

## THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL SERVICE

### ITS RELATION TO WORLD NEEDS AND PROBLEMS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ASIA AND AFRICA

*The René Sand Prize has been awarded for the last four years by the International Conference of Social Work. In 1961, the prize was awarded to Princess Amrit Kaur, formerly Minister of Health for India, who is now Chairman of the Indian Red Cross. In the July 1959 issue of the Revue internationale<sup>1</sup>, she published a long article on the Red Cross and its humanitarian tasks, and the important rôle which she plays on the international level is well known. This was recognized by her nomination, in 1950, to the presidency of the World Health Assembly. It should also be remembered that for sixteen years she was Gandhi's private secretary and fellow-worker.*

*The René Sand Prize was handed to her during the 10th International Conference of Social Work which was held in Rome in 1961. On this occasion, she made a speech and we are indebted to the International Conference of Social Work for permission to publish the essential passages.<sup>2</sup>*

*In her introduction, Princess Amrit Kaur recalled the fine personality of René Sand who, moved by a high ideal, took an active part*

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<sup>1</sup> English Supplement, August 1959.

<sup>2</sup> This speech appeared in French in *Le Service social dans un monde qui se transforme*, the report of the 10th International Conference of Social Work published in 1961, by the International Conference of Social Work—Regional Office for Europe and the Middle East, Paris.

*in the Red Cross in Belgium and whose action led to National Societies engaging in social work. "René Sand was a truly great man, a devoted servant of humanity", as Princess Amrit Kaur calls him, "and one whose entire life was an epic of love in action."*

*We are particularly pleased to reproduce the following text, which is of all the more interest since it was given by the Chairman of an important National Society and inspired by a man whom the Red Cross movement remembers with gratitude. (Editorial Note.)*

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Man has always been a gregarious animal. It is contrary to his nature to live alone and hence has emerged in every part of the world, however backward or advanced, the concept of society which, because of man's innate desire for companionship, has developed from family life to the wider field of community and nation. No society, however, primitive or small in numbers, can prosper unless its members are united and aware of their duties and responsibilities. In order, therefore, to evolve a mode of life which contributes to the prosperity of the community, certain laws of behaviour had to be formulated and I feel that it would be interesting for us to turn our minds for a little while towards the earliest concepts of a social order. Coming as I do from a country whose civilisation stretches back to many milleniums, I should like to place before you the Indian concept of life which, though it may not be followed in action in modern India, does still sway the minds of our masses.

In one of the greatest of our <sup>1</sup> Upanishads it is said "Everything here on earth belongs to Iswara (i.e. God). Enjoy what is given to you. Do not cast eyes of greed on any one's wealth. To work here on earth is the lot of man. There is no other way. Work and live out your life however long it may be. Work will not leave any sinful residue to cling to the soul, if it is done in the right way with detachment. Those who deny the spiritual being within our bodies commit suicide and the world will be utter darkness for such

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<sup>1</sup> The Isaavasyopaniṣad. Rendering into English by C. Rajagopalachari.

men. He who sees all others as if he were living in their bodies will not be perturbed by any dislikes or aversions. If he identifies himself completely with the beings around him he emancipates himself from all delusion and sorrow. When your spirit joins the ever-moving air and your body is reduced to ashes, remember your work alone remains behind. Act with this great knowledge. O Fire ! you know all the paths, lead us in the right path. O God ! guide us so that we may not sin."

Tagore writes of "The Spirit of India": "I love India, not because I cultivate the idolatry of geography, not because I have had the chance to be born in her soil, but because she has saved through tumultuous ages the living words that have issued from the illuminated consciousness of her great sons". Say the Hindu scriptures "Brahma (i.e. God) is Truth, Brahma is Wisdom, Brahma is Infinite. Peace is in Brahma, goodness is in Brahma and the unity of all beings." Again: "The householder shall have his life established in Brahma, shall pursue the deeper truth of all things and in all activities of life dedicate his works to the Eternal Being." Thus we have come to know that what India truly seeks is not a peace which is negation, or in some mechanical adjustment, but that which is in "Sivam" (i.e. God), in goodness, which is in the truth of perfect union; that India does not enjoin her children to cease from "Karma", (i.e. action), but to perform their "Karma" in the presence of the Eternal, with the pure knowledge of the spiritual meaning of existence; that this is the true prayer of Mother India.

"He who is one, who is above all colour distinctions, who dispenses the inherent needs of men of all colours, who comprehends all things from their beginning to the end, let Him unite us to one another with wisdom, which is the wisdom of goodness".

Indeed spiritual life has been the true genius of India. Those who have throughout the ages made the greatest appeal to the mass mind are not the builders of Empire or the victors in War, nor the rich, but the Rishis or Sages who have renounced the world with all its pomp and splendour and material wealth. These have taught that pride and power, wealth and worldly fame are as nothing compared with the spiritual values of life. History records no parallel to the renunciation of war by the great Emperor Asoka after he

had seen its tragedy. Conquest no longer held any lure for him because his heart was filled with compassion.

The lessons learnt from the Gita which is the core of the great Epic, the Mahabharata, are that our daily work is our vocation, the sphere in which we are called by God to serve Him to the best of our capacity. It is not the work we do that matters, but the spirit in which we do it. The lowest kind of work done for the love of God ranks higher with Him than the most brilliant done for personal gain. The former sets us free, the latter leads us to greater bondage. In other words freedom lies in true service.

Truth becomes Truth only through self-suffering. Let a man suffer for Truth and demonstrate to the world its power so that others may be convinced and accept it of their own free will. This gospel is of momentous consequence for it effects a change in outlook. To be killed, as Gandhi taught, becomes more heroic than to kill. It is nobler to stand up in spotless innocence against a misguided brother and be slain by him if necessary than march against and slay him. It is more profitable to convert him through love than to put an end to him through violence. It is better to evoke the divine spark in him by suffering oneself and thereby effect a permanent cure of the evil than crush him, win a temporary triumph and thus perpetuate evil. In brief, Truth is secure and duty unerring only when they sit on the throne of love for Eternal Truth postulates immeasurable Love.

Perhaps the finest description of an all-embracing code of life is embodied in the Sanskrit word "Dharma". Dharma is conceived as law, not of any country or society or nation but is rooted in the principle of the sustenance of every speck and atom in perfect harmony with the whole. Adharma—or breach of this law—denotes lack of discipline and selfishness and hence its resultant evils—discontent, unhealthy rivalry, fear and mistrust. We have to recognise that the universe is one family, a single unit and that its inhabitants, therefore, cannot help abiding by this law, whether they know it explicitly or not. Anything contrary to the law must lead to division and rupture within an organic whole.

The four Ashramas or divisions of life as prescribed in the Hindu scriptures were supposed to regulate life. They compel or should compel attention even in the modern world. First of all,

Brahmacharya, the life of probation of a student who learns at the feet of an erudite and morally perfect preceptor, receives training in the arts and sciences and religious lore, leading a life of strict celibacy. Second comes Grihastha—the life of the householder, the family man who puts into practice what he has imbibed from his Guru or preceptor. If he is truly disciplined the life of the householder will connote a harmony between his high ideals, his social duty and personal desire. Third Vanaprastha—the stage preparatory to the last lap of human life on earth. Just as the first prepares for the second, so the third trains for the last. Wordly contacts are gradually reduced, more time is given to religious worship and contemplation. It is the period of life when man tries to free himself from earthly cares. Finally Sannyasa—renunciation of the material values of life—which promises to man the knowledge of the way to the ultimate objective of life—Moksha, i.e. Salvation.

Later in the Sixth Century B.C. we had the light of Buddhism permeate not only India but the entire East. It is strange that the Buddha was in a sense less accepted in the land that gave him birth than he was in China, Japan, Burma, Ceylon, Thailand and Indonesia. This was largely because he was trying far more to reform Hinduism than to propound a new religion. In like vein he asked man to abstain from all kinds of evil, to accumulate all that is good and to purify the mind. He too held that Karma (action) regulates all life and the whole universe is bound by it so that Karma is like the axle of a moving chariot. Buddhism laid down that when an individual understands the true nature of things, he tries to renounce wordly life since he finds nothing substantial in it. The true Buddhist should mould his life according to the Noble Eight-Fold Path which consists of Right View, Right Resolve, Right Words, Right Actions, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindedness and Right Concentration. Great love and great compassion being the keynotes of Buddhism the true follower has to try to effect the good and happiness of all sentient beings of the world and to put an end to all their sufferings.

Contemporary with the Buddha were Lao Tzu and Confucius in China and Zarathustra in Iran. A century or so later the world was enriched by the great philosophers of Greece. Socrates laid down his life willingly rather than submit to giving up his search for

Truth. In his wonderful apologia he says "It may be that an individual is condemned unjustly : then the laws are either bad or badly administered. Still the individual may not take the matter into his own hands. The members of all bodies of men, and therefore of the State, must sacrifice their individual wills, more or less, to the whole to which they belong. They must obey the rules or laws of the whole or it will perish." And so grew up the concept of citizenship. Plato emphasised the good life and Aristotle looked upon the State as the highest association for the realisation of the good of man. European civics or the philosophy of citizenship has been based on Greek and Roman traditions and has evolved in the different countries of the Western world according to varying national temperaments, characteristics and needs. Later of course it was greatly enriched by the radiant light of Christianity. The ideal of the dignity of manual labour was admitted by the Monks in the Benedictine and other monasteries. The ideal of holy poverty was brought home to men, along with the dignity of labour, by the great religious Orders in the West. The Franciscans left the shelter of the Cloister and lived as "Little Brothers of the Poor" in the outer world. The ideal of brotherhood and mutual service was the strength and life of Mediaeval guilds. It bound working-men together and made them take an honourable pride in the excellence of their craft. It eliminated under-selling and unfair competition. The ideal of justice and mercy towards the poor lay at the root of the earnest efforts made by the Church to condemn usury and to make all trade moral by insisting on a "just price" being reached between those who engage in Commerce.

We can look back with pride on the ground covered by these great adventures in the cause of brotherhood and human freedom and intellect. The practical promulgation of these ideals was a great step forward towards a new world. Clement of Alexandria said : "Wealth, when not properly governed, is a very fortress of evil. All we possess is given for use . . . He who gives to none becomes the poorer. Not he who keeps but he who gives is truly rich. He who climbs the steep ascent of salvation must carry in his hand the fair staff of charity." Hindu ideology also laid down that one should give up oneself for the sake of one's family, one's family

for the sake of one's village, one's village for the sake of one's country and the world for the sake of one's soul. This concept has probably been more social, humanitarian and spiritual than political in that spiritual salvation of the soul has always been given the highest preference. But the points of contact between Eastern and Western concepts are many because always the emphasis has been on the way of life which would conduce to the happiness and welfare of the greatest number. The Hindu scriptures are in fact soaked with the direction to help others. Islam laid immense stress on the brotherhood of man. Jesus Christ paid the supreme sacrifice that man might live. The teachings of the Sermon on the Mount are a classic to which no follower of any religion can take exception and at no time in the world's history more than today do we need to fear God and to love our neighbours as ourselves.

If we admit that all religions have laid upon mankind the duty of living so that we may contribute to the general well-being, it follows that the science of good citizenship extends from local interests to national, international and human relations. If we believe that humanity is one family, children of one God, then the more this belief sinks into our lives the more impossible it will become for us to neglect our fellow-men. Disputes, divisions, conflicts, rivalries, become hateful and on us falls the duty of becoming peace-makers.

This is known as the scientific age. Within the ken of some of us have come in the last two generations tremendous developments in science and technology; the establishment of the germ theory of disease, the discovery of radioactivity, the knowledge of the age of rocks, the measurement of the distance of stars, the discovery of antibiotics, the splitting of the atom and all that flows from that marvellous achievement, travel into space, and we do not know what more astonishing discoveries await us from day to day. In this age of wonder we who work for humanity must see to it that all knowledge is used for building up not only material wealth and looking upon that alone as progress. Increase in total production or riches may never be an end regardless of the means. Growth in national character must ever be the most important objective.

At the same time, as Hooker said "Men must have enough to live on before they live well" and we must therefore realise that

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material circumstances do condition individual lives. Social servants cannot rest content until conditions which impede a healthy physical activity have been removed not only from individuals but from classes. But dead equality there can never and should never be. Manifold diversity is a part of the fullness of social life provided man realises that the fruits of such diversity are for the use of others. Each one of us is a trustee of what has been given to him, given to provide opportunity of service, not for selfish accumulation. And this concept of stewardship is the best watchword for the social worker. Reverential love for humanity will employ voluntary methods always. The individual is sacred ; the whole material world is insignificant compared with the individual life. Society is sacred ; the Fatherhood of God is the basis of all life. There is no fraternity without a common father and in a family reverential love is the bond of union. Mezzini said many wise things and he was right in propounding that " Man must not be taught ' to each according to his wants ', nor yet ' to each according to his passions ', but ' to each according to his love ' ". The geographical barriers of mountains and oceans that once divided man from having contacts with his fellowmen in other parts of the world have vanished. The world is a very small place today and all these happenings are throwing out a tremendous challenge to every one of us, for life has become far more complex than ever before and more and more difficult problems face us. Change has always been the one unchanging law of life and since we live in very dynamic times, to stand still must spell disaster whether for the individual, the community, the race or the nation. All this must make us pause and think as to what contribution we can make for only by using new means to meet new ends can we move with the times. I myself have no doubt that there is today more than ever need for service to humanity, need to enlarge the scope of this service, need to broaden our outlook so as to take in the ever-widening horizon of world needs.

The history of the world would be very dull if the lives of the Founders of the great religions of the world, of the Apostles and Martyrs who gave their lives so that what they preached might live, of the social reformers who sought to combat evil in whatsoever

shape and in whatsoever clime they found it, had not illumined its pages in letters of gold. The world would indeed be the poorer if men and women like Galileo, Leonardo da Vinci, Dante, Rousseau, Mazzini, Wilberforce, Livingstone, Francis of Assisi, Josephine Butler, Florence Nightingale, Abraham Lincoln, Tolstoi, René Sand and hosts of other great ones of the earth too numerous to mention, had never lived. The cry against impurity, slavery, ignorance, was always raised by inspired men and women, until recognition was won simply because they were willing to serve and sacrifice for a cause. Legislation has registered changes in outlook but legislation cannot go in advance of public opinion. And it is here that the social worker can strive to raise and deepen public opinion or rouse the public conscience by voluntary methods until the time is ripe for law. And the public conscience has to be roused in every sphere. There would be no disputes between Capital and Labour, between forms of Government, if all worked with devotion for the common good, if we loved our neighbours as ourselves. The concept of citizenship, of patriotism, would take on a new look and this unselfishness would naturally spread to all forms of organisations which go to make up national and international life. "Nothing is fruitful but sacrifice" said Lamennais and therefore our own unselfish work, however small or limited our personal area may be, will spread little by little the glow of warmth and light to wider and wider circles. And in our own day have we not all received inspiration from Gandhi, from Abbé Pierre, from Helen Keller and from Albert Schweitzer, ideal servants of humanity? All these have proved, if proof were needed, that the urge to serve fellow human beings is and must remain the keynote of the good life and that through such service alone can man rise to his full stature.

We live in a world still overcast with the shadow of conflict. Two devastating world wars have or should have taught mankind that war is no solution to any dispute, that in fact it creates more and greater problems. And yet every nation has still to resort to arms to defend peace, something that seems to be a veritable contradiction in terms. If there is no actual armed conflict today it is only because everyone knows that nuclear war would spell the destruction of the world. In other words war is held at bay only because of fear while suspicion and mistrust amounting to hatred

fill men's minds. Can an organisation like this help to lessen tensions in any way ? I believe it can. As social workers in a world full of fear it is our privilege through disinterested service to try to help in the creation of a new relationship between all peoples.

We are today aware that every person may reasonably expect a measure of freedom from disease, ignorance and poverty. We are conscious too of the newly won freedom from foreign domination or political independence that has come and is coming, perhaps quicker than any one of us may have imagined even a decade ago, to the peoples of Asia and Africa. What can we do for them ? Their needs cry out and must be met if peace is to obtain, for war finds a place only if there is no contentment, if hunger, disease and poverty stalk the land. President Eisenhower was therefore right when he said recently that those who have must share their gifts with those who have not and all are right when they demand that the enormous expenditure on armaments shall cease so that these huge sums of money may be diverted to lessen the world's sorrow and suffering.

You of the Western Hemisphere may find it hard to believe that poverty, disease and ignorance exist to an unbelievable extent in these great continents. India is probably far more advanced in the matter of education, trained personnel and social amenities than many of the other countries of Asia and Africa. And yet the problems that we face would stagger the stoutest heart. Millions of our children are without schools. Not even 25 % of our people are literate. Millions do not get enough to eat. If they are not actually hungry, the intake of calories is well below the minimum required to build up healthy bodies. The per capita income is only Rs. 294 or \$60 per annum. It has doubtless gone up during the first twelve years of our political independence but it has not kept pace *pari passu* with the increased cost of living. Infant mortality has during the first ten years of independence come down from 160 to 92, maternal mortality from 20 to 12 and maternal morbidity from 300 to 150 per 1,000 live births. But these rates are still distressingly high. As for the 1-4 year age mortality, it is 40/60 times as high as in Europe or the United States of America or Canada or Australia or New Zealand. We have one doctor to minister to the

needs of 6,000 persons, one nurse to 13,000 and one woman health visitor per 160,000 of the population. These figures are according to the ratio of trained personnel to the population but because 80 % of our people live in the villages and the very large majority of doctors and nurses are in the cities, the medical aid and relief available to the masses is in no way commensurate with our needs. We have still only 185,000 hospital beds in the whole country, including 22,000 for maternity and 4,000 for children. Leprosy is a grave problem and unless more workers and more financial aid are made available, one does not know when we shall be able to rid India of this dread disease. Tuberculosis continues to take a heavy toll of life and all the conditions which go towards encouraging the spread of this malady are present. I refer to malnutrition, under-nutrition, overcrowding and lack of beds and other facilities for isolating infectious patients. From 5,000 beds in 1947 we have raised the number to 33,000 but since we have half a million deaths per year from and five million open cases of TB you can imagine how far short we fall of what we ought to have. There are over two million blind persons in India and the tragedy is that 90 % of blindness in children and youth is preventible if only we had the means to stretch out a helping hand to those in need. Then there are the physically and mentally handicapped for whom very very little has so far been able to be done. It is sad but true that 80 % of the population who live in rural areas do not have a protected water supply and it is easy to understand what havoc is wrought by water-borne diseases. The universal lack and in many areas the complete absence of environmental hygiene and sanitation makes living conditions in rural India a sine qua non of ill health. Malaria control has greatly lessened the deaths and debility caused by this fell disease and we look forward to the day when the World Health Organization programme for ridding the globe of this pest will come to a successful end. There are other insect-borne diseases and other maladies which time does not permit me to talk about but you will gather some idea of the magnitude of our health problem when I tell you that poor health, disability and early deaths cost India well over four hundred million dollars in 1950. If this is the picture of conditions in India, the same and perhaps even worse may prevail in the other poor countries of Asia and Africa who have only

recently gained their independence and, in particular, in those who are trying to build themselves up in the democratic way. What a challenge this presents to all of us and in special measure to those who come from countries where education is within the reach of every child, where health care covers every person, where disease has to a large extent been conquered, where the lives of the physically handicapped are made livable and where old age has no longer any fears.

Familiar as we are with the needs in the countries to which we belong and cognizant as we are of world needs, what are the problems and the difficulties that confront social workers today? My experience tells me that, in the first place, the social services run by Governments do not receive the attention or material help that is their due. I believe I am right in saying that this phenomenon is not common to my country alone. I have said that we live in a scientific age but it would be equally correct to say that in our age the greater emphasis is laid on the material values of life. We are apt to judge national prosperity purely on an economic basis, on how much an individual earns and how high a target of industrial production can be reached. How often have I been asked as to why we should want to improve the health of the nation when our biggest malady is overpopulation! And equally often do some people hold that by and large education simply helps to make people dissatisfied! Little do such ignorant folk realise that intelligent co-operation can only come from those who are educated enough to understand and likewise that the skilled workman will always yield better results. And yet again that no worthwhile output can be expected from the under-nourished or poorly housed and no education can be imparted to the sick child.

I must also draw the attention towards another problem that voluntary endeavour everywhere faces. All or most democratic countries today speak of "The Welfare State". While it is the bounden duty of the State to do everything in its power to promote the welfare of its citizens, the interpretation of "The Welfare State" seems to me to be in danger of becoming much too narrow, if indeed it has not already arrogated to itself the right to control all beneficent activity. The State can never galvanise its machinery

so as to enter into the human aspect of needs. Indeed such machinery must by its very nature remain soulless with all the red tape and harassing delays that follow as a natural corollary. Therefore this is an encroachment on voluntary endeavour which must be resisted if the latter is to play its full role in the uplift of any country and of the world . . .

There is turmoil in Africa, a whole continent awaking from an age long slumber and asking to be freed from bondage. It is good to feel that political freedom is coming to Africans but mere political freedom is not going to be the solution of the many problems with which the different areas of this vast world are confronted. A veritable army of social workers would, I am sure, achieve more for the people than the United Nations has so far been able to do, for example, in the Congo. WHO and Red Cross workers have given fine service there and have won the confidence of the people simply through their humanitarian approach. I myself pray devoutly that the people of Africa will cease to resort to violence to attain their objectives, for no permanent good can ever be had that way. If racial prejudices are to be vanquished it can only be done through selfless service. If the tensions that divide nation from nation are to be lessened it can again be done best by universal collaboration in all those fields where the sole objective is human welfare. Just as the medical man cares for his patient regardless of his nationality or political creed, so also has the social servant to serve humanity. Asia and Africa need such servants. The field of work is immense and the labourers are indeed few. Teachers, doctors, nurses, physio-therapists, those skilled in the art of looking after the physically handicapped and aged, sportsmen, those willing with missionary zeal to undergo hardship are needed not only to train personnel but also to work with and for the people in outlying areas. The task to be undertaken by such workers is by no means easy. It requires courage, patience and an abounding faith in and love for humanity. But such service can keep our own hearts from hatred, it can shed goodwill and cheer among our less fortunate fellowmen, it can bring light where there is darkness, it can break through the man-made barriers of race, creed and colour, it can banish intolerance born of ignorance, it can sow the seeds of universal love and justice whereby mankind may reap the harvest of a

warless world, it can contribute towards the creation of an atmosphere where peoples varying in languages, traditions and political institutions can feel themselves fundamentally one, united inspite of diversity of climate and race by the bonds of a common humanity.

Gandhi said " My goal is friendship with the world and I combine the greatest love of man with the greatest opposition to wrong." I learnt during the years that I was privileged to be with this great man that the Glory of Life is to love to give, not to get, to serve, not to be served, to be a strong hand in the dark to another in the time of need, to be a cup of strength to any soul in a crisis of weakness. Freedom has conquered as a way of life through great effort and willing sacrifice. It is for freedom from the bondage of poverty, hunger, and disease, for the freedom of the spirit of man that we must all rededicate our lives as we end this Conference. May we, each one of us, be given the courage, the wisdom, the love and the faith so to do is my earnest hope and prayer.

Princess AMRIT KAUR