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**Evolution and Historical Background of Social Work in Different Religions:**

**Social Work:**

Social work is a profession concerned with helping individuals, families, groups and communities to enhance their individual and collective well-being. It aims to help people develop their skills and their ability to use their own resources and those of the community to resolve problems. Social work is concerned with individual and personal problems but also with broader social issues such as poverty, unemployment and domestic violence.

**History of Social Work:**

Social work as practice existed since the beginning of human civilization. But as profession, social work is the product of 20th century. Social work started its journey of development from Charity concept of social work and had to travel a long distance to reach to the present status of a profession. Basic practices of social work are obtained from the religious teachings in the world. Here is the explanation of social work practices in different religions.

**Islam and Social Work:**

Islam is one of the main religions in the world. Islam means the active submission to the one God. The followers of Islam are called Muslims. Muslims are those who believe in one Allah and in Muhammad (PBUH) as the final Prophet of Allah.

**The basic tenets of Islam are:**

* Belief in the one and only one Allah.
* Belief in Prophet Muhammad as Allah’s Messenger.
* Belief in the five pillars of Islam.
* Belief in six articles of faith.
* Belief in Quran and following Quran teachings.
* Following Islam morals.
* Performing good deeds.

**Social Work practices in Islam:**

The religious book of Islam ‘Quran’ gives much importance to social service, social justice and equality. In Quran Allah says:

“It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards East or West; but it is righteousness to believe in Allah and the Last Day and the Angels and the Book and the Messengers; to spend of your substance out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask; and for the ransom of slaves.”

**Social work practices existing in Islam consists of:**

1. **Zakat:**

Zakat is a form of ‘poor tax’ imposed on the privileged Muslims and the fund created out of it is spent for the welfare of the poor Muslims. Zakat is one of the five pillars of Islam.

In Quran Allah says:

“You shall observe the Contact Prayers (Salat) and give the obligatory charity (Zakat), and bow down with those who bow down.”

"They ask you as to what they should spend. Say: Whatever wealth you spend, it is for the parents and the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer, and whatever good you do, Allah surely knows it."

It has been narrated from the Noble Prophet (PBUH), that he said:

“Indeed Allah has imposed on the rich people a measure that will suffice their poor ones.”

The above verses and hadith shows that zakat is a duty of Muslims who have that much wealth so that they can help poor. For zakat the individual must own a specific amount of wealth or savings. This is referred to as Nisaab and is the threshold at which Zakat becomes payable. The amount of Zakat to be paid is 2.5% of Nisaab. It is a way of eliminating poverty from the society. Moreover zakat practice shows that concept of charity is as old as Islam and existed even before it.

1. **Fitrah:**

It is charity given to the poor at the end of the fasting in the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. It is a way of helping poor.

1. **Sadqa-o-Khairat:**

It is charity that Muslim gives voluntarily to poor in the name of Allah in order to help them.

In Quran Allah says:

“And whoever volunteers good – then indeed, Allah is appreciative and Knowing.”

1. **Other Social Services:**

Islam also gives teachings of other social services related to **health** and **education**. Islam teaches that education should be for all.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: “The seeking of knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim.”

Moreover Islam teaches to **take care of orphans**, to ensure their right brought up, to educate them and make them good persons.

All these social work practices taught in Islam have today become part of social work profession. And these provide people with a progressive basis to change and develop and to improve their quality of life.

**Christianity and Social Work:**

Christianity is one of the world largest religions. Historically it is found that Christian missionaries played a significant role in changing the living pattern and contributed a lot to the adding of new values and tradition to the practice of social work.

The Gospel (means the Christian message itself) of **“service to man is service to God”** of Christianity is an enduring foundation stone of social work profession all over the world.

Christianity is a religion based upon the teachings and miracles of Jesus. Jesus is the Christ. He performed many miracles which were recorded in the Gospels by the eyewitnesses. Christians believe that Christ is divine in nature as well as human, so he is worthy of worship and prayer.

**The Basic Tenets of Christianity:**

Some of the most important beliefs of the Christian religion are:

* God is described as father as he is said to be the creator, life-giver, law-giver, and protector.
* The Bible itself claims to be **“the inspired Word of God”.**
* Christianity is basically built around the value of relationship with God and with others. Jesus Christ, in his teachings, emphasized on loving God and the neighbors.

**The Ten Commandments:**

The Ten Commandments are a set of biblical principles relating to ethics and worship which play a fundamental role in Christianity. The Ten Commandments include:

1. You will worship the only one God, the Father.
2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
3. Remember to keep holy the Lord’s Day (Sunday).
4. Honour your father and your mother.
5. You shall no kill.
6. You shall not commit adultery.
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.
9. You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife.
10. You shall not covet your neighbour’s wealth.

**Contribution of Christianity to Social Work:**

Some of the social works done by Christians are:

1. **Social Reformation:**

The most excellent work done by Christianity is to remove existing inequalities in the world among different societies. It protested against division, exclusion and exploitation.

1. **Education:**

Educational service of the Christianity has been admitted as highly valued service to the world. Missionary schools exist almost everywhere in the world. In spite of oppositions they function well and almost 90% of the beneficiaries of such institutions are non-Christians.

1. **Social service to the destitute:**

There are hostels and orphanages for boys and girls attached to Christian educational institutions to help the children of poor parents. Great care is given to deaf and dump, mentally retarded, aged, destitute, lepers, aids patients etc.

1. **Health Services:**

The contribution of the church in the field of health services has been well appreciated. Quite a many church personnel are fully involved in public health services, nutritional programs and hygiene and sanitation programs. In the field of medical care the contribution of the Christianity is admirable. Health centers run by Christians originally meant to serve the poor which are well equipped and well established.

1. **Livelihood Promotion**

Liberating people from bonded chains of all forms of suffering has always been main goal of the church initiatives. The church’s development schemes consist not only of providing food, clothing and shelter to the needy, but also helping people toward the achievement of self-reliance and dignity.

All these points discussed above shows that social work is practiced by the Christians as it exists in the basic teachings of Christianity.

Hinduism and Social Work:

Hinduism can best be defined as a way of life based on the teaching of ancient Indian sages and scripture like Vedas and Upanishads.

Hinduism is not an organized religion and has no single, systematic approach to teaching its value system. Nor do Hindus have a simple set of rules to follow like the Ten Commandments of Christianity. Local, regional, caste, and community-driven practices influence the interpretation and practice of beliefs throughout the Hindu world. Yet a common thread among all these variations is belief in a Supreme Being and adherence to certain concepts such as Truth, dharma, and karma.

**Hinduism speaks of following for the service of mankind:**

* + - * Bhakti (Devotion),
      * Dharma (what is right)
      * Yoga (discipline).
* The oldest Hindu religious scripture Rig Veda encourages charity by saying, **“May the one who gives shines most”**.
* The Upanishads like Brihadaranyaka, Chhandagya and Taitiriya, prescribed that every  
  householder must practice charity.
* In Mahabharat it is found that in an interaction Bhisma talked to Yudhistir describing the essence of eternal religion, non-violence, truth, the conquest of anger and practice of charity.
* Bhagawat Geeta says**, “**When any profit accrued as a result of total dedicated efforts of many, if misappropriated by a man, then he is a thief. No single member has the right to have a larger share. The community is sure to succeed in progress and welfare when it has learned to live and strive as one entity. The privileged class has a moral duty to serve the poor, such persons who served the society with all their ability are freed from all sins**”.**  
  This statement from Bhagawat Geeta, a Hindu scripture has deep identification with  
  equality, social justice and social responsibility which are the essence of social work  
  practice.
* **Law of Karma:** The law of Karma in Hinduism is essentially a moral law which calls for social  
  responsibility towards one’s fellowmen. By karma whatever one does has consequences not only for others, but also for oneself. As misunderstood by many, karma doesn’t mean fate, but it is the outcome of what one does in his lifetime. If you fail to do good to others who are in pain and suffering then you are losing a chance of shaping your karma.
* Dharma: Dharma is the value one receives from good deeds (Karma). Practice of dharma does not mean observance of religious rituals but living a life of truth, non-violence, compassion and equal regards for others and their welfare, reflected in selfless service to the society.
* Gita: In the Gita non-violence is considered to be the highest dharma in Hinduism (Ahimsa  
  Param dharma). In a wider sense, it is not just non-killing, not even mere tolerance, but  
  is compassion, forgiveness, benevolence, selflessness, help for others, peace and  
  harmony. Compassion and help to others in need has been highly cherished value right  
  from the very Vedic age till today.
* **Daan:** ‘Daan’ (charity) was recognized as the most potent way of earning **‘Punya’** which is believed to be the qualifying mark for entry into the heaven.
* Padmapuranam declares, “Those who always feed the crippled, the blind, the  
  children, the old, the ill and those who help the helpless will enjoy bliss in heaven afterdeath”.
* According to Chhandogya Upanishad, another Hindu scripture, **“**Life is a succession  
  of **‘Yajna’** (which means regular services for others). Charity is not merely a social duty, but it is like a prayer. One does it for his own sake; one feels it is privilege, because one is serving the Lord (God) through it**”**.
* On the careful analysis of all the above quotations from different Hindu scriptures,   
  one may find that presence of social work is deeply felt in each practice of Hindu  
  religion.

**Organizations:**

* + One of the famous Hindu organizations working for the welfare of the people without any discrimination on the basis of faith is **Sri Satya Saibaba Charitable Trust.** It does outstanding work in the fields of health and education.
  + **Ram Krishna Mission** has setup many Vivekananda Mathas in different parts of the country which are involved in promoting education, health through yoga, personality development, rural development, natural resource development in the guidelines of the ‘Sanatana Dharma’.
  + Among the other institutions, **Brahmakumaris, Swami Hrudananda Trusts,  
    ISKCON, Swaminarayan Mission** are doing commendable job for the welfare of not only Hindus but also for others who are in need.

**Buddhism and Social Work:**

Buddhism is often called ‘the religion without a God’.It is known not so much as a religion, but as a philosophy. It is regarded as a mind culture and a path towards enlightenment and of discovering truth and reality of human existence.

Buddhism is a religion indigenous to the Indian subcontinent that encompasses a variety of traditions, beliefs and practices largely based on teachings attributed to Siddhartha Gautama, who is commonly known as the Buddha, meaning "the awakened one".

**Social Concern of Buddhism:**

* Buddha delivers the noble Mission of social work, as found in Vinaya Pitaka “Go! Mark, and travel for the welfare and happiness of the people, out of compassion for the world…”
* Buddha was a young man he gathered other young men of the village and induced them to work for the welfare of the people. As saying goes, they used to undertake different activities such as construction of shelters for the homeless, building and repairing roads, digging wells for drinking water and so on.
* Buddhism laid great emphasis on Punya (righteousness) and Dana (charity). In Buddhism charity was seen not only as a means of relieving the sufferings of materially poor, but also as the giving of gifts (Dana).

Thus, the religious values and practices of Buddhism had a close association with the social work practice.

**Contribution of Buddhism to Social Work:**

During the past few decades Buddhists have been considering the teaching of their religion and are engaged in various developmental and welfare activities which has a close connection with the philosophy of social work. Some of which are discussed below:

1. **Social Action:** In Buddhism ‘social action’ refers to the many kinds of intended to benefit mankind. These actions range from simple individual acts of charity, donation, teaching, training, organized kinds of service, right livelihood in and outside, the helping professions, community development as well as political activity for a better society. Besides, Buddhists spearhead the movement for confronting war, racism and exploitation of the weaker members of the society.
2. **Social Services:** Buddhist Monks and Nuns from the monasteries provide social service for thecommon people who are needy. Buddhists under the guidance of their religionhelp people to enable them to function effectively andultimately lead a life of decency, dignity and liberty. These services have been renderedto all the members of the society, irrespective of their religion, caste, race, language,culture etc.
3. **Women Empowerment:** Buddhism has a very positive and revolutionary attitude towards women. It believes in equal benefits of men and women. In Buddhism women are able to indulge in activities outside home, including teaching, development of organizational skills, above all in an atmosphere where they couldexperience a sense of improvement and accomplishment.
4. **Social Work with Weaker Section:** Upliftment of the oppressed in the society has been taken into high considerationby Buddhism. Buddhism is against any kind of socialinequality including caste based inequality. Buddhist aims at undertaking more and more social and political activities forliberation of oppressed people from the cycle of caste based exploitation.

Thus, the practice of social work can be felt in wide range of activities undertaken in the spiritual guidance of Buddhism.

**Jainism and Social Work:**

Jainism, traditionally known as Jain Dharma, is an ancient Indian religion. The religion derives its name from the jina ("conqueror"), a title given to twenty-four great teachers (tirthankaras), through whom their faith was revealed. Mahavira, the last of the tirthankara, is considered the founder of Jainism. The ultimate goal of Jainism is the liberation of the self (jiva) from rebirth, which is attained through the elimination of accumulated karma.

**The Basic Tenets of Jainism:**

The Jains believe in re-creation. To free themselves of the cycle of birth and death, they practice self-denial that is tough in nature. Their professions are chosen carefully and revolve around the protection of lives or doing good deeds for others. The Jains believe in the following principles and ethics:

* **Ahimsa**, the principle of non-injury (often called non-violence), non-injury extends to thought, word and action.
* **Sathya**, to speak the truth requires moral courage.
* **Asteya** that is non-stealing.
* Jainism believes that the more a man possesses worldly wealth, the more he may be unhappy and more likely he is to be attached to his possessions and his station in life.

**Contribution of Jainism to Social Work:**

From the social history of India it is evident that Tirthankara Mahavira made several important salient contributions from a social point of view. Some of the social work practices include:

1. **Equality and Social Justice:** The most significant contribution of Jainism in the social field was the establishment of social equality among the four castes in India that are Brahman, Ksatriya, Vaisya and Sudra. They have developed special institutions like upasharayas for monks and nuns, dharmashalas for travelers, poor and destitute, orphanages, women’s homes, libraries, schools etc.
2. **Education:** Statistics reveal that there are over 4400 schools all over India established by or managed by Jains. Similarly there are 100s of colleges in professions like engineering, medicine, management etc. established and run by Jains. Thus Jains have contributed a lot to improve education system.
3. **Health and Food:** Health service is another thrust area of social works undertaken by Jains. There are many hospitals run by Jains. Jain social organizations hold annual special health treatment camps in remote areas for weaker sections of the society.
4. **Ecology, Disaster Management:** Almost all Jains and Jain organizations singly come forward whenever there is a need for assistance in any disaster situation. For example, Bhartiya Jain Sangathana of Pune undertakes extensive disaster rehabilitation program on a professional cum charitable basis.
5. **Liberation of Women:** Jainism focuses on women education and liberty. They provide ways to make women independent.

These all contributions of Jainism to social work show that social work exists in the teachings of this religion.

Through all this discussion it is concluded that social work has its basis in the teaching of all religions in the world. Social work is as old as these religions or human civilization and it is evolved from the religions in the world.