

Religion, Spirituality and Social Work Practice: The Christian Perspective

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Abstract

Majority of Indians identify themselves with religion and some sort of spirituality. People confronted with concerns such as trauma, illness, loss or bereavement, substance abuse or violence, are likely to seek solace in spiritual and religious beliefs and support systems. An important component of social work practice is the assessment of the client's needs. Social work strives to take the clients from where they are, utilizing their strengths to an improved quality of their life. Serving needy people, social work incorporates interventions that take to account the biological, psychological, sociological and economical aspects. The importance of religion and spirituality in the lives of people, demands that social work practitioners develop the ability to incorporate clients' religion and spiritual beliefs also into the process of giving assistance. Any model of generalist practice that does not incorporate a conception of the social workers role, responsibility and resources relative to beneficiary's religious and spiritual interests does not address the totality of the beneficiary's capacity. It will inevitably fail to help the beneficiary reach the full potential. It is a fact that, though when major religions of the world appeared, the concept and practice of social work, as it's understood in modern times, did not exist. However, the religious ideologies of Christianity did set up many approaches and practices which clearly overlap with this 'helping profession'. This paper makes an effort to substantiate the above mentioned theoretical assumptions about religion, spirituality and social work practice from a Christian perspective.

Keywords: Spirituality, Religion, Professional Social Work, Christianity, Social Work Practice

The profession of social work seeks to promote social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance their well-being. Utilizing 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.¹

In a general sense social work can be defined as the process of helping people so that they can help themselves. The purpose of the social work profession is to promote human well-being by strengthening opportunities, resources, and capacities of people and to create policies and provide services to prevent and address conditions that limit human rights and the quality of life. Acknowledging a global perspective, the social work profession strives to eliminate poverty, discrimination, and oppression according to the Council on Social Work Education.

¹ Definition of Social Work adopted by the International Federation of Social Workers General Meeting in Montreal, Canada, July 2000. Source <http://ifsw.org/policies/definition-of-social-work/> (Accessed on 10.06.2013).

Over the past three decades there has been an extensive exploration of spirituality and religion in its connection with social work. Christianity has played a central role in the development of social work as a profession. Historically, social work originated under the inspiration of Judeo-Christian religious traditions. The Biblical ideas and teachings of Christianity have influenced the development of the concept of social work in general and its principals and values in particular.

1. Origin and Growth of Social Work Education

The concept of social work, as it is understood in present times originated in the USA in early 19th century. It was further strengthened during the Social Gospel movement - a Protestant Christian intellectual movement in early 19th century. The movement applied Christian ethics to social problems, especially issues of social justice such as economic inequality, poverty, alcoholism, crime, racial tensions, slums, poor hygiene, child labour, inadequate labour unions, poor schools, and the danger of war. Theologically, the Social Gospellers sought to operationalize the *Lord's Prayer* (Mat. - 6:10), "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."²

The Social Gospel movement flourished under the leadership of Walter Rauschenbusch, a Christian theologian and Baptist pastor, and Washington Gladden, a leading American Congregational pastor and early leader in the Social Gospel movement. Rauschenbusch's view of Christianity was that its purpose was to spread the Kingdom of God, not through a fire and brimstone style of preaching but by leading a Christ-like life. Rauschenbusch did not view Jesus' death as an act of substitutionary atonement but in his words, he died "to substitute love for selfishness as the basis of human society."³ He wrote that "Christianity is in its nature revolutionary" and tried to remind society of the same.⁴ He explained that the Kingdom of God "is not a matter of getting individuals to heaven, but of transforming the life on earth into the harmony of heaven"; the significance of this work is that it spoke of the individual's responsibility toward society.⁵

Another leader of Social Gospel movement, Washington Gladden, was a leading American Congregational pastor. He believed that all Christians must dedicate themselves to the mission of Jesus Christ. They must fight corruption and greed. They must also do all in their power to help their fellow men and women. Numerous people during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century held these beliefs.

The leaders of the Social Gospel movement believed in social progress and the essential goodness of humanity. The views of the Social Gospel movement were given formal expression in 1908 when the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America adopted what was later called 'the social creed of the churches'. Advocated in the creed were the abolition of child labour, better working conditions for women, one day off during the week, and the right of every worker to a living wage. The Social Gospel movement proclaimed that "the great ends of the church are the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the

² Cecelia Tichi, *Civic Passions: Seven who Launched Progressive America (and What They Teach Us)*, 2009, p.221.

³ Walter Rauschenbusch, Washington Gladden, and Jacob Riis, *The Lectionary*, http://satucket.com/lectionary/rauschenbusch_gladden_riis.html (Accessed on 30.04.2017).

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Walter Rauschenbusch, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Rauschenbusch, (Accessed on 10. 06. 2013).

preservation of truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.⁶

Many reformers inspired by the Social Gospel movement opened settlement houses, most notably Hull House in Chicago operated by Jane Addams. Jane Addams was a pioneer settlement worker, philosopher, sociologist, author, and leader in woman suffrage and world peace. Through Hull House, she helped the poor and immigrants improve their lives. Settlement houses offered services such as day-care, education, and health care to the needy people in slum neighbourhoods.

The Young Man's Christian Association (YMCA) was created originally to help rural youth adjust to the city without losing their religion, but by the 1890s became a powerful instrument of the Social Gospel. Nearly all the denominations, including Catholics, engaged in foreign missions, which often had a social gospel component in terms especially of medical uplift.

With the rise of the organized labour movement in the early 20th century, the Social Gospel movement lost much of its appeal as an independent force. However, many of its ideals were later embodied in the New Deal legislation of the 1930s.

2. The Beginning of Social Work Education in India

Mahatma Jyotiba Phule founded the Satyashodak Samaj (Society for Truth Seekers), in 1873⁷ which was the first major organization in the field of Social Work. He insisted on scholarly study of the problems for which they sought solutions. He thus paved the way for a rational and scientific, if not professional, approach to the solution of social problems. Another precursor to professional social work was the Social Service League in Bombay which started a training class in 1924, to train the voluntary cadre for social development. They offered a series of lectures on social subjects and introduced the students to the various social work activities being carried out in the city, for voluntary unpaid services. Apart from that, Social work in India has been, in large measure, a matter of apprentice training. The young social worker learned from being associated with an older worker, or even more commonly, by engaging in work and acquiring a technique and proficiency through experience. The first professional school of social work, Sir Dorabji Tata Graduate School of Social Work was set up in Bombay by Sir Dorabji Tata trust in 1936, with an American Missionary, Sir Clifford Manshardt, as its first director. This school is now known as the Tata Institute of Social Science. Sir Manshardt had obtained his social work experience in a settlement house in Chicago. He had founded a settlement house called the Nagpada neighbourhood house in Bombay. He was convinced that in order to raise the standard of social work in India appreciably, a permanent school of social work was needed, to engage in a continuous study of Indian social problems and to offer training for social work at the post graduate level. This school was initiated in the Nagpada Neighbourhood house. To start the school, the bibliography was prepared by the University of Chicago library and curriculum planning was drawn from American and British Schools of Social Work. Thus, started the legacy of American Professional Social Work in India.⁸

⁶ The Six Great Ends of the Church, *Book of Order F-1.0304*, http://spartapresbyterian.org/six_ends.php, (Accessed on 01.05.2017).

⁷ Cfr. Braj Ranjan Mani, *Debrahmanising History: Dominance and Resistance in Indian Society* (Extensively Revised Edition), Delhi, Manohar Publishing & Distributors, 2015, P. 262. (Editor's note)

⁸ Murli Desai, *Ideologies and Social Work: Historical and Contemporary Analysis*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 2002, pp.

3. Influence of Christianity on Social Work Education in India

The Christians who constitute 2.3% of total population of India⁹ have had a major influence in establishing and promoting social work education in India. The significant contribution of Christian Institutions in development of social work profession in India can be understood by the fact that, the major schools of social work are founded under the auspices of the Christian Missionaries. The chronology of the growth of social work education and social work institutions in India are as follows:

Tata Institute of Social Science (TISS), Mumbai (1936)

The first social work school in Asia – Tata Institute of Social Science (TISS) at Mumbai was established under the leadership of American Missionary Clifford Manshardt.

Delhi School of School of Social Work (DSSW), New Delhi (1946)

The Young Women Christian Association of YWCA of India, Burma and Ceylon (which is now known as National YWCA of India) established National YWCA School of Social Work at Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh and became the second school of social work in India after TISS. This school was set up with a substantial assistance from the foreign division of the YWCA of United States. The school started under the directorship of Ms. Nora Ventura who was the then Secretary of Religious Education Committee of the YWCA, with two students – one from Sindh and the other from Bengal. Later in 1946 Ms. Elmina Lucke, a noted social work educationist of considerable standing and experience, took over as Consultant Organizer of the School. In 1947 the school moved to Delhi and with the efforts of the then Vice Chancellor of University of Delhi, Sir Maurice Gwyer, the old Air Force Barracks located on the corner of the Mall Road and 3 University Road was given to the School. Due to the initiatives and efforts of Ms. Lucke, postgraduate programme was started in 1948 which was affiliated to the University of Delhi, and the name was changed to Delhi School of Social Work. Dorothy Moses was appointed as the First Principal of the School. She was succeeded by M. S. Gore and S. N. Ranade. DSSW was taken over by University of Delhi in 1962 and became a post graduate institution maintained by the university. PhD programme was started in 1965 and MPhil Programme was introduced in 1976. In 1979 DSSW became the Department of Social Work in the University.¹⁰

Indore School of Social Work (1951)

Indore School of Social Work was founded in 1951 by the Indore Christian College at the instance of the Madhya Bharat State Branch of the Indian Conference of Social Work. In 1955, the Board of Governors of the Indore Christian College invited (Mrs.) Winifred Bryce, a well-known sociologist, educationist and social worker, and a former Principal of Indore Christian College, to head the School. With her vast experience of education and social welfare work in India, mainly in the Malwa region, for over forty years; under her leadership the school was raised to the graduate diploma standard offering a one-year course in Social Work. The next important milestone in the development of the School was its transformation into a postgraduate

135-36.

⁹ www.censusindia.gov.in, (Accessed on 10.06.2013).

¹⁰ About the Department of Social Work, Delhi University, <http://www.du.ac.in>, (Accessed on 10.06.2013).

department of the Indore Christian College with affiliation to the Vikram University for the Degree of Master of Arts in Social Work, in 1961. Much of the credit for raising the School to this standard goes to Dr. Bryce and to Dr. C. W. David, the then Principal of the Indore Christian College. In the following year, Dr. Bryce retired and went home to Canada, but she continued to take an active interest in the School until her death in 1967. In 1970 the School instituted a prize in the memory of Dr. Bryce. Miss Mavis Bowen succeeded Dr. Bryce as Head of the Department in 1962.¹¹

College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan, Mumbai (1955)

Nirmala Niketan was founded by a band of valiant women known as Daughters of the Heart of Mary, whose mission was to readily respond to the felt needs of the people according to the signs of the time. In the years following the Independence of India, the founders – Ms Paiva Couceiro, Ms Collette Galby and Dr Dorothy Baker realized that the nation's struggle for development would be served not so much by sensitive social concern as by insightful committed action. This led to the conceptualization of a programme of social work education to prepare young people to undertake and assist in resolving the existing social problems like widespread poverty.¹²

Rajagiri College of Social Sciences, Kalamassery, Cochin, Kerala (1955)

Initiated as a Department of Social Work at Sacred Heart College (Thevara), Rajagiri College of Social Sciences, owes its origin and success to the visionary congregation of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI), the first indigenous religious congregation for men in India. Francis Sales served as the founder director of the institute. Rajagiri College of Social Sciences was established as a result of the indefatigable industry and foresight of the CMI. The School of Social Work was one of the pioneering institutions in South India, establishing programmes and setting the standards for the field.¹³

Centre for Studies in Rural Development (CSRSD), Institute of Social Work & Research, Ahmednagar, Maharashtra (1962)

CSRSD was established in 1961 as an extension wing of Ahmednagar College. It was started as an initiative of Dr. T. Barnabas, then Principal of Ahmednagar College, with the involvement of faculty and student volunteers in rural development. With their initial experiments, Rural Life Development Programme (RLDP) was introduced in 1961. Subsequently, the RLDP was renamed as Centre for Studies in Rural Development (CSRSD). The Department of Social Work began functioning from CSRSD building since 1967. The certificate course was upgraded to one year post graduate course in social work (DSW) in 1969 and eventually to two-year Master of Social Work in 1974. Later in 1990 the Department of Social Work became the Institute of Social Work & Research as a full-fledged Institute with a full-time Director. Prof. S. K. Hulbe.¹⁴

Social Work education gained popularity in India post globalization. As of now, social work education is offered at more than four hundred institutes/ colleges across India.

¹¹ <http://isswindore.org/about/aboutus/background-of-the-college>, (Accessed on 10.06.2013).

¹² <http://cswnn.edu.in/> (Accessed on 10.06.2013).

¹³ <http://rcss.rajagiri.edu/a-brief-history>, (Accessed on 10.06.2013).

¹⁴ <http://www.csrdd.edu.in/genesis.htm>, (Accessed on 10.06.2013).

4. The Value Base of Social Work Profession

Social work is a practice profession. While a value base is necessary for all professions, it is crucial for social work. The values and concepts of the profession are compassion, care, recognizing the dignity and worth of an individual, welfare of the needy, social justice, tolerance, the integrity and competence of the self, clearly drawn essentially from the Christian perspective. Social work's professional value base is uncompromisingly congruent with the Bible. While other disciplines may struggle with finding a Biblical mandate for their existence, social work does not. Social work embodies the commission of Matthew 25:40 - doing "unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" in the Bible; through organized professional services that use social work policies, practices, and expertise to accomplish its purposes. Christian social workers draw their inspiration for social work from the Bible, while others try to absorb it from their personal life experiences and their respective scriptural sources.

Sl. No.	Social Work Values	Biblical Text supporting Core Social Work Values
1	Compassion	Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12 2 Corinthians 1:3-5; 1 Peter 3:8 1 John 3:17; Acts 20:35 Hebrews 10:34
2	Care	Isaiah 58:10,11; James 1:27
3	Service	Mathew 25:31-45; Luke 10:25-37 Deuteronomy 10:18-20.
4	Social Justice	Micah 6:7-9; Isaiah 58:6
5	The dignity and worth of the person	Genesis 1:27; Isaiah 49:14-16 Mathew
6	The importance of Human relationship	Mathew 5:23-24 Mark 12:31
7	The integrity and competence of the worker	Mathew 25:14-28 Timothy 2:15

Table 1: Social Work Values and the supporting Biblical texts

4.1 Compassion

Compassion is the understanding or empathy for the suffering of others. Mahatma Gandhi has once opined "[i]t is easy enough to be friendly to one's friends. But to befriend the one who regards himself as your enemy is the quintessence of true religion. The other is mere business". The core of Christian faith is 'Compassion', it (Deut. 4:31) clearly states the nature of God, "For the LORD your God is a compassionate God; He will not fail you nor destroy you nor forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to them."¹⁵ The Bible talks about compassion in many places. (Eph. 4:32) - "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as

¹⁵ All biblical quotation and references used in this article are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New International Version, Authentic Publishing, India.

God in Christ forgave you." (Col. 3:14) - Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. (2Cor. 1:3-5) - Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. (1 Pet. 3:8) - Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. (1 Jn. 3:17) - But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? (Acts 20:35) - In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ' [i]t is more blessed to give than to receive'. (Zech. 7:9) - "Thus says the Lord of hosts, Render true judgements, show kindness and mercy to one another. (Jude 1:22) - And have mercy on those who doubt; (Heb. 10:34) For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

4.2 Care

Mother Teresa has once said "If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other". Rarely do we witness the act of care. No one has ever become poor by giving or caring for others. It is time to care, it is time to take responsibility, it is time to lead, it is time for a change, it is time to be true to our greatest self, and it is time to stop blaming others. Love, care and compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Without them, humanity cannot survive. There is no exercise better for the heart than reaching down and lifting people up. Mind the words of Martin Luther King Junior "The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was: "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?" But... the Good Samaritan reversed the question: "If I do stop to help this man, what will happen to him?"" Bible talks about care loudly in (Deut. 10:18-20) - "He (God) defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt. Fear the Lord your God and serve him"; (Is. 58:10, 11) - "If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun- scorched land and will strengthen your frame"; and (Heb. 13:3) - "Remember that prison as if you were their fellow prisoners and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering".

4.3 Service

Christianity has given an iconic figure to the world, which was, is and will be a symbol of service to the world, that of Mother Teresa. She has said that at the end of life we will not be judged by how many diplomas we have received how much money we have made, how many things we have done. We will be judged by (Mat. 25:35, 36, 40) - I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was naked and you clothed me. I was homeless, and you took me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.... I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me. (James 1:27) - "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure

and faultless in this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world”.

Pearl S. Buck has said “To serve is beautiful, but only if it is done with joy, a whole heart, and a free mind.”¹⁶ Christian social workers get joy in serving people because in doing so they know that they are serving God.

4.4 Social Justice

Craig M. Gay says, “Christian hope frees people to act hopefully in the world. It enables us to act humbly and patiently, tackling visible injustices in the world around us without needing to be assured that our skill and our effort will somehow rid the world of injustices altogether. Christian hope, after all does not need to see what it hopes for (Heb.11:1); and neither does it require us to comprehend the end of history. Rather, it simply requires us to trust that even the most outwardly insignificant of faithful actions - the cup of cup of cold water given to the child, the widow’s mite offered at the temple, the act of hospitality shown to the stranger, none of which has any overall strategic socio – political significance so far as we can now see – will nevertheless be made to contribute in some significant way to the construction of God’s kingdom by the action of God’s creative and sovereign grace.”¹⁷ The Bible says,

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to lose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with helter – when you see the naked, to cloth them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will rise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer. (Is. 58:6-12)

4.5 The dignity and worth of the person

Every life deserves a certain amount of dignity, no matter how poor or damaged the shell that carries it. Dignity is as essential to human life as water, food, and oxygen. The stubborn retention of it, even in the face of extreme physical hardship, can hold a man’s soul in his body long past the point at which the body should have surrendered it. Gen. 1:27 says that “God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Is 49: 14- 16) – But Zion said, “The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten

¹⁶ A Survey of Ministers Wives, *Christianity Today*, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/1981/fall/8114064.html>, (Accessed on 01.05.2017).

¹⁷ <http://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/1736817-the-way-of-the-modern-world-or-why-it-s-tempting-to-live-as-if-god-d> (Accessed on 01.05.2017).

me. Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me.”

4.6 The importance of Human relationship

If civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationships - the ability of all peoples, of all kinds, to live together, in the same world at peace. Trust is to human relationships what faith is to gospel living. It is the beginning place, the foundation upon which more can be built. Where trust is, love can flourish. Mk. 12:30-31 verses say that “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’. There is no commandment greater than these”.

4.7 The integrity and competence of the worker

“Whoever is careless with the truth in small matters cannot be trusted with important matters”, said Albert Einstein. Bible talks about integrity in many place i.e. parable of bags of Gold (Mat. 25:14-26). In (Tim 2:15), it is mentioned that “Do your best to present yourself of God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth”. These verses are guiding ethics for Christian social workers.

5. Faith and Service

Pioneering social work began in response to industrialization and its effects on society. It was Christian religious settlement workers, who began, financed, and staffed these first programs to marginalized inner-city populations. The first sponsors of social service programs to institutions, and there is evidence that the people who were the early leaders of the settlement house movement and the charity organizations shared a sense of spiritual mission.

However a large number of social workers, regardless of their personal religions afflictions, are trained to think that the religion has no relevance for their everyday professional practice, according to Ram A. Cnaan. The rational being given that the social work profession operates from psycho socioeconomic perspectives, with the purpose of enhancing the interactions between people and their environment. People should not be seen only as bio/psycho or social beings, but also as beings with the existential and spiritual dimension. A number of social work authors Dedley and Herlgoft have expressed that the human experience of religion and spirituality has been somewhat neglected in social work education and practice.

Not only was early social work practice spiritually grounded, but early social work education recognized the value of spirituality as well. The earliest Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) curriculum standards included issues of spirituality, but those requirements were removed in the 1970s. Hugen 1998 argues that social work originated because of the influence and values of Judeo-Christian traditions as people translated their understanding of their faith into social action.¹⁸ Even Jane Addams recognized the vital role Christianity played in the

¹⁸ Tiffany R. Harris, “On Integrating Christian Faith and Social Work Practice: How do People do it?,” *North American Association of Christians in Social Work (NACSW)*, 2008, pp.3-5.

settlement house movement.¹⁹ According to Hugen, it was not until the 20th century that the profession of social work began secularizing and replacing Judeo-Christian values with the values of natural rights, utilitarianism, and humanistic ideology. Hugen states: "Dealing with human need apart from religious motives and methods is actually a very recent development in the history of charity and philanthropy". Hodge stated that "Many scholars have noted that the field of social work is unfriendly if not outright hostile toward religion, especially toward people who are overtly proud of their religiosity."²⁰

With the changing times, Social Work as a discipline gradually adopted the socialistic thought promoted by Karl Marks, Emile Durkheim and Max Webber. In the process, the Biblical understanding of the concept of social work was somewhat lost in translation. In 1994, the International Federation of Social Workers had declared that "Social Work originated from humanitarian, religious and democratic ideals and philosophies and has universal application to meet human needs. Yet, majority of the recent Social Work literatures today give a feeling that religion has nothing to do with the social work profession. The notion of the 'just society' is visualized in terms of common humanitarian ground.

6. Spiritually Sensitive Social Work

The globalization phenomenon 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 a situation people seek solace in spiritual and religious beliefs and support systems as they provide relief to their body and peace to their mind. It is a common observation in India that people; irrespective of being educated or illiterate, are happy to discuss their personal psycho-social problems with priests, astrologers, *pundits*, etc. And people have no hesitation in paying them.

Significantly, a vast majority of Indian people identify themselves with religion and some sort of spirituality. India, the second most populous country in the world, with over 1.21 billion people according to the 2011 Census²¹, is the birth place of four of the world's major religious traditions; namely Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism.²²

Name of Religion	Percentage of total Population	Sex ratio
Hindu	80.5	931
Muslim	13.4	936
Christian	2.3	1009
Sikhs	1.9	893
Buddhists	0.8	953

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ For details, see Census of India, www.censusindia.net, (Accessed on 10.06.2013).

²² Phani Deka, *The Great Indian Corridor in the East*, Mittal Publications, 2007, p. 135.

Name of Religion	Percentage of total Population	Sex ratio
Jains	0.4	940
Other religions	0.6	992
India	100	933

Table 2: Distribution of Population by Religion groups and their sex ratio in India (Census 20011)

According to the 2011 census, devotees of Hinduism, a varied grouping of philosophical and devotional traditions officially numbered 80.5% of the population of India. Buddhists represented 0.8 per cent of the total population, while Jains represented 0.4 per cent in 2011 census. The Muslim population, 13.4 per cent in India, is the third largest in the world. India also has the largest population of people adhering to Zoroastrianism and Bahai Faith anywhere in the world. The Christians population who represent 2.3% of total population of India have had a major influence on India art, philosophy, and society and remain important minority religions since the late twentieth century.

Social work as a helping profession is designed to help needy people in their psycho-social emergencies. An important component of social work practice is the assessment of the client's needs. Religion and spirituality are important variables to enable the lives of the beneficiaries who have to cope with the deep problems. In a country like India, where all aspects of human life is largely influenced by religion and spirituality, it becomes significant to understand the religious ideologies of social work practitioners as well as of their clients. By doing so, the social work service delivery system will be more affective.²³

Traditionally, while serving needy people, social work has incorporated interventions that are limited with the biological, psychological, sociological and economical aspects. But, due to its importance, the ability to incorporate clients' religion and spiritual beliefs into the process of giving assistance becomes mandatory. Any model of generalist practice that does not incorporate a conception of the social workers role, responsibility and resources relative to beneficiaries religious and spiritual interests does not address the totality of the beneficiary's capacity. It will inevitably fail to help the beneficiary reach the full potential.

7. The Way Forward

Spirituality is one of the fundamental needs of human beings and this component should not be ignored while rendering services to the needy. While the common worldview supports helping the poor and needy strongly, somehow it is struggling to inspire the learners of Social Work on the components like: Selfless service, Compassion and Care. The religious ideologies of Christianity did set up many approaches and practices which clearly overlap with this 'helping profession'. The values of social Work profession i.e. "Compassion, Care, Service and Social Justice" are clearly drawn from a Biblical understanding which needs to be manifested in diverse cultural set up around the world. There is an urgent need to design and mainstream 'Spiritually sensitive Social Work Curriculum', so that social work practitioners may "help

²³ Pankaj Kumar Das and Vijay Mane, "Religion, Spirituality and Social Work Ethics: The Indian Perspective", *Sa-majdarshan Prakashan*, Pune, 2013, p. 89.

the people to help themselves” in the true sense. The Indian Universities offering social work education at Masters and Bachelors level should design and incorporate a separate paper on “Religion, Spirituality and Social Work”.

For Christian social workers, as of now, the motivation and inspiration comes from the Bible and Jesus Christ, the Messiah and the Saviour. Christian social workers know that while the poor may benefit from their social work services, they themselves are its greatest beneficiaries.