

## Social Welfare in the Religions of Subcontinent

(A Critical Study)

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### ABSTRACT

Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism are among the major religions of Sub-continent. The present study highlights the fact that public welfare is preached by all of these religions. Giving alms for the sake of public welfare is an important part of various Hindu religious practices. The role of latest reformist movements is also worth mentioning along with the Hindu literature related with social well-being. Arya Samāj movement did many activities for the welfare of people. The founder of Buddhism made efforts for the betterment of mankind and used his religion and teachings to propagate public welfare.

Buddhism rejected the caste system and played an important and effective role to minimize the sufferings of affected community. In this regard Islam rises to the highest pedestal as the topic of Holy Quran is Man. It focuses not only on the worldly success of man but also his success in the hereafter. Islam has gone a step ahead than other religions as the activities of public welfare are considered worship in it. The rights of human beings are given great importance and they are given no less importance than rights of Allah. Moreover, the Holy Prophet (S.A.W) took noteworthy steps for the welfare of whole mankind without any discrimination and these are highlighted in this paper. Islam also gives lineaments of the methods and modes of public welfare and goes beyond the other Semitic and non-Semitic religions in this regard.

This paper explores and highlights the measures taken by the mentioned religions in a comparative manner and also proves that Islamic concept of social welfare is not only limited to human beings but it also enfolds other living beings and even plants. Islam provides a complete road map of public welfare. Islamic society not only progresses financially but it also focuses on spiritual, ideological and social progress. The aim of social welfare cannot be achieved unless equilibrium is maintained between rights and duties. Islam not only stresses on the rights of the weak but also safeguards the rights of the rich.

**Keywords:** *Social welfare, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, charity.*

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An important and organized way to solve the problems of mankind is social welfare. Because it imply “the full range of organized activities of voluntary and governmental agencies that seek to prevent, elevate, or contribute to the solution of recognized social problems, or to improve the well-being of individuals, groups, or communities”<sup>(1)</sup>. Its core purpose is “to aid disadvantaged, distressed or vulnerable persons or groups”<sup>(2)</sup>. In the present era, individual and institutional efforts are executed in this regard.

Today man is making positive efforts in helping mankind. The reason behind this awakening is undoubtedly the religion because it is most influential reality of man's life. Religion not only influences individual and public institutions but religious beliefs and deeds also affect the human relationship<sup>(3)</sup>. It helps in the understanding and solving man's problems. That is why the ideas of social welfare and public good are clearly described in all the major religions of the world. Although there is long list of religions of the world, but in the present study only those religions are focused which are major religions of Subcontinent. The reason behind this selection is that there is a blend of Semitic and non-Semitic religions in Subcontinent. Hinduism and Buddhism are non-Semitic whereas Islam is Semitic. These three are considered the major religions of Subcontinent because Hinduism and Islam influenced majority of population. As far as Buddhism is concerned, it is included in the study because it originated and flowered in this region. In this research paper the study of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam are included so that their point of views regarding the public welfare can be highlighted.

### **The Teachings of Social Welfare in Hinduism**

Hinduism has an ancient history. People were divided into four social orders in the times of *Vedas*. According to this division the *Brahmins* were given priority over *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Sudra*. The *Vaishya* were considered higher than *Kshatriya* and *sudra*. The *sudra* belonged to the lowest social order. Despite this division of classes it cannot be said that there was no concept of public welfare in Hinduism. In fact it is preached in religious literature.

A great importance is attached to *Dān* (charity) in Hinduism. It is binding upon the followers to give alms on daily basis and it is an important

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(1) Encyclopedia of Social Work, (National Association of Social Workers, 1971), II: 1446.

(2) Encyclopedia Britannica, (Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1998), X: 923.

(3) Edward R. Canda, “Religious content in Social Work Education,” Journal of Social work Education, Vol.25, No.1, 1989, 36.

part of religious festivals.<sup>(1)</sup> Al-Bayrūnī has discussed thirty six festivals in his travelogue and in twenty two out of these, giving alms is mandatory.<sup>(2)</sup> It is also binding on the occasion of *Yātrā* (pilgrimage).<sup>(3)</sup> In major and famous religious treatises giving alms is not only stressed but those who do not give alms are condemned. In *Rigveda* there is condemnation for those who do not spend on friends and spending only on one's self is considered a sin.<sup>(4)</sup> Same idea is also presented in *Gītā*.<sup>(5)</sup> The rules mentioned in the law of Manu also show that giving alms was basic part of religious life.<sup>(6)</sup>

About the creation of world the *Purāṇas* tell that there are many eras of the world. Every era is the era of a *Mahā-Yuga*. There are four *Yugas* in one *Mahā-Yuga*. Three *Yugas* have passed from the present *Yuga* in which mankind faced decline. Now fourth *Yuga* is passing and is known as *Kali Yuga*. Social decline is at its peak in this *Yuga*. Vedas have been forgotten and the Brahmins have lost prestige.<sup>(7)</sup> During *Kali Yuga*, only *Dān* remains as the sole foot upholding Dharma. Therefore, people are advised to focus on *dān* during the present age, *Kali Yuga*. So giving alms is considered the most important religious practice in the present era. There are a few rules for giving alms. For instance alms must be given to the deserving on appropriate time.<sup>(8)</sup> Hindus also believe that giving alms never goes waste and is rewarded at each occasion.<sup>(9)</sup>

Although the *Brahmins* are given priority for accepting alms but it should also be spent on deserving people and it has been stressed in Hinduism. It rises above social orders and the poor, needy, friends, parents and hungry are included in this list.<sup>(10)</sup> Serving the guests is regarded as a

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(1) Al- Bayrūnī, *Kitab al-Hind*, (Lahore: Al-Faisal Nashran, 2005), 1 : 186.

(2) *Ibid.*, I : 205 – 213.

(3) *Ibid.*, I : 180.

(4) *Rigveda* X. 117

(5) *The Bhagavad Gita*, trans. Franklin Edgerton (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1972), III. 118.

(6) *The Laws of Manu*, trans. G. Buhler, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1886), I. 86.

(7) Madeleine Biardeau, *Hinduism: The Anthropology of a Civilization*, (New Delhi, O.U.P, 1989), 102.; Sanjay Agarwal, *Daan and other Giving Traditions in India*, (New Delhi, AccountAid, 2010), 35.

(8) *Bhagavad Gita*, XVII. 20-23

(9) Swami Dayanand Saraswati, *An English Translation of the Satyarth Prakash*, (Lahore: Virjanand Press, 1908), 350.

(10) Leona Anderson, "Contextualizing Philanthropy in South Asia", in *Philanthropy in the World Traditions*, ed. W.F. Ilchman et al. (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998), 63.

great deed and is called *Dev puja*.<sup>(1)</sup> The heirs of the deceased offer sixteen meals during the first year of death.<sup>(2)</sup> Moreover in ancient literature there is evidence of attending the sick. In the third century BC, Asoka established hospitals and also clinics for animals.<sup>(3)</sup>

Modern movements for public welfare have proved more useful than the movements of the ancient times. Due to this many works of social welfare gained momentum and practically it proved useful in getting rid of four social orders. It is clear that these movements were direct result of the influence of Islam and Christian missionaries. The activities of Hindu reformer Sahaja Anand Swami are valuable as he established welfare houses and wells in the time of famine. Although he did not succeed in abolishing the caste system but because of his activities Gujrat became well off.<sup>(4)</sup> Moreover the *Arya Samāj* movement by Swami Dya Anand in last quarter of nineteenth century did many activities of social welfare. Swami Dya Anand himself established the first Hindu orphanage. The *Arya Samāj* worked for providing relief during famine, providing medical help during days of epidemic, attending the sick and carrying out the funeral of the dead.<sup>(5)</sup> It also raised voice for the second marriage of the virgin widows and did efforts to abolish caste system.

### Social Welfare in Buddhism

The basic focus of Buddhism is on social welfare and public good.<sup>(6)</sup> *Gotham Buddha* preaches his followers to help people. He preached his followers to move in the streets instead of settling at one place and help the people.<sup>(7)</sup>

Charity is highly appreciated in Buddhism and a lot has been written in religious literature in this regard. *Buddha* was well aware of the advantages of giving alms. According to him if people become aware of its advantages then they will surely share their wealth with people and save

(1) Saraswati, Satyarth Prakash, 325.

(2) Al-Bayrūnī, Kitāb al-Hind, 2 : 517.

(3) P.V. Kane, History of Dharmasastra, (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1941), Part-I, II, 4.

(4) Rana Amjad, Social Welfare and Religion in the Middle East, (U.K.:The Policy Press, University of Bristol), 2009, 31.

(5) Lajpat Rai, The Arya Samaj, (London:Longmans, Green and Co., 1915), 219.

(6) Bhikku Bodhi, Introduction to The Dhammapada, trans. Acharya Buddhārakkhita, , (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1985), 9.

(7) Walpola Rahula, The Heritage of the Bhikkru, (Canada: Grove Press, 2007), 3.

their hearts from the stains of greed.<sup>(1)</sup> Close fist people finally meet decline.<sup>(2)</sup> According to Buddhist philosophy greed is one of the three evils which are hurdles in the way of getting wisdom. So the importance of charity increases because it saves from greed and also brings advantage in the hereafter.

In addition to giving material benefit, Buddhism also stresses on sharing knowledge and skills. In other words imparting education is a good deed as giving food to the needy. This custom is quite contrary to the Hindu *Brahmins* who monopolize the education as well as resources.<sup>(3)</sup> *Buddha* not only accepted alms but also gave alms in his life. To him the animals should also be treated with kindness. A story is attached to his name that once he came across a lioness who was so weak that she could not feed her cubs. *Buddha* put himself before her so that she may eat him and feed her cubs.<sup>(4)</sup> A person having such kindness for animals must have more passion to serve humanity. The hungry are fed on daily basis and especially on religious festivals so that their forefathers may get peace in the other world.<sup>(5)</sup>

*Buddha* did many efforts for the public welfare in his life. He told the traders to give full measure and not to trade the illegal things. Such kinds of instruction are given on various places in *Āṅguttaranikāya* the religious book of Buddhism.<sup>(6)</sup> In the time of *Buddha* there were some unjust rulers and he preached those rulers to treat their subject with justice and waive the heavy taxes imposed by them.<sup>(7)</sup> There are ten rules set out for rulers in Buddhism and they all aim at public welfare.<sup>(8)</sup> According to *Buddha* the

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- (1) Itivuttaka: This Was Said by the Buddha, trans. Thanissaro Bhikkhu, (Barre, Massachusetts: Dhamma Dana Publications, 2001), 17.
  - (2) Suttanipata, I. 6.
  - (3) Urgan Sargharakshita, The Essential Sangharakshita, (U.S.A., Wisdom Publications Inc, 2009), 571.
  - (4) Hendrik Kern, Jatakamala, ed. Arya Sura, (Cambridge, Harvard Oriental Series, Harvard University Press, 1895,) I, Iff;
  - (5) Husain M. Ilyas, Buddh Dharam....Aik Taruf, Seh Roza Dawat, New Delhi, February 16, 1995, 11.
  - (6) Rahula, Bhikkhu, 4.
  - (7) Helmer Smithy, ed. The Commentary on the Dhammapada/Dhammapadatthakotka (U.K.: The Pali Text Society, 2007), II, 592.
  - (8) Ten rules are as follow: 1.Dana/charity, 2.Sila/morality, 3.Paricaga/altruism, 4.Ajjava/honesty, 5.Maddava/gentleness, 6.Tapa/self-control, 7.Akkhoda/non-anger, 8.Avihimsa/non-violence, 9.Khanti/forbearance, 10. Avirodhana/uprightness; Jeffery Haynes, ed. Routledge Handbook of Religion and Politics, (U.S.A.: Routledge, 2009), 12.

circle of social welfare is very wide. In his life time he visited far flung tribes and helped in resolving their rows.<sup>(1)</sup>

The division of human beings on social level is very famous on the soil of Subcontinent. Hindus divided the human beings in four castes and because of this social inequality was at its peak. In this situation Buddhism played radical role and upgraded the honor of humanity. It preached the division of human beings on the basis of their deeds rather than caste. *Buddha* preached that no one is better for being born in the family of *Brahmins* and no one is lower to others for being born in the family of *sudra*. Those who do good deeds are better and those who do bad deeds are lower than others.<sup>(2)</sup>

In Buddhism all those acts which can harm humanity are illegal and all those acts which help mankind are preached. On one occasion it is said:

“One who destroys life, utters lies, takes what is not given, goes to another man’s wife, and addicted to intoxicating drinks\_ such a man digs up his own root even in this world.”<sup>(3)</sup>

### Social Welfare in Islam

Islam focuses on the welfare of mankind in this world and the hereafter. Helping the needy and the weak is stressed and given high place. The weak and the needy include widows, divorced women, travellers, orphans and slaves.<sup>4</sup> Helping the needy is binding upon the Muslims. Many human needs are fulfilled with money and extending monetary help is basic in this regard. For this reason *Zakat* is an important religious binding.<sup>5</sup> The people who can take *zakat* and alms are listed in the Holy *Qur’ān*. Allah says:

﴿إِنَّمَا الصَّدَقَاتُ لِلْفُقَرَاءِ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَالْعَامِلِينَ عَلَيْهَا وَالْمَوْلَّاتِ فُلُوبُهُمْ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ  
وَالْعَارِمِينَ وَفِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَأَبْنِ السَّبِيلِ فَرِيضَةً مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ﴾<sup>(6)</sup>

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- (1) Buddhaghosa, Samantapasadika, Commentary on Vinayapitaka, (Lycee Bouddhique Preach Suramarit, 1966), I, 50-51.
  - (2) Ahmad Abdullah Al-Masdūsī, Mazahab Alam – Aik Mu‘ashartī wa Siyāsī Jaizah, (Karachi: Maktabah Khuddam-e-Millat, 1598) 192.
  - (3) The Dhammapada, Ch.18, 246-247.
  - (4) e.g., Al-Baqarh 2 : 83, 177, 215, 234, 240; Al-Nisa 4 : 4, 12, 19, 75, 92; Al-Anfal 8 : 41; Al-Tauba 9 : 91, 92; Al-Noor 24 : 24, 61; Al-Ahzab 33 : 5; Al-Hashr 59 : 7.
  - (5) Al-Bukhārī, Muhammad b. Ismail, Sahīh Al-Bukhārī, (Al-Riyādh: Dar al-Salam, 2000), Hadīth No. 8.
  - (6) Al-Taubah 9 : 60.

*The alms are only for the poor and the needy, and for those employed in connection therewith, and for those whose hearts are to be reconciled, and for the freeing of slaves, and for those in debt, and for the cause of Allah, and for the wayfarer.*

Moreover giving alms in the way of Allah is stressed in Holy Qur'ān on numerous occasions.<sup>(1)</sup> About twenty verses in the Holy Qur'ān discuss this subject. The basic needs like dress and food are not overlooked in Holy Qur'ān.<sup>(2)</sup> Fulfilling the needs of people is not only stressed but those who do not do it are warned.<sup>(3)</sup> The Holy Book introduces a unique dimension of public welfare and takes the view that intercession of the needy is also welfare.<sup>(4)</sup>

A study of Ahādīṭ shows that the circle of social welfare is quite wide in Islam. The Holy Prophet S.A.W has clarified the ideas of social welfare mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān. Children, sick, old, prisoners and animals are included in this list and there are a lot of 'Ahādīṭ in this regard.

The Holy Prophet S.A.W stressed upon the resolving of issues between quarreling parties, providing help to the unemployed and facilitating the marriage of the willing persons.<sup>(5)</sup> Putting hurdles in the path of people<sup>(6)</sup> and teasing the pedestrians is also prohibited.<sup>(7)</sup> Spilling the garbage is also prohibited and clearing the harmful things from the path of people is also ordered.<sup>(8)</sup>

Islam has directed the lender to extend the time limit of the return of loan so as to provide relief to the indebted.<sup>(9)</sup> To lend money to the needy is considered charity and to extend time of the return of loan is double charity.<sup>(10)</sup> The one who does not take back loaned money from the needy is

(1) Al-Baqarah 2 : 274, 289; Āl Imran 3 : 133; Al-Saba 34 : 39; Al-Hadīd 57 : 7; Al-Hashr 59 : 9; Al-Muzzammil 73 : 20.

(2) Al-Nisa 4 : 5; Al-Maidah 5 : 89.

(3) Al-Hāqqag 69: 34; Al-Fajr 89: 18; Al-Mā'ūn 107: 1-3.

(4) Al-Nisā' 4: 85.

(5) Prof. Amīr al-Dīn Mahar, Islam Main Rifāh 'Āmah Ka Tasawwur aur Khidmat Khalq Ka Nizām; (Lahore: Nashriyat, 2009), 206.

(6) Abu Dawūd, Sunan Abu Dawūd (Al-Riyāḍ: Dar al-Salam lil-Nashr wa al-Tauzī', 2000), Hadīth No. 2629.

(7) Muslim b. Al-Hajjāj b. Muslim, Sahīh Muslim, (Al-Riyāḍ: Dar al-Salam lil-Nashr wa al-Tauzī', 2000), Hadīth No. 4028.

(8) Sahīh al-Bukhārī, Hadīth No. 2707; Sahīh Muslim, Hadīth No. 100.

(9) Al-Baqarah 2: 280.

(10) Ibn Kathīr, Isma'īl b. Umar, Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Azīm, (Al- Riyāḍ: Dar Ṭayyibah lil-Nashr wa Tauzī', 1999), 1: 716.

promised forgiveness from Allah.<sup>(1)</sup> On the other hand the indebted is asked to return the loan on decided time. The Holy Prophet S.A.W did not offer funeral prayer of the indebted person. The Holy Prophet S.A.W gave good tidings to the one who pays the loan in place of the poor indebted person.<sup>(2)</sup>

The welfare of neighbours is so much important that it is the compulsory principle of belief in Allah and the Day of Judgment.<sup>(3)</sup> Taking care of neighbours is obligatory for a Muslim. The one whose neighbour sleeps hungry is not considered a perfect mu'min.<sup>(4)</sup> Luxuries of life must be shared with neighbor and if not possible then must be hidden. The one who is source of trouble for his neighbor is not fit to enter paradise.<sup>(5)</sup>

Islam has strictly prohibited negative monetary activities for the sake of public welfare. The Holy Prophet S.A.W has cursed those who take or give bribe.<sup>(6)</sup> Deceit in trade is harām.<sup>(7)</sup> Making a deal over another deal is also prohibited.<sup>(8)</sup> According to Islamic law, giving short measure is a crime and considered cause of chaos in the world.<sup>(9)</sup> Adulteration is totally against public welfare and the Holy Prophet S.A.W has denied having any relation with a person doing it.<sup>(10)</sup> Moreover falsehood, abusive conversation, deceit, guile, slandering, backbiting, theft, usury and not fulfilling promises are all illegal acts in Islam.<sup>(11)</sup>

Those who help others are helped by Allah.<sup>12</sup> That is why a mu'min does not focus on doing well for himself but he also strives to do good for others. He solves their problems and addresses their grievances and as a result gets reward from Allah in this world and the hereafter. According to a Hadīth:

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- (1) Sahīh Al-Bukhārī, Hadīth No. 2078.
  - (2) Daraquṭnī, Ali b. Umar, Sunan Daraquṭni (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1424 AH), 3: 64.
  - (3) Sahīh al-Bukhārī, Hadīth No. 6018.
  - (4) Baiqahī, Ahmad b. Al-Husain, Al-Sunan al-Kubrā, (Beirut: Dar Al-Ma'rifah, 1356 AH), 3: 10.
  - (5) Sahīh Muslim, Hadīth No. 46.
  - (6) Sunan Abu Dawūd, Hadīth No. 3111.
  - (7) Sahīh Muslim, Hadīth No. 2564.
  - (8) Ibn Mājah, Abu Abd Allah Muhammad, Sunan Ibn Mājah, (Al-Riyāḍ: Dar al-Salam lil-Nashr wa al-Tauzī', 2000), Hadīth No. 2607.
  - (9) Hūd 11: 8; Al-Shūrā 26: 10.
  - (10) Sahīh Muslim, Hadīth No. 101.
  - (11) Shiblī Nu'mānī, Sayyid Sulaimān Nadavī, Sīrat al-Nabī (Lahore: Idara Islamiyat, 2002) 6:579-681.
  - (12) Sahīh Muslim, Hadīth No. 6853.



((مَنْ يَسِّرْ عَلَيَّ مَعْسَرَ يَسِّرَ اللَّهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ))<sup>(1)</sup>

*Whoever alleviates the need of a needy persons, Allah will alleviate His needs in this world and the Hereafter.*

The rights of Allah hold an important and vital place in Islam. Public rights are also given a lot of stress. Allah has connected His own rights with the rights of people.<sup>(2)</sup> The Holy Prophet S.A.W considered the whole humanity as one unit without distinction of colour, tribe and nation and laid the foundation of public welfare.<sup>(3)</sup> Helping the public without any distinction is so valuable that it is said to be the cause of Allah's blessing. The Holy Prophet S.A.W said:

((الرَّاحِمُونَ يَرْحَمُهُمُ الرَّحْمَنُ ارْحَمُوا أَهْلَ الْأَرْضِ يَرْحَمَكُم مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ))<sup>(4)</sup>

*Merciful are shown mercy by Al-Rahman. Be merciful on the earth, and you will be shown mercy from Who is above the heavens.*

### Public Welfare and Practice of Holy Prophet S.A.W

Before Holy Prophet S.A.W the society was at its lowest level. The humanity was in darkness of ignorance and mankind was disgraced. Human society fell below the level of animals. Man was ignorant to his duties to Almighty and his duties to other human beings. There was no consciousness to upgrade life. In these conditions the Holy Prophet S.A.W came as a blessing. Allah says about him:

﴿وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ﴾<sup>(5)</sup>

*“And We have sent you as grace towards all the worlds.”*

In words of Sayed Suleman Mansur Puri, "the Holy Prophet S.A.W invested all his life for the betterment, success, evolution, purification and welfare of generations."<sup>6</sup> The Holy Prophet S.A.W took charge of the betterment of humanity without any distinction. He took practical measures

(1) Ibid.

(2) Ibid., Hadīth No. 2569.

(3) Ahmad b. Hanbal, Musnad, (Beirut: Moassasa al-Risalah, 1999), 3:272.

(4) Al-Termidhī, Muhammad b. Isa, Jami al-Tirmidhī, (Al-Riyād: Dar al-Salam lil-Nashr wa al-Tauzī', 2000), Hadīth No. 1924.

(5) Al-Anbiyā' 21 : 107.

(6) Qāḍī M. Sulaimān Salmān Mansūr-pūrī, Rahmat lil-'Ālamīn, (Lahore: Maktabah Islamiyah, 2006), 2:301.

for this purpose. Due to these measures he not only proved beneficial for his contemporaries but also for the generations to come.

Even before getting the prophet hood his benevolence gained fame among his people. At the age of thirty five he helped in the construction of Ka'bah and resolved the matter of placing Hajar al-Aswad in a peaceful manner. The matter of placing the sacred stone was very controversial because all the tribes wanted to do this blessed task. The tribes were on the verge of war but the wisdom of Holy Prophet S.A.W saved war. He also took part in *Hilf al-Fuḍūl* which was a treaty to stop violence, to help the poor and ensure safety of travelers. His participation in the treaty shows his concern for public welfare. *Hazrat Khadija* states about his public life before prophet-hood in these words:

((إِنَّكَ لَتَصِلُ الرَّحِمَ وَتَحْمِلُ الْكَلَّ وَتَكْسِبُ الْمَعْدُومَ وَتَقْرِي الضَّيْفَ وَتُعِينُ عَلَى  
نَوَائِبِ الْحَقِّ))<sup>(1)</sup>

*You do your duties to relatives, take burden of the weak, earn for the poor, entertain the guests and help all the rightful things.*

Social welfare is an important dimension of the life of Holy Prophet S.A.W. The study of his life shows that welfare of humanity was given priority in the agenda of prophet hood. The speech of *Hazrat Ja'far Tayyār* in the court of *Negus*, king of *Axum*, is a proof in this regard. He summarized the teachings of Holy Prophet S.A.W in these words: "He taught us to speak the truth, to return the entrusted things and to treat the neighbors well. He stopped us from breaking with relations, having illicit relations and doing violence. He stopped us from indulging in vulgarity, falsehood, taking the wealth of orphans and slandering the pious women."<sup>(2)</sup>

The Holy Prophet S.A.W also taught his followers to help humanity and the history of *Sahābah RA* is full of such incidents. It was the result of the teachings of Holy Prophet S.A.W that those of his fellows who became caliphs laid foundation of such acts of public welfare which the most developed states of today cannot boast. The *Sahāba RA* always remained busy in helping the humanity. Some of the examples of their great behavior are given below:

1. *Hazrat Abu Bakar RA* used to go to the house of a blind woman in *Madinah* and did her chores.<sup>(3)</sup>

(1) *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, Hadīth No. 3.

(2) *Ibn Hishām*, *Al-Sīrat Al-Nabaviyah*. (Beirut: Dar al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1990) 1 : 362.

(3) *Ibn al-Athīr*, *Al-Kāmil fi al-Tārīkh*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah, 1987), 2 : 270.

2. After becoming caliph *Hazrat* Abu Bakar RA used to milk the goats for those whom he used to do before becoming caliph.<sup>(1)</sup>
3. On one of his nightly patrol *Hazrat* Umer RA heard the cries of children who were crying of hunger. He came to the national treasure and brought back flour, meat, ghee and dates to the kids on his own back. His servant insisted on taking the burden but he did not allow him.<sup>(2)</sup>
4. Once *Hazrat* Jarīr bin Abdullah RA asked his servant to buy him a horse. The servant made deal of a horse in 300 durhams and brought the seller along with the horse to pay him. When *Hazrat* Jarīr bin Abdullah RA S.A.W the horse he said to the seller that this horse is worth more than 300 durhams and asked him if he can sale it for 400 durhams. The seller agreed. Then *Hazrat* Jarīr RA went closer to the horse and said that this horse is worth more than 400 durhams and asked the seller if he will take 500 durhams for the horse. In this way he kept on increasing the price of the horse till 800 durhams was decided. He was asked why he gave so much money instead of 300 for which the seller had agreed. He said that he gave his word to the Holy Prophet S.A.W that he will always do good to the public.<sup>(3)</sup>
5. After migration to Madinah, the Muslims faced a problem of drinking water's availability. There was just one well which was the property of a Jew. The Holy Prophet PBUH declared the garden in paradise in exchange of the well. *Hazrat* 'Usmān RA bought this well and assigned as endowment in Allah's name.<sup>(4)</sup>

The mercy of Holy Prophet S.A.W is not limited to any special group. He extended his mercy towards non-Muslim subject and prisoners, strangers, animals and even trees and it can be found in his teachings. There are many examples in this regard but keeping in view the length of this paper only one incident is cited here. When *Thamāmah* bin *Āthāl* RA embraced Islam he stopped the supply of grain to Makkah which caused shortage there. The leaders of Makkah requested the Holy Prophet S.A.W. These were the very leaders who persecuted the Muslims in *Shi' b Abī Tālib* and never allowed them food and laughed at the cries of children and

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(1) Ibid, 2 : 272.

(2) *Shiblī Nu'mānī*, *Al-Fārūq*, (Karachi: Dr al-'Ishā'at), 322.

(3) *Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalānī*, *Ahmad b.Ali*, *Fath al-Bārī*, (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah,1379AH), 1:183.

(4) *Jami' al-Tirmadhī*, *Hadīth* No. 3703

women. The Holy Prophet S.A.W responded with kindness and asked Hazrat Thamāmah RA to restore the supply.<sup>(1)</sup>

In short social welfare is a wide subject which enfolds the whole society. Islam enjoins upon its followers to treat parents and relatives with kindness. It also imparts upon its followers to treat widows, orphans, poor, sick, travelers and prisoners with mercy. The victims of natural disasters and epidemics should also be treated well. In other words, Islam preaches to treat humanity with kindness in all spheres of life.

### **Distinctions of Islam**

1. According to Islam the ultimate end of all activities regarding social welfare is to get closer to Allah and find His pleasure. A Muslim does not want fame and worldly gains. He wants reward from Allah for all his acts for public welfare. The sincerity which a Muslim all these activities is not possible in other religions because there is no foundations of Islamic creed, such as belief in Allah and belief in life after death, behind such acts. So these two fundamental beliefs positively influence the charitable affairs of Muslims
2. Islam does not only enjoin welfare of people upon individuals but it also considers it the responsibility of state. Islam is distinguished from other religions because Islamic state is responsible for welfare of its subject. The rulers are held responsible for everything regarding their subject. The basic reason of this sensibility is the concept that they will be questioned about public affairs on the Day of Judgment. Contrary to this the two other major religions i.e. Buddhism and Hinduism do not entertain such a concept and hence overshadowed by Islam. The statement of Hazrat Umer RA is very important in this regard. He said:

*If any baby goat is lost due to hunger on the bank of the Euphrates, then I will be held responsible for it on the Day of Resurrection.*<sup>(2)</sup>

3. Islam provides a complete road map of public welfare. Islamic society not only progresses financially but it also focuses on spiritual, ideological and social progress. The matters of public welfare hold a primary place in Islamic society.

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(1) Sīrat al-Nabī, 2: 602.

(2) Al-Aṣfahānī, Abu Na‘īm Ahmad b. Abd Allah, Hilyat al-Auliyaḥ wa Ṭabaqat Al-Aṣfiyah, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah, 1988) 1: 53.

4. The aim of social welfare cannot be achieved unless equilibrium is maintained between rights and duties. Islam not only stresses the rights of the weak but it also safeguards the rights of the rich.
5. Islam has also taken into account the natural order of creatures. The other religions do not distinguish between human beings and animals with regard to welfare. For example in Buddhism there is no distinction between the welfare of animals and human beings. The relatives are given no priority. In Hinduism the killing of a man is equal to killing of animal. An animal can achieve the status of mother of man. All these beliefs seem to be quite good but in reality a man is the highest of creations and his needs must be given priority to animals. Islam has discussed this matter in detail. <sup>(1)</sup>
6. It is a common concept that the good deeds of man cease after his death, whereas in Islam the unique and distinctive concept of *sadaqah jāriyah* (ceaseless charity) is greatly stressed. This concept establishes the great importance of public assistance in Islam as compared to non-Semitic religions. So, Islam considers the matters of social welfare as a source of eternal blessings. The bliss of any act continues as long as people get benefit from it.
7. No religion in the world allows its followers to earn money from unlawful means. In this regard all the religions are equal. The peerless feature of Islam is that the acceptance of charity is totally conditional to the legitimate earning. The money earned from unlawful means is not acceptable at all. Islam does not approve the use of illegal means for public welfare as it will provide shelter to the illegal activities. The Holy Prophet S.A.W said:
 

((لَا يَقْبَلُ اللَّهُ صَدَقَةً مِنْ غُلُولٍ وَلَا صَلَاةً بِغَيْرِ طُهُورٍ))<sup>(2)</sup>

*All does not accept any Salāt (Prayer) without purification, and He does not accept any charity from ghuḷūl.*
8. Some religions consider public welfare as sole purpose of religion. This idea should be mended. Social welfare is given a lot of importance in Islam but still it is considered a part of religion, not the whole religion. Islam is a religion that propagates justice and equilibrium in society. It does not approve of only doing acts of social welfare. The rights of Allah must not be forgotten. There should be no extremism in anything. All the matters are given due

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(1) Sīrat al-Nabī, 4: 387.

(2) Sunan Ibn Mājah, Hadīth No. 274.

importance in Islam. This point should be clear that social welfare is a part of Islam not the whole Islam.

### Conclusion:

Everyone wants to get help from others and this desire connects him to the idea of helping others. That is why social cooperation began right from the beginning of civilization. Social problems are there in every society in every era and man has always struggled to overcome these problems. In other words, social welfare has been a part of every society from ancient times. Religion is the most important driving force behind the idea of social welfare. Social welfare and religion are inseparable in the perspective of Subcontinent.

In Hinduism there is a lot of stress on social welfare. The concept of spending for public welfare is commanded in religious books like *Bhagavad-gītā*, *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* and Vedas. Besides religion Hindu leaders also did a lot for the betterment of the people. Their reformist movements also took practical steps for public welfare. The movements of Sahajanand Swami and Dayanand Saraswati are remarkable in this regard.

Buddhism also laid great stress on public welfare. Gautama Buddha enjoined upon his followers to travel for the sake of social well-being. He declared that the greatness of human beings does not lie in castes but in being helpful to the masses. The activities against humanity are strongly banned in Buddhism and efforts are made to propagate public welfare.

Islam has gone a step ahead than these two religions and the activities of public service are considered worship in it. The rights of human beings are given great importance and they are given no less importance than rights of Allah. The Holy Prophet S.A.W established a welfare state under his leadership and the Sahāba R.A carried out this mission and it is manifest from their manner of governance. There are a lot of *Qur'ānic* verses and *ahādīth* that highlight the importance of public welfare. The Islamic concept social welfare is not only limited to human beings but it also enfolds other living beings and.

