

PEACE AND SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

Mary Joseph

Abstract

Peace is sought after as a desirable goal in human society. The world now looks for sustainable peace, which can be achieved only with the realisation of social justice. Through its intervention for social justice in human society, the profession of social work plays an important role in the pursuit of peace in human society. Based on the discussions in a conference on world peace and social work education, this paper deals with peace in relation to certain issues, such as religion, environment, human rights, value education, social development and social work education. It also refers to certain peace initiatives undertaken at the grassroots.

Introduction

This article is based on the International Conference on World Peace and Social Work Education organised at the Rajagiri College of Social Sciences, Kalamassery, Kerala.¹ The inaugural session of the conference set the tone for the deliberations in the different sessions. It pointed out the triangular relationship among peace, social justice and social work profession, viz. sustainable peace cannot be achieved without bringing about social justice and social work intervention for social justice is a right course of action in pursuit of peace.

Peace requires relentless fight against war and terrorism on the one hand, and realisation of social justice on the other. Social justice requires eradication of social inequality at various levels, all types of religious fundamentalism, and environmental degeneration

caused by human interference in nature. Sustainable peace has to be built on strong values. Pursuit of peace, therefore, should be accompanied by value education in our educational institutions. It is the absence of the appropriate values that make peace often elusive, although everybody strives for it. We need to accept peace as not merely a right but a responsibility. In order to have peace in society we need to establish peace everywhere – in family, in small groups, in educational institutions, etc. Social work profession, through its programmes of social justice and value education, has an important role to play in the pursuit of sustainable peace. World peace is a great challenge to social work and the profession needs professionals with a global perspective to give leadership in the pursuit of peace in a shrinking world. Social work education has to equip itself to produce professionals who will have the requisite knowledge and skills to meet the challenge of peace in the present day society.

Peace and programmes of peace form a very broad area. It is beyond the scope of this article to undertake a comprehensive treatment of this topic. Following the pattern of discussions in the conference, this article confines itself to the consideration of seven issues related to peace, viz. religion and peace, environment and peace, human rights and peace, value education and peace, peace initiatives at the grassroots, social development and peace, and social work education and peace.

Religion and Peace²

World religions on the whole advocate some of the values that are basic to peace. They have always stood for equality and justice, love and brotherhood, mutual respect and tolerance. The modern value of secularism, which respects one another's religion, can be treated as an expression of the religious ethos of spirituality in a pluralist society. The religious virtues of self-abnegation and charity are values that express concern for fellow human beings that is basic to peace. World religions consider service to human beings as

sacred dharma or religious duty. Religion in its purity is an embodiment of values that are desired by all and are basic to sustain peace in humanity.

Spirituality, considered to be the core value of true religion, stands for the sublime human values that promote and strengthen peace – peace with oneself and peace with others. Today, when the world is ridden with conflicts and nations are looking for channels and formulae for peace, religion is expected to play an important role in institutionalisation of spirituality that embodies the basic values and principles of peace. It is the moral order maintained by the basic social values in human society that sustains peace. Where religious values are congruent with moral values and strengthen them, religion becomes an important source of peace in human society.

Religious values not merely help human beings coexist. Beyond coexistence religion promotes values that positively enable people to be together in harmony with one another. Discourses of the different religions are full of references on how religiosity or spirituality consists in living with others as fellow human beings. “Thus Religion that was given by God is not only the elaboration of doctrines and practices, but rather the vivid and personal summons to individuals and societies to live their lives always in His presence and to treat their fellow-men always under His judgement. If we are God fearing and religious that is the greatest guarantee to Peace on earth” (Mohammed 2005).

One can find in religion numerous references to values and beliefs that are basic to peace. For instance, the “Hindu perspective to World Peace is embodied in the Words of Upanishads: “All We see around us is permeated by the Divine spirit. Lead a life of sacrifice, never aspire for anyone else’s possessions”. Gandhiji said that even if all the scriptures of Hinduism are burnt down, remembering the one verse as quoted above would sustain the spirit of Hinduism for ever” (Menon 2005).

To live in peace with oneself human being needs to have answers to certain eternal questions of life. The ancient Greek philosophers like Aristotle and Plato, and the medieval religious thinkers like Thomas Aquinas provided the great philosophical

traditions of the western culture in which human beings could find a safe way of developing themselves. The modern philosophers of the west questioned the traditional concept of God and so to say freed human beings. This led to the isolation of human beings. “The Enlightenment cleared the way for the individual, who had the right, but also the duty to self-development, autonomous and fully free. The post-modern being feels himself becoming lonely in this freedom. The links with nature, with humans just have the quality of a contract, but there is no reciprocity anymore. On the contrary, people become rivals. And even worse, at the end the human being regards himself as his own rival. This is frustrating and depressing. He wants to feel the warmth of the other, but at the same time he may not and doesn’t want to give up his freedom” (Vandormael, 2005). There is no wonder if human beings in the modern society, hemmed in by the vicissitudes and uncertainties of life, look for solace in spirituality that is the real essence of religion.

It is ironical that religion at times becomes a source of conflict between groups of human beings. That happens when religion promotes the feelings of ethnic identity rather than spirituality or the followers of religion lose the basic religious value of spirituality. Peace becomes the casualty in the conflict between the glorification of religious ethnicity and spirituality. Absence of peace that results from religious sources in whatever form is the denial, if not misuse, of religion. It can be considered as the failure of religion in its social function of value education and support to the moral order. While the world religions preach and promote peace, their followers are increasingly creating situations that are prejudicial to peace. It is necessary that genuine spirituality of religion be placed in the forefront so that religious affiliation of individuals does not become a hindrance to healthy interpersonal and inter-group relationships. The element of spirituality should become dominant over the ethnic tendency of one group of human beings to subjugate another. Spirituality provides oneness to human beings either in the name of god or in the name of human dignity. Then religion can function as a source of peace in human society. This in turn requires that people have unprejudiced knowledge about the religions of other individuals. Social work education may respond to this need by

introducing in the curriculum contents that give the students knowledge about the basics of the different religions.

Environment and Peace³

The environment in which human beings live is closely related to peace, and misuse of environment adversely affects the situation of peace. Most of the environmental problems are caused by over-utilisation or over-exploitation of natural resources. Human beings live in constant interaction with the living and non-living environment. In the process the environment of human living has been subjected to enormous changes. In the name of development human beings world over have been transforming their environment in various ways. Today people of the world have started experiencing the scarcity of some of the natural resources that were considered to be in plenty. Water, energy and even fresh (or unpolluted) air are becoming increasingly scarce. “The natural resources were considered to be inexhaustible. People even thought that the natural resources were there to be exploited for the material development of mankind. Much of the economic development in the industrialised world was based on this idea. Now human beings realise the environmental fragility, which means that these natural resources could be depleted soon. The environment is not only a virtue but also a necessity” (Joy, 2005). Realisation of peace requires that people use the nature and its resources for human living and do not misuse or over-use them.

The natural balance in the environment has been constantly disturbed by human intervention. Human beings will not be able to live peacefully in an environment that is made increasingly hostile to themselves through mindless human intervention for extracting natural resources. The human environment is becoming increasingly unsafe for human living. Industrial and other technological developments have meddled with the natural environment and have damaged the healthy atmosphere. The waste produced by the developmental programmes added to the damage done to the environment.

Another stark reality in the exploitation of the natural environment is the unequal acquisition of the resources generated in the process. The developed countries have

immensely benefited from the exploitation of the natural environment. Under colonisation they appropriated the resources of the weaker and poorer countries. This is partly the reason for the backwardness of the developing countries. “The development should not be at the expenses of the other countries. Greedy people and countries for the sake of their development deteriorate nature and natural resources, which ultimately upset the peace of a society, locality, region and the country. Hence world peace is based on the peace of the societies and the societal peace is based on the conservation of our environment” (Joy, 2005). Inequality between the developed and developing countries exists not only in the access to resources but also in sharing of destructive by-products of intervention in nature. One might find that “all the environmental problems of the west had been solved and such problems existed only in the third world countries. In the poor countries the natural resources are severely strained by the growing population. The industrialised nations of the west have employed measures to minimise their environmental problems” (Joy, 2005).

Unequal access to natural resources among the different populations in the world has created the situation of the feeling of relative deprivation. It is the feeling of relative deprivation that is ultimately responsible for the strife and conflict between human groups that is a constant threat to peace in human society. Thus it is necessary that human beings preserve their environment from destruction and distortion so that they do not create situations conducive to disruption of peace. Mindless exploitation of the environment has within it another point of injustice. It is the extent of exploitation that results in the present populations usurping the resources that are the legitimate right of the future populations also. Thus the present plan is for a regulated exploitation of the environment or what is today known as sustainable development. World peace requires that human beings be in harmony with their environment.

An example of the grassroots level attempt at peace through environment protection is that of the Green Party in Germany. The Green Party has been the product of a movement at the grassroots for peace and environment protection that eventually became a political party to share power of the government in Germany. The movement in the

initial stages was known for opposition and protest against all that harmed peace and environment. The workers at the grassroots increasingly felt that they needed to assume political power in order to be effective in their programmes. Thus they formed into the political Green Party and contested elections. They won enough seats in the parliament to share political power in government of the country. Now the party had to cope with the political power. It had to change its strategy of opposition and protest to the difficult task of governing. The Green Party in power succeeded to bring to realisation some of its programmes of environmental protection.

At the same time it was not all smooth sail for the Green Party. “Another important field of green party – such as peace making and increasing human rights - turned out as a heavy burden for the Greens. They couldn’t keep up with their principles of non-violent peace policy in the governmental responsibility. They were forced to make painful compromises” (Nitsch and Nitsch, 2005). The Greens faced crisis in the context of the government’s support to the US military action in Afghanistan and in the intervention in Kosovo. But, to their credit, their presence and influence dissuaded the German government from supporting the American and British military action in Iraq.

Following are the lessons from the experiences of the Greens Party in Germany: “Participation in political power is necessary in order to realise progressive environmental and social goals. Opposition alone isn’t sufficient. Participation in political power demands compromises and partial corrections on original programmes. Therefore green parties in government are always in the danger of losing their profile and to become a “normal” political party. This danger must and can be balanced out by a strong network of NGO’s and other civil groups at all levels. It is their task to maintain the basic principles and goals of more peaceful and sustainable policy on the political agenda. In this way they support green parties in their governmental work. But in the same time they always have to remind green parties not to cut their green roots” (Nitsch and Nitsch, 2005).

Another grassroots level effort at peace and environment is the one undertaken at the campus of the Rajagiri College of Social Sciences. The vision of the Rajagiri College Social Sciences is to become a centre of excellence in learning, unique in experience, value based in its approach, and pioneering in its efforts for *enriching and fulfilling life*. Life in this vision statement is to be taken in the holistic perspective - life in all its realms and, in particular, human life in all its realms. The totality of human life consists of physical, mental, intellectual, spiritual and social realms. Life in the holistic perspective comprises all the organisms on earth – human, animal and plant – and the supportive environment. It is under this perspective that the Rajagiri College of Social Sciences is continuously engaged in making the campus environment-friendly while it is providing education to the students for enrichment of human life. “In this connection the College has promoted and continuously improved a commitment to a life-style which is to be in harmony with nature, with the environment. That peace consists in ‘harmony with the nature, which is the manifestation of the Really Real’, is the foundational principle and experiential truth that inspires this commitment” (Palakkappilli, 2005).

Rajagiri College strives to have a campus in tune with the rhythm of nature. There have been constant efforts to make the campus environment-friendly by introducing various programmes. Beginning with the basics a serious attempt is made to keep the campus litter free. The next step has been ‘zero waste management’ for which ‘segregation at the source’ is the principle applied. There are separate segregation bins and pits on the campus. Introduction of effective micro-organisms and earth worms for composting is another way of making the campus manure rich and waste free. Rajagiri College has taken the necessary steps to protect the environment through eradication of plastic from the campus and promotion of paper bags. A biogas plant has been installed in the premises of the College, from where cooking gas and bio manure are produced.

Rajagiri College of Social Sciences has made some notable achievements in the area of energy conservation. Aditya – the “Solar Shop”, first of its kind run by an educational institution, is one of them. Aditya solar shop is a showroom-cum-sales service centre at Kochi run by the Rajagiri College of Social Sciences since 1999. It is sponsored by the

Ministry of Non-conventional Energy Sources (MNES), Government of India. Aditya coordinates the activities of manufacturers, suppliers and NGO's working in the field of energy conservation. The MNES, Government of India also plays an important role in the functioning of the shop. The MNES provides grants-in-aid to run the shop and disburses Central Government subsidy for the items sold through the shop.

Human Rights and Peace⁴

Peace is not simply absence of war or conflict, but rather presence of justice, a situation wherein every human being gets what is due and no discrimination is shown to anyone on any grounds. Thus the issue of human rights is of great importance to peace. Real peace cannot be thought of without the realisation of the basic human rights. The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights identified the basic human rights that should be available to each every human being. The member countries of the United Nations are expected endorse them and ensure their realisation. But violation of human rights does take place that is detrimental to peace. There are several issues related to human rights and peace. First, the notion of the universality of human rights is at times misused. Second, there is a strong tendency to take a legalist view of human rights that often does not ensure human rights. Third, certain sections of the society, such as the poor, women and children are vulnerable to denial of human rights.

Actions under the doctrine of the universality of human rights can adversely affect the situation of peace. The weaker countries vis-à-vis the stronger ones have little option but to feel deprived of their own rights, which ultimately results in the crisis of peace. "It is not surprising that human rights movement has lately come to be associated with neo-imperialism and its human rights activist watch dogs have become suspects as extra-territorial loyalists. It is already in the vortex of international political storms. The doctrine of universality of human rights has been interpreted to supersede the principle of national sovereignty to justify military intervention by powerful members of the Security Council setting aside even the principle of consensus determination by veto-holding powers not to speak of determination by decisive majorities of Assembly" (Jain, 2005). This is a helpless scenario in the world with reference to protection of human rights, viz.

when powerful nations violate human rights, nothing is done to protect the right of the weaker nations. Human beings are living in a world wherein powerful countries spend much more on weapons for destroying fellow human beings than for helping them procure the means necessary to live with human dignity.

The legalist view of human rights ignores the related issue of duties and depends heavily on the state and the judiciary for the realisation of human rights. This may not always ensure human rights, or may delay it unduly. Despite the legislations that are enacted to protect human rights, there is increasing violation of human rights throughout the world. Individuals and groups are subjected to injustice and humiliation in various ways. It means that one cannot depend on legislations alone in order to have human rights realised or stop violations of human rights. “The present discourse runs on the path of empowerment without groundwork being done by behavioural and social capacity building or economic and political preparations. The state is supposed to deliver right but it cannot do so without requiring someone to discipline or obligate himself, without resources and powers of extraction, without legitimation and accountability considerations.... The more the responsibility for human right realisation is thrown on it, the more obligations it creates, the more extractions it does, the more suppressions it makes, the more totalitarian it becomes to justify its agency role and it often does with over-generalisation because it lacks the specificity of situational and individual contexts” (Jain, 2005). In order to get the human rights really realised it is necessary to have a change in the key to the discourse. The present discourse on human rights, which is centred on legalistic apparatus, has to be changed to one that is centred on fundamental duties. Right and duty go together and can be said to be the two sides of the same coin. Every human being has duties towards the other to assume responsibility for the development of one another. Human rights discourse should also be addressed to basic values like non-violence, human unity and tolerance of cultural diversity.

Sustainable peace in human society requires that every section of the society be ensured of the human rights. But the fact is the existence of discrimination of various kinds in the realisation of human rights. One of them is gender discrimination. “Traditionally it was

believed that world peace depended on political relations alone. This led to splitting of human rights – focusing on rights of adult free males – from women’s rights and also children’s rights. As a result human rights were classified into public or men’s world and private world to which women and children were still confined by custom and traditions and sometimes also law. ... This distinction of human rights led to discrimination in the family against women and children. The rights of women and children are not protected” (Jose, 2005). It is necessary that determined steps be taken to treat human rights as rights of every human being without any distinction. All the nations should adopt and implement the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women in 1981 and Convention on the Rights of Child in 1989. That would be an important step for bringing about world peace.

An innovative experiment that is undertaken in Kerala in pursuit of the protection of women’s rights is that of the Jana Jagratha Samithi. It is an organisation of women formed under the leadership of the Kerala Women’s Commission in all the panchayats of the state. The samithi is constituted with the panchayat president as the chairperson, and women lawyers, social activists and women leaders as members. The objective of the samithi is raising the status of women in the family and in the society. In order to achieve it the organisation undertakes activities of educating women about their rights and duties, and making them economically, socially and politically empowered. The samithi also functions as a women’s grievance redress forum and offers counselling services.

Human rights are basic to sustenance of peace. The basic human rights are embodied in the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights. Ensuring human rights to every human being is a global responsibility. “Real peace can only be built on the affirmation of universal human and democratic rights. We as citizens of the world have to identify those who are vulnerable, whose humanity is violated or abused. If we wish peace, we must do everything in our power to find out and inform people about the crimes being committed in the name of various nationalisms, combat the mutilation of humanity brought about by

all forms of national exclusivism, and actively propagate universal human rights, democracy and friendship between peoples”(Murthy and Rao, 2005).

Value Education and Peace⁵

Peace is based on certain values that determine the norms and guidelines for human behaviour. Inculcation of the appropriate values is necessary for pursuing and sustaining peace. Thus value education is an important aspect of the efforts for pursuing peace in human society. Inculcation of values should become part of the process of the development of human personality. It is the task that should not be left to the formal educational system alone. It should begin at home and be continued in the community. Religion, through faith and spirituality, can also play an important role in the process of value education. Value inculcation carried out in the family and community should pave the way for systematic value education in the formal educational system. “As educators, we must be teaching and modelling the spirit of open inquiry. We must never shrug and say that’s all we can do. Education holds peace as a universal value. ... It is in the minds of men and women that we will make our impact. We must trust that our seeds of peace, our teaching, our research, our writings, fall on fertile ground” (Dugan, 2005).

At present there is a crisis of values in the form of the dichotomy between macro ethics and micro ethics, that is, people, especially the leaders who are to champion the cause of peace, do not practise what they preach. This is indicative of the need for serious efforts in value education. An important step that can be taken to deal with the process of value education is to introduce new forms of teaching-learning in our educational institutions. “Value education for peace building should develop a new dynamics of education. Conventional methods emphasised moralising, which meant direct and subtle inculcation of adult values. This is becoming increasingly less effective, primarily because of the dichotomy between precept and practice, the extra indications galore in homes, schools or other social environments. Laissez faire attitudes have been tried. But young need help. Modelling has been advocated as an effective value education tool. While it is true to a large extent too many models crowd young minds, creating more confusion than clarity” (George, 2005). It is necessary that the educational institutions take value education

seriously. The trend in most of the educational institutions has been that of neglecting value education. For instance, the moral education classes that are expected to assume the function of value education receive low priority vis-à-vis the other courses. This trend should be corrected and value education should get its due place in our educational system.

The media can play an important role in value education. This is especially true, when our traditional institutions of family and religion are facing crises in values. These institutions are finding it increasingly difficult to cope with the demands of rapid developments in the different spheres of the modern society. The media however is not sensitive to this aspect of its social role. Today the media too often is driven by consumerism and sensationalism, that do not go along with the values appropriate for peace. “The most disturbing outcome of this de-regulated empowerment of the media is the creation of a new kind of superficial global culture. This high-tech culture takes earlier folk cultures and human values and pack them into a standard mass culture. It destroys the divergent micro cultures and creates macro culture which we celebrate as the global culture of the global village (Vasudaivakaudumbakam). This global culture has no roots, no habitat and no traditional identity. The media proclaim that the world is developing to a global village but we get trapped in the global market of the multinational corporates who permeate the values of the jungle and market cultures” (Antony, 2005).

Rejecting or condemning the role of media that is unfavourable to value education does not help the situation in any way. We need the media to be constructively involved in the process of value education. It is necessary that media be used creatively and developed as a cultivator and protector of socially accepted values. “There should be a deliberate attempt to give media education to combat with the media threat to the value systems. Children and youth should be made competent to make good analysis of the media programmes and also to be capable of taking what is good and reject what is bad” (Antony, 2005). Creative use of the media would mean that the media correct their own path in the service of value education – inculcation and strengthening of values that make human behaviour and inter-group relationships conducive to peace.

Value education should be the joint responsibility of the informal and formal agencies, such the family, community, religion, media and educational institutions. The various developmental processes are going to make in-roads into the traditional value system. Some of the elements of the new system need to be selectively accepted for human development. It is the complementary role played by the different agencies in the task of value education that should provide the necessary checks and balances in the inculcation of appropriate values.

Shanti Yagna Meditation⁶

Shanti Yagna mediation is an innovative experiment in promoting a culture of peace or value education for peace. It has a religious or, more correctly, spiritual aspect. As it is based on the value of spirituality that is common to all religions, individuals of any religion can freely undertake this form of meditation and benefit from it. The specific concept of peace and the basic elements of peace in human society form the theoretical perspective of this exercise of meditation for peace. In the analysis of peace two aspects of human existence and three dimensions of peace are identified.

“Peace encompasses both the spiritual and the physical aspects of human existence. The spiritual aspects comprise forgiveness and reconciliation. This is the realm of religion. The physical aspects consist of justice and development. This is the realm of politics. Forgiveness, reconciliation, justice and development are inter-related and interdependent. ... Hence peace in the world can be established only when religion and politics join hands in a common mission of promoting a culture of peace in the world on the pillars of forgiveness, reconciliation, justice and development. Each has its specific area of work. Religion has to work for forgiveness and reconciliation. Politics has to work for justice and development” (Bharathi, 2005). Thus, ultimately peace is the combined product of the personal feeling for others (reconciliation) and social justice. The roles of religion in promoting spirituality and of the state in providing social justice contribute to peace in human society.

Real and sustainable peace is the combined realisation of three interrelated dimensions. “True and lasting peace has three dimensions: personal, social and ecological – peace within the individual, peace within the society, and peace within the world of nature. This three dimensional peace can be termed ‘integral peace’. All human beings together constitute a ‘human family’. They are also part of a larger ‘earth family’. Hence they are called to live in harmony with all living beings and with the world of nature. From harmony comes peace” (Bharathi, 2005). Thus peace in society cannot be established unless individuals find peace within themselves and human interventions in nature are not destructive of the natural environment. “Peace within individuals is not possible without forgiveness and reconciliation. The ‘wounds’ in the human psyche are the basic cause of much of the violence in the world. These wounds in our individual as well as collective psyche need to be healed if we are to find true and lasting peace. Forgiveness is a precondition for this inner healing. Without forgiveness there can be no reconciliation, and without reconciliation there can be no peace. Thus forgiveness and reconciliation are preconditions for peace within individuals and communities” (Bharathi, 2005).

The personal, spiritual aspects of peace – forgiveness and reconciliation – are drawn from the message and example of Jesus Christ. The supreme message of Jesus Christ is that of forgiveness and reconciliation. He “challenged the Jewish community of his time to change their age-old concept of God as a revengeful Yaweh watching over humankind from heaven to punish them if they failed to obey His ‘commandments’. Jesus presented a God of love who is like a loving and forgiving Father to all humankind” (Bharathi, 2005). Jesus Christ as the personification of love, forgiveness and reconciliation provides the spirituality component of the shanti yagna meditation for peace. Thus, the innovative experiment of shanti yagna meditation for peace believes that real peace begins within individuals and that forgiveness and reconciliation are a precondition for peace within individuals. Jesus Christ is the supreme example of the spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Peace Initiatives at the Grassroots⁷

Concern for peace is universal in so far as the countries in the world look for peace and have various programmes to achieve it. Some of them are focussed on social justice and some others on conflict resolution and still others on value education. They differ in their approach and mode of operation. Certain grassroots level experiments in promoting peace from the USA and India were presented during the conference.

The experience of working in three peace experiments was the presentation from the USA. They were (i) the Peace Corps, (ii) the American Service Committee: Summer Project in Toppenish, Washington with Mexican American Farm Workers and (iii) the War on Poverty: Community Action Programme, Augusta, Maine. The Peace Corps was initiated in the USA during the period of the “cold war” for working in the developing countries. It had the objective of countering the animosity towards Americans from outside the USA. The second experiment was a project on poverty alleviation in small communities in the USA and the third one was a religious community (Quakers) supported project for the farmers in the USA. While Peace Corps had the objective of peace in the sense of dealing with the situation of the “cold war”, the other programmes had the direct objective of social justice, one of the basic values of peace. A very important lesson learned from the experience of working with these experiments is that community participation is an important factor of success of such projects. Things work better when the community is allowed to define the project and the outside expertise and resources are made available to the community as defined by it. This was precisely the difference between the top-down system of the Peace Corps and the other community based grassroots projects (Cook, 2005).

The programmes from India presented in the conference were the projects for fostering communal harmony in Mumbai, the Gandhi Peace Foundation in Ernakulam, Kerala under the Gandhian ideology of truth and non-violence, and the Peace Forum of Kerala which adopted the method of peace march. In many of these projects value education or awareness building has been an important programme of action. One of the experiments from Mumbai was the Community Animators Training for Communal Harmony. The objective of this programme was to equip the youth with knowledge, skills and

appropriate attitudes to face the situation of communalism that disrupt peace in the community.

An action programme for promoting communal harmony experimented in Mumbai is the Zophadpatti Police Panchayat. Against the backdrop of the communal violence in Mumbai in 1992-93, the city police introduced an experiment in maintaining peace through the participation of the citizens. It involved the citizens in resolving disputes and maintaining peace in the neighbourhood community. Citizens' groups called Zophadpatti Police Panchayats were formed under the police stations in the city. Each panchayat consists of 11 members from the local community. The main functions of the panchayat are resolving disputes between individuals and groups, and awareness building, especially about social evils like illicit liquor. The experiment has had some success in resolving problems and contributing to peace in the local community. Cases get dissolved much faster and more effectively through the zophadpatti police panchayat. The uniqueness of this experiment is that it tries to promote peace through the joint efforts of the state machinery (the police) and the civil society (citizen group). Its strength is derived from its state-civil-society structure (Khan, 2005).

Social Development and Peace⁸

Social development is a comprehensive process that denotes all round progress of all human beings. The ultimate goal of social development is achieved when every human being is enabled to have the quality of life that is accepted as really human, or every human being has the resources to live with human dignity. It is obtained when human rights are realised and justice meted out to every human being. In so far as lasting peace cannot be achieved without justice and realisation of human rights, peace may be considered an essential component of the process of social development.

It needs to be reiterated here that peace is not absence or avoidance of conflict. This is especially pertinent in the context of peace and social development. It is not avoidance of conflict but resolution of conflict that brings about peace for social development. "Peace is basically an attitude of mind that is conducive for dialogue with cultures and to

enter into deep relationship with nature and humanity. We must reject the idea that ‘conflict necessarily brings hostility’. It does not; provided we have skills to manage conflicts effectively. Conflicts are inevitable in human relationships and structures. Conflicts will produce energy and if harnessed it can produce good results. It brings creativity and newness in ideas, practices and spirit as in the case of Hegelian dialectics (Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis)” (James, 2005).

Programmes for social development may face conflicts of various kinds. They need to be effectively resolved in order to achieve peace as well as social development. Both the state (the government) and agencies of the civil society (non-government organisations - NGOs) are involved in the different projects of social development. They are faced with the difficult task of moving to the goal of social development amidst conflicts and disturbances. Here peace becomes an inalienable component of the process of social development. “Social development process is an important area where we need to experience peace or instil peace as the situation is vulnerable and conflicts are intrinsic in its nature. The role of the state and non-government organisations is vital in this process. Obviously there are very many projects by the state to enhance the well being of the citizens and many of them get bureaucratized and produce little result. When governments fail in delivering the desired good to the target groups NGOs come into the scene developing its own strategies and programmes” (James, 2005).

However, there is a trend among many of the NGOs engaged in programmes of social development to avoid the issue of social justice and concentrate on charity. At times social justice is left to the state to be attended to as the realm of the state. This trend needs to be corrected, even if it may require voluntary agencies and professionals to take a stand that may be uncomfortable or demanding. As already stated, peace and social development cannot be achieved without social justice. And social justice may require facing conflicts and skilfully resolving them.

Peace as the component of social development has to be realised at not only the societal but also individual level. Social development ultimately should result in the situation

wherein every human being enjoys a life that is qualitatively human. An example of the consequence of development without peace at the individual level is that of suicide. This is being increasingly visible in the state of Kerala in India. Kerala is relatively high on several indices of development. At the same time Kerala stands first among the states in India in the rate of suicide. Statistics show that suicide rate in Kerala is increasing. For the year 2001 the suicide rate (number of suicide deaths per population of 100000) was 30.06. The highest rate of suicide (64.67) was in the age group of 45-59 years.

Incidence of suicide may be seen as absence of peace – peace with oneself. Action for peace should take into consideration the fact of the rising suicide rate and take measures to control suicide proneness. Some of the NGOs, like the Maithri in Kerala are now engaged in this work of helping the individual in distress come to terms with herself/himself. “Apart from centre based emotional support to distressed individuals, a key activity of these organisations is to create awareness in the society about suicide, in order to encourage individuals to give and seek help” (Jayakumar and George, 2005). Awareness programmes for both the public and those individuals who are prone to suicide or have attempted suicide are necessary. The general public should be made aware of the appropriate attitude they should have towards suicide and relatives of the suicide victims.

The Rajagiri College of Social Sciences has been engaged in the task of social development and peace in its own unique way. The thrust of the various programmes and activities of the college is social development. The college was established with the objective of providing professional training for personnel to be engaged in the field of social development. In course of time the college has become an institution engaged in different programmes of social development. The college has the scheme of Live-Labs, which function as laboratories where social theories are practised and skills in development activities are learned. The areas of the activities of the Live-Labs include community development, women empowerment, child care, health services, legal aid and disaster management.

The Live-Labs function as projects of social development for the benefit of individuals and groups in the community as well as learning situations for the professional trainees of the college. “We consider the functioning of the Live-Labs as an opportunity to do its little bit in fulfilling its commitment towards creating a just society. By associating with the Live-labs, the students get those opportunities even during the training period. Rajagiri Live-Labs reach out to take care of the needs of a new born baby to the needs of senior citizens by giving respect to the life and dignity of each human being without discrimination or prejudice” (Antoni, 2005).

Social Work Education and Peace⁹

The engagement of social work profession with peace is through its activities of social development. Social work education is the programme of producing professionals for activities of social development. The concept of peace as social justice and integral part of social development requires that social work education be contextualised, which would mean treating peace as a right of individuals and groups. In practical terms peace would include security of life and property, assurance of justice, equality, inclusive democracy and just governance. “Issue of communalism and religious fundamentalism is a serious threat to Indian democracy on one side and causes huge misery and marginalisation of certain sections of people. ... Response to such issues from social work fraternity is extremely inadequate both in social work education as well as in practice” (Shajahan, 2005). Social work education has to address these issues in contextualising social work in India.

Social Work education in India has to respond to the challenges of social development in the Indian context. It has to adopt a progressive approach that is oriented to human well-being, involves systematic and structural analysis of social problems, takes radical action with reference to social issues and accepts the linkage between rights and responsibilities. Some of the basic values and principles of social work are not adequately reflected in social work education in India. The social work curriculum does not provide contents that give the students an insight into the socio-political reality of India. Consequently students as practitioners later face problems in the field, especially in issues such as

communalism and casteism. There is an urgent need to restructure the social work curriculum in India so as to meet the needs of the Indian situation. It is also important that indigenous models of intervention are used in social work education.

Social work education as well as practice for the realisation of peace and social development should have a holistic perspective and radical approach. It may require change in the traditional strategies and adopting fresh ones that are contextual. “Radical social work is the effort to overcome the dichotomy between theory and practice in a society, or institutions and even among the practitioners of social work when they oppress people with concealed ideological foundations and political purposes. Methods of radical practice are crucial. Radical social work includes a wide range of social work activity and avoids fragmentation that the traditional adherence to distinctive methods was bound to encourage. This approach may be seen as paving the way for more holistic conceptions of social work. It encompasses direct work with individuals and families as well as the wider groups and collectivities to which they belong, and must seek to relate organisational and individual action” (Jacinta, 2005).

With its thrust on social development, the Rajagiri College of Social Sciences has been constantly engaged in promoting and maintaining peace not only in the community settings of its outside activities but also on its campus. Rajagiri literally means king of the hill. The king, as conceived by the founders of the College, is Jesus Christ. All the institutions bearing the name of Rajagiri are committed to the values embodied by Jesus Christ. Inspired by them, the College has identified truth, justice, love, peace and excellence as its core values. The College is committed to the realisation of these values.

The Rajagiri College of Social Sciences has dedicated the jubilee year of 2005 to the value of peace and has endeavoured to consolidate the various activities it has been undertaking to promote peace directly and indirectly. In its activities of teaching, research, training and live-labs the college is making all efforts to sensitise people to the values basic to peace, work for conflict resolution in inter-personal and community

situations, and bring about social justice in situations of exploitation and relative deprivation (Joseph, 2005).

Notes

¹ The conference was held during 10-12 January 2005 as part of the golden jubilee celebrations of the Rajagiri College of Social Sciences in association with the School of Social Work, University of Maryland, Baltimore, USA. It was inaugurated by His Eminence, Cardinal Varkey Vithayathil, Major Arch-Bishop of Ernakulam-Angamaly Archdiocese. Dr. Jancy James, Vice-Chancellor of the Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala presided over the inaugural function and Dr. Jesse Harris, Dean of the School of Social Work, University of Maryland, USA, delivered the keynote address.

² Papers in the session on religion and peace were presented by Vandormael (2005), Mohammed (2005), and Menon (2005).

³ The session of the conference on World Peace and Environment had three papers for discussion. They were presented by Joy (2005), Nitsch and Nitsch (2005) and Palakkappillil (2005).

⁴ The papers presented in the session on Human Rights and Peace were by Jain (2005), Jose (2005) and Murthy and Rao (2005).

⁵ The papers presented in the session on Value Education and Peace were by Dugan (2005), George (2005) and Antony (2005).

⁶ Shanti Yagna is an inter-religious meditation developed by Bharathi (2005) for reconciliation and peace. The theoretical principles of this innovative experiment are given here. Theoretical exposition in the conference was followed by the actual practice in meditation under the guidance of Bharathi (2005).

⁷ In the session on Peace Initiatives and Search for Models there were four paper presentations. They were by Cook (2005), Raote (2005), Khan (2005) and Sebastian (2005).

⁸ The papers presented in the session on Social Development and Peace – Role of State and Civil Society were by James (2005), Jayakumar and George (2005), and Antoni (2005).

⁹ Presentations in the session on Social Work Education and Peace were made by Shajahan (2005), D'Souza (2005) and Joseph (2005).

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Mary Joseph, Vice-Principal, Rajagiri College of Social Sciences, Kalamassery, Kochi – 683 104. Email: maryvenus@rajagiri.edu
