an overview of historical trends of the connection between spirituality, religion and social work profession. Then he 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 he draws 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.

The next article by Pankaj Kumar Das and Dr. Vijay Mane, social work professors from Yashwantrao Chavan School of Social Work, Satara, Maharashtra, talks of religion, spirituality and ethics of social work from an Indian perspective. It is common observation in India that people, whether intellectual or illiterate, are happier discussing their personal psycho-social problems with priests, astrologers, tantrics etc, than 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. Throughout Indian history, religion has been an important part of the country's culture. Religious diversity and religious tolerance have deep historical roots which are established in the country by law and custom.

This chapter makes an effort to substantiate these theoretical assumptions about Religion, Spirituality and Ethics of Social Work from Indian perspective. The authors conclude by asserting that materialism promoted by science has failed to give the real meaning to the ultimate purpose of life. The number of suicides cases is on rise. The feeling of emptiness and hopelessness is growing among Indian people's life. As a helping profession, Social Work should take a strategic step to incorporate Religion and Spirituality in Social Work education and practice so that we can "help people to help themselves in true sense".



The next paper by Dr. Jayashree M Mehta and Dr. S.V. Hippargi Director and Professor of Bharati Vidyapeeth Abhijit Kadam Institute of Management and Social Sciences, dwells on spirituality as the heart of all development. Today the ideal of development as a continuing process of growth, creation, improvement and positive change has yielded to a reality more frequently marked by destruction, division, deprivation and depletion. The difference between the cherished ideal and the cruel reality finds its roots in a poverty of values and spirituality. That poverty, hunger and other deprivations persist in an age of global plenty is not an issue of logistics, technology or financing so much as a question of values and morality. Setting a clear and defined course of action that we all agree on with regard to the development agenda is important but we must not forget that the world cannot be changed with plans alone. It can only change when our value, attitude and action change. The crisis of the non-implementation of action plans is itself a crisis of values – a spiritual challenge. The authors hold that people who wish to have moral harmony in the world, in their nation and society, should first cultivate their personal lives by inculcating righteousness and a sincere will. This is the foundation of a happy, prosperous life for all, from the emperor down to the common man. Thus spirituality is the heart of all development, including social work and development.

Spirituality and values have not occupied a prominent place in the development agenda of recent decades. However if development concern the relationship between people and people on the one hand and people and nature on the other then sustainable development that sustains people and respects nature requires that such relationships be based on and guided by fundamental human values and a spiritual perspective of life.

The next two articles deal with Buddhism and social work. The first paper by Dr. Mrs. Nisha C Waghmare, Walchand College of Arts and Science, Solapur, Maharashtra reflects on Buddhism as the Pioneer of Social Work Practices. Although Social work education originated outside India, the same cannot be said about

the social work practices. The earliest references of social work in the world date back to the period of Buddha and the Mauryan period of ancient India which has been acclaimed as the golden era of India. This was a period of about 1500 years during which Buddhism flourished not only in all the nooks and corners of the India but abroad as well. Buddhism, one of the most ancient religions of the world is India's earliest endeavor in social work / social welfare practises. Gautam Buddha, the founder of Buddhism attacked the unjust social practices prevalent at that time. The society was governed by the birth based Varna system, under which the society was divided into four Varnas viz. the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and the Shudras. The upper three Varnas enjoyed all the privileges while disabilities were heaped upon the Shudras. The status of women too was denigrated and was treated at par with the Shudras. The animal sacrifice was widely practiced. Buddhism vehemently attacked the then prevalent Varna system which discriminated against human beings on the basis of birth based Varna system under which the Shudras and the women suffered the most. Buddhism admitted the Shudras and the women into its fold and gave them an equal status. The emancipation of the Shudras and the women, thanks to the efforts of the Sangha led by Buddha was a great step forward in social transformation from the unjust Varna system to a progressive society based on the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity.

The author sees Buddhist Sangha as an organization of dedicated monks that played pivotal role in effecting the social transformation in India in that period. The Sangha undertook not only religious preaching but also a number of social services and social welfare activities as well. Thus the author shows that the Buddhism and especially the Sangha were the pioneers of social work practices not only in India but the world.

This is complemented and enlarged by the Atul Lalasaheb More, an active social worker, who looks at Buddhism in the contemporary context of religion.

The article by James Ponniah, Dean, Faculty of Philosophy, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, India, explores the Discriminating Social Structures and Empowering Religious Resources in the context of social work. This paper aims to explore the mediating role of religion between the vulnerable groups and the process of development. Interfacing between the socially discriminated marginal subjects and the all encompassing process of development—especially in the age of globalization, religion provides for the subalterns an alternative space that: generates symbolic power to negotiate welfare schemes with the state; upholds their human dignity and identity assertion; facilitates their contestation of the discriminatory caste system and the negation of its inequality; displays and safeguards their newly gained socio-economic status. By doing this, religion contributes for the affirmation of UN charter's faith in the dignity and worth of the human person and its determination to promote social progress and development for the vulnerable groups. However, religion, by seeking to ensure the protection of the environment through the folk religious practices of the subalterns, does not fail to critique the process of development when the latter seeks to devastate mother nature.

The next article by Dr. Nazir Jabbar Sheikh, Asst. Professor, Manavlok's College of Social Science, Ambajogai Dist Beed, Maharashtra, deals with Islam. Cultural competency is fundamental social work. The result-oriented social work is practiced by considering the cultural and religious aspects of community and application of appropriate indigenous knowledge of the community. Islam, one of the world's largest religion, an excellent source for formulating principles and values for social workers, yet to be taken into consideration at large extent. Understanding its beliefs and practices has become essential knowledge for practicing social work. "Quran", "Hadith" and "Shariat" are the best sources for understanding Islam and its beliefs and searching the solution of the problem inside. Irrespective of considering cultural and religious diversities, the western model for social work practice is followed. After fifty

years of social work, practice we are developing a model included religious values and spiritual aspects for practice.

This paper examines the relevance values in Islam with social work, and references in the light of “Quran”, “Hadith” and “Shariat” for social work practices. The discussion is also made on the practical aspects of religion for social work intervention and strategies for work with Muslim leading for Workers cultural competency for effective social work.

This is followed by the article of Dr. Rama Achyut Pande, Manavloks College of Social Sciences, Ambajogai Dist Beed. He treats social work from the Hindu perspective. Social work and human history go together. Social Work was always in human societies although it begins to be a defined pursuit and profession in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Professional social workers work with individuals, groups, families, organization and communities. While working with them social workers should concern with their social problems, their causes and their solutions. At the same time they should concern about the culture of community, their customs, traditions and religious beliefs, values and ethics. Because each religion and culture have their own techniques or sources to solve their problems. India has had a glorious tradition of spirituality and religion. As each religion teaches us the philosophy of humanity as Daya, Karuna, Ahimsa, Equality, Human Rights and Social Justice, Dignity of Individual. In Veershiva religion there was no dignity to man and manual work Basveshwara of Veershiva spiritual religion find out some solution to abolish social evils which were created in justice in the society. Intervention sources of Veerashiva religion to solve the social problem were very effective be not only preached them to attain social justice.

In this paper researcher intended to trace the similarities between Veershiva a religion and social work, social issues focused by Veershiva's and the intervention sources available in the Veershiva religion practiced by Basaveshwara - Anubhav Mantap (a spiritual parliament) Kayak (Work as worship and Vachana's

rational progressive thoughts) which was created literacy revolution. As Veershiva religion developed its own culture which implies harmonious relationship between an individual and his society. This religion have spiritual base which is based on the doctrine of Kayakve Kailasa' which means that work is worship and by this tried to attain dignity of man and manual work and thus attain principal of 'dignity of man' which is also a principal of professional social work.

As social work grew out of humanitarian and democratic ideas and its values are based on respect for the equality, worth and dignity of all people. It focuses on meeting human needs and developing human potentials, human rights and social justice. In concern with this all these values and principles were focused in Veerashiva religion, while working with the people Basaveshwara used the sources of intervention of Veerashiva religion. It is the need of the day that professional social workers should concern about these values, principles, culture of to solve the social problems.

The final article by Prof Sanjai Bhatt, Department of Social Work, University of Delhi, explore further on the intimate relationship among Religion, Spirituality and Social Work Engagement. He considers the interconnected of these independent concepts and urges that Spirituality should be brought as part of practicing skills in the education. There is more need to include the same in syllabi of Social work courses.

We hope this this book will be able to enlighten us on the complex and dynamic relationship between spirituality and social work. If the readers are inspired to look deeper into social work and broader into spirituality, we consider that our effort has borne fruit.

Suresh Pathare  
Kuruvilla Pandikattu  
(Guest Editors)