CHAPTER SEVEN

APPRAISAL

This chapter pertains to the appraisal of the role of religious organization in social welfare. The preceding chapters have dealt with the various activities of the religious organization within the general framework of social welfare.

A number of questions have been raised in the introductory chapter. Suitable answers could be found to these questions by directing the present discussion along following lines:

(i) Are there any possibilities inherent in a religious organization to take up welfare work; which are not found in other organizations;

(ii) Are there certain inherent limitations for a religious organization to take up welfare work;

(iii) What is the position of a religious organization in relation to social work role and practice?
These questions will not be taken up individually for purposes of discussion, as they only indicate the broad lines of discussion, and not meant for finding out specific solutions or answers. In investigating these questions, this chapter takes up primarily the appraisal of the role of the Math as a religious organization in the promotion of social welfare. This is the main focus of the present study, and the discussion taken up here will try to inquire into the wider relationship between religion and social welfare.

The ascetic order of Virasaivism is distinct from the domestic priests as well as the order of laymen. But, the ascetic ideal prescribed by Virasaivism does not foreclose social participation and, in fact, the institution of Jangama, establishes the useful link between religion and society. This institution of Jangama opens up immense possibilities of interplay between the religious and the social spheres. Religion itself is a major institutional order of society and hence its influence over other major institutional orders cannot be ignored. Thus, the conception of "Jangama Dasoha" is not something confined to the
religious order. It implies the service of society, and as the service rendered to society, it is not a residual function, but one of the primary concerns of religious life.

It can be restated that the Math does not exist in a social vacuum. It draws its sustenance from the community which it serves. This inter-relationship between the Math and the community is not merely in monetary (in the sense of patronage given to the Math by the people), or spiritual terms, but more than anything else, in terms of the welfare needs of the community, and the welfare provisions which the Math can offer in fulfilling these needs. This relationship between the Math and the community cannot be characterised simply as a patron-client relationship in whichever way this relationship is conceived. It can be said that the Math is able to cater to the welfare needs of the community in so far as it ceases to be a mere charitable institution. In other words, the Math does not symbolize mere charity. In fact, a Virasaiva, belonging to any of the orders mentioned above, is enjoined not to resort to beggary, or to solicit alms, even in the worst circumstances. This provides the
necessary force to the doctrine of Kāyaka, which has been explained as work with a sense of dedication, and not something which is used for self-aggrandizement.

Pure charity lacks the elevating influence of welfare. In charity, the relationship between the benefactor and the beneficiary ceases the moment charity is doled out to the beneficiary. The relationship between the two is transitory. The doling out of charity becomes primary in a charitable act. But, in social welfare, the relationship between the two parties is primary. It is sustained and is constantly being reinforced by the mutual concern and the elevating influence which is imparted to the relationship.

The growth of Hubli city and the growth of the Math seem to have gone hand in hand. As the city grew, the Math has expanded its activities covering larger and larger sections of the city population. However, it should be restated here that the Math serves not only the immediate community but also a wider region covering several communities. Thus, communities have come to be associated with the Math, and community welfare is one of the chief concerns of the Math.

In recent decades, the Math has taken up
new welfare functions without losing its traditional identity as a religious organization. Many of the welfare functions which existed in an incipient form have become institutionalized. An illustration of this is found in the sphere of health services. Before the building of the hospital at Ghataprabha was taken up, medical help was given to a small circle of clientele with the help of an Ayurvedic doctor housed in a small hut. This was the small beginning of the well-equipped hospital which exists now. In providing these added institutional services, the Math has adapted itself to the changing circumstances whereby the changing needs of the people it serves are being more adequately met. The Math has responded effectively to the conditions of modern life, seeking new avenues of helping the people at large, and to meet some of the problems arising out of urbanism and industrialization; its functions being increasingly supplementary to those of other organizations. For instance, the Math has provided substantial funds to institutions of higher learning, and the Math has not sought any administrative control over such institutions.

In modern times, the public welfare organizations alone cannot meet the problems of society.
In this task, the role of private organizations is also important. Many voluntary welfare institutions are supported and aided with financial assistance, thus enabling these institutions to function more effectively and to cater to the needs of a wider section of society. Encouraged by such public aid and assistance, many welfare agencies have become active in the field of social welfare. There can be no argument against such public aid being given to voluntary welfare agencies. But it needs to be recognised that the social welfare functions which are actually being fulfilled by traditional organizations like the religious, seem to be completely lost sight of.

Further, it must be realized that voluntary welfare organizations are mostly confined to the urban areas. They are not only located in urban places, but their activities are also centred in such places. The welfare needs of the vast rural population which constitutes the bulk of the nation's population, are almost untouched. Not even a correct assessment of such needs has been undertaken. But, the traditional organizations like the religious, with their vast array of smaller units dotting the countryside are in a better
position to help the rural population, if they had the necessary resources. Still, with their limited resources, and without much publicity, these traditional institutions serve the communities within their reach. Such a stupendous task undertaken by innumerable unaided institutions in the vast countryside cannot be left to themselves. With a life that is dominated by religion, the rural population responds readily to the measures undertaken by religious organizations.

There is another dimension to the situation obtaining in the rural communities. The dominance of religion in rural life is often ignored by social scientists, principally by social workers. This has led to the belief on the part of social workers that the rural population and the village leaders are generally apathetic to the welfare programmes administered by them. They view the rural population as highly unresponsive. Such social workers do not have a proper perspective of rural social structure and of rural leadership.

The Math, with its tradition of social welfare, has been providing the necessary services to the needy,
not only in the urban area where it is located, but also in a wider area covering the countryside. Thus, the Math cannot be labelled as a purely local organization. It has succeeded in establishing contact with people of diverse religious persuasions and social backgrounds. It acts as a meeting-ground for people of diverse social origins. It displays a sense of modernity without being engulfed by all the nuances of modern life. In terms of integration of community life, the Math has provided the initial momentum.

In this relationship between religion and social welfare, the uniqueness about the religious organization is the ideological support which has already been discussed in chapter four. The ideology is built into practice, and no special effort is needed to activate the religious organization to take up welfare work. The Swamiji has often spoken about the public reaction to the welfare activities undertaken by the Math. He spoke, for instance, about the critical attitude of some, who cannot visualize a religious organization engaging itself in welfare work. Such critics feel that there should be a clear separation
between the sacred and the profane, and that the two spheres cannot be reconciled. Under such attacks, any other organization would have easily succumbed. But the religious organization can survive such onslaughts from its adversaries as it has survived such onslaughts in the past.

Regarding the resources which are required for welfare activities, the Math could be considered as a centre for mobilizing the resources of society. The resources of society are not measured purely in quantitative terms, i.e., in terms of monetary and material resources. An inventory of resources of a society cannot easily be drawn when it is realized that there are resources which are not capable of quantitative measurement. These are the resources of collective action which every organized human collectivity is capable of mobilizing. The Math has been able to tap not only the monetary and material resources of society, but also the more vital resource of collective action. The mobilization of collective action is one of the distinct accomplishments of the Math as exemplified by certain gigantic tasks like famine relief work undertaken by the Math. Even a task like
feeding hundreds of individuals day after day seem to transcend the sheer considerations of money and material. These are, no doubt, necessary, but these alone cannot contribute to the accomplishment of such tasks, unless other less tangible resources are added to it.

As for monetary and material resources, the Math does not seem to feel difficulty in mobilizing these resources in undertaking welfare activities. When there is need for them, they are drawn from diverse sources in society, often these sources remaining anonymous. This support to the organization is not confined to any particular groups, and people of diverse social backgrounds are likely to support a cause taken up by a religious organization. In this regard, the religious organization has an advantage over other types of organizations.

We may examine the relationship between religious affiliation and social welfare, and between religiosity and social welfare. In doing this, we may consider the type of welfare activity that the religious organization is engaged in. Firstly, the welfare activity is not confined to a particular group of
people with certain religious affiliation or certain degree of religiosity. Services are rendered to diverse groups of people, and it leaves none in doubt as to whether the services are dependent on the type of religious affiliation one has, or on the degree of religiosity. In fact, the religious organization does not consult either about one's religious affiliation or the degree of one's religiosity before undertaking welfare work meant for a group or community. The determination of the criteria for dispensing welfare is along lines different from the considerations of religious affiliation and religiosity. For instance, in dispensing famine relief to the drought-stricken people in the several districts of the State, the criteria that were used related to age and exposure to conditions of despondency, rather than religious affiliation. Similarly, a person who visits the Math regularly is not necessarily strongly religious, or the person who seldom visits the Math is not necessarily the least religious. And when the former returns to his community, he does not feel himself more eligible than the latter, for the attention of the religious organization. In fact, the hallmark of true religiosity is not estimated in terms of whether one
receives or does not receive the attention of the religious organization. In reality, the religious organization itself makes no such demands about one's religiosity in order to become eligible for its attention.

Here, we locate one of the distinctive characteristics of the religious organization. In the case of other types of organizations including the state welfare provisions, eligibility criteria are specifically laid down as to the conditions under which individuals, families and communities would come under the purview of the provisions or programmes.

So far as the religious organization is concerned, two important lines of development have taken place. First, the religious organization has developed the religious tradition and has become the repository of esoteric knowledge. It is also characterized by a common ritual tradition. This line of development on the part of a religious organization unites the members of the faith, brings them together on occasions of ritual importance. The Math represents to its devotees the fountain-spring of religiosity and righteousness.
There is a second line of development, and this is the development of the welfare tradition. This makes the religious organization the nucleus of welfare activity. Here, the religious affiliations of individuals and families are not primary. In this respect, the religious organization gains a wider relevance than what merely actual religious membership represents. The concern for the needy individuals, families and groups on the part of a religious organization is so strong, that very often it becomes difficult to separate actions conforming to one type of tradition from actions conforming to another type of tradition. The two seem to merge together. This, perhaps, accounts for the fact that when certain needy individuals or families receive help from the religious organization, they often turn into being the faithful, either formally going through the process of religious conversion, or by maintaining close affinity to the religious organization.

In the case of the Settlement dwellers of Hubli, religious conversion did not take place. But the Settlement dwellers owe allegiance to the Math, and accept the Jagadguru as their religious leader.
In token of this, they have named their locality after the Jagadguru, as Gangadhar Nagar.

Viewing certain advantages which the religious organization possesses relative to other types of organizations in terms of providing certain services, it can be emphasized that the religious organization is the seat of scholarly tradition. This kind of tradition is not found in any other organization. Consequently, in the promotion of education, the religious organization does not confront any insurmountable difficulty. This is true of any religious organization. For instance, the history of many of the universities goes back to religious origins in medieval times. To these institutions of higher learning, the transition from the sacred traditions of the medieval times to the secular traditions of modern times presented no grave problems.

Further, every organization has a determinate territorial jurisdiction, and this jurisdiction cannot be trespassed under any circumstances. The religious organization, on the other hand, has no such constraints born of a fixed territorial jurisdiction. Certain
universal principles of human welfare cut across territorial boundaries, and this fact facilitates the enlargement of the scope of activity of religious organizations. We have instances in history of the priests and the clergy accompanying the traders and the political overlords to distant lands, when the latter migrated for purposes of trade or conquest. In spite of the bifurcation of the sacred and the secular in modern societies, the resources of both are often combined, especially where territorial boundaries had to be transcended.

On the part of some social workers, there may be a feeling that the welfare provisions made by religious organizations are not quite effective, as they lack suitable organizational resources to undertake such tasks. This may be partly true. Like any modern organization, the religious organization has no exact roster of members and no clear-cut allocation of tasks and responsibilities. It is difficult, at any given time, to determine how large its membership is, and the roles which the members are assigned. Consequently, its resources cannot be geared systematically to any determinate task. Very often the functioning of a
religious organization does not appear to be efficient. Things do not seem to get done according to a time schedule. But still, there is no adequate reason for the social worker to ignore the religious organization altogether. As Niebuhr states: "The social worker needs the insights of religion, not only to keep wholesome his attitudes towards individuals for whom he is responsible, but also to preserve sanity and health in his outlook upon life and his particular mission therein."¹ In fact, Niebuhr describes social work as a 'moral enterprise' of which 'religion is a part.'²

Social welfare could be viewed as a developmental task. Social welfare could also be considered as an attempt in bringing about change in the life of an individual, group or community. The prescriptions of welfare tradition are clear in considering this change as a change towards betterment. Thus, the social worker becomes an agent of social change, controlling and regulating it. But, he will lose his moorings, if he

¹. Niebuhr, B. op. cit., p. 68.
². Ibid., p. 68.
does not satisfy himself that the type of change which he intends to bring about is really the type of change that contributes to the development of society. Consequently, in his career as a social worker, he has to face the dilemma of care or development. Obviously, the two are not synonymous. 'Care' does not necessarily lead to development, nor is it the only essential ingredient.

The role of social work and its practice should be viewed in the larger context of the institutional structures of political, economic and religious organizations existing in any given society. Consequently, social work practice has to contend with certain constraints having their loci in the institutional structures, in accomplishing wider applications of welfare activities and programmes. Thus, the role of social work in facilitating the tasks of social welfare in a society face certain limitations rooted in society itself. Even in the context of a welfare state, these limitations are real for the social worker.

Social welfare is not yet institutionalised in our society in the sense that the tasks of social
welfare are not considered as an integral part of the social mechanism. The separate welfare institutions which exist are not built into the institutional framework of society, and consequently, their impact on the lives of individuals, groups and communities is not considerable. On the other hand, social welfare measures undertaken by these institutions become rather suspect.

In the absence of institutionalization of social welfare, the profession of social work is best practised in coping with the many problems of a rapidly changing society only when it operates through the established institutional structures of society.

In the light of this, it is apparent that the religious organization, with its tradition and ideology of social welfare is effective in meeting the several problems and requisites of a changing social order. If this contention is true, then the corollary that the religious organization has a contribution to make to social development will be valid.