



# SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND PRACTICE ENGAGEMENT

Edited by  
Sanjai Bhatt • Suresh Pathare

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Sanjai Bhatt  
Suresh Pathare



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*Section I*  
**Social Work Education**

## Spiritually Sensitive Social Work

### An Emerging Model of Practice

Jaimon Varghese

Spiritual quest is intrinsic to human being. Spirituality is an integral dimension of human life. Men and women across the world spend a considerable time and resources in spiritual endeavours. Besides motivating to form spiritual and religious movements, this quest has enhanced to commitment for just, inclusive and sustainable societies. The recently held international conference on spirituality and social work at Ahmednagar has reemphasized the role of spirituality in enhancing social commitment. Spirituality has ever been the chief motivator for social entrepreneurs who have contributed towards the social, economic and cultural development of various societies across the world. People seek solutions to their problems in spiritual and religious sectors of life. Social work profession which is basically a helping activity cannot ignore these aspects of human life. On the other hand, it is better to integrate the spiritual aspects in their professional practice. It is an emerging model of social work practice. It has almost well established in the west. India, having a rich religious and spiritual heritage, has great scope for developing a new concentration (specialization) of spiritually sensitive social work. This paper highlights various dimensions of spiritually sensitive social work and attempts to frame syllabus for an elective paper on spirituality sensitive social work.

#### Spirituality and Spiritually Sensitive Social Work

Some literature has been reviewed to convey the significance of spirituality in the lives of human beings. Humans live by ideas and ideals. It can be found that everyone on this earth is in search for some great ideas and ideals to orient their lives. The idea of 'God' has always fascinated people of every nation. *'Millions of people had loved God and have let that love purge their souls, without knowing in the least how to define God. All they have needed is the firm conviction that God is good, and God is love – by no means the kind of concept which a scientist could approve. But our ideals are the jumping-off ground for new adventures in living, not for new discoveries of science. And for that purpose it is enough that we should grasp just a little of the reality which the ideal embraces'* (Urwick EJ, 1948). This firm conviction

became the basis of human spirituality in the past. Such spirituality is the foundation of the major world religions. Till recently, spirituality apart from the belief in God was seldom discussed. By the turn of the new millennium, spirituality is being considered independent of the belief in God or religion.

Today spirituality is considered as a matter of 'meaning making'. Spirituality is part of our world view and the frame of reference for everything on this earth. Our life is very much influenced by our spirituality. I would like to define spirituality operationally. It is different from the general understanding of the common man. Spirituality is that sense within us which gives meaning to my life, my relationships with everything else in this world. *'It (spirituality) includes our sense of order and chaos, our understanding of good and evil, and our belief in the form of a higher power. It finds expression the way we choose to live our lives. Spirituality takes the form of religious expression for some, but not for others'* (Wanda Wagler Martin, 2005: 136).

In this context, we need to differentiate religion from spirituality. Common men use them interchangeably. They share several things in common. However, what makes them different to each other is more important in the context of this paper. There is an intuitive knowledge in both. Both the religion and spirituality involves an experience of the transcendence, something extraordinary. It is important to understand that religion is the institutional aspect of spirituality, while spirituality is the soul of every religion. They are different in the sense that, *spirituality is a personal connection with the universe and religion involves a creed, institution and rituals* (Geri Miller, 2003: 6). Spirituality is the personal connection with the 'transcendent' while religion is a group, rather a mass approach (connection) to experience the connection with the 'transcendent'. Thus we can say that spirituality can have an existence apart from religion, but religion cannot exist apart from spirituality. The organizational and managerial part of religion involves political, economic, cultural, social and ethical considerations.

There is abundant literature available on the meaning and importance of spirituality especially in the context of social work. Spirituality is defined as *'the human quest for personal meaning and mutually fulfilling relationships among people, the non-human environment and for some, God'* (Canda, 1988: 243). Spirituality helps us to establish a working relationship with the universe and find a meaning in such relationship. Such spirituality is essential for cultivating the love of nature, the feeling of belongingness with the nature and above all to strengthen our motivation to protect the nature. Spirituality is sometimes defines as *'the connection to all that is in existence'* (Baskin, 2002: 2). This connectedness is the source of our inner strength, peace and harmony with the universe.

When we realize the benefits of being spiritual, we come to the conclusion that spirituality is one of the fundamental aspects of human development.