

A Deeper Look at the Origin and Evolution of the Social Work Profession

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Abstract

This article explores how social work has changed from its beginnings to the early 21st century in India, Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States. It emphasises the significance of understanding social work's past to consider the field's potential future. The researchers used a qualitative research method and gathered information from existing literature, knowledgeable persons, and field visits for observation and verification to validate the collected data. Almshouses, or choultries, in India, can trace their origins back to the time of Buddha. Records from the Chinese travellers Fa-Hien and Xuanzang reveal that similar hospitals/Buddha Vihars existed in India around 400 BC. From the 7th century AD, the temples served food to devotees through 'temple kitchens. These institutions paved the way for almshouses in China, the Middle East, Europe, and Britain, signifying that Social Work's groundwork in India predates the Charity Organisation Society and the Settlement House Movement. Available records also reveal how the British Poor Laws systematised welfare services and played an important role in turning them into rights for the poor. Although social work, both as a career and as a way of living, evolved in India, countless books on social work published over the decades did not explicitly mention it as such.

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1. Introduction

Social work originated from a gradual development in India, based on the people's inherent and supportive disposition to serve. Temples in India have been more than places of worship; they have also fulfilled a social function for a long time. Many of the nation's temples have embraced a longstanding custom of feeding the populace, enabling pilgrims and visitors to share daily healthful, delectable meals (CNN, 2021). During Buddha's time, Buddha Vihar¹ significantly impacted its evolution, as did the establishment of hospitals by monasteries in India and Ceylon from 400 BC to 260 BC. These hospitals offered refuge to the impoverished, incapacitated, and homeless, resembling almshouses rather than contemporary medical facilities. The practice of offering temple kitchen meals to devotees, establishing Choultries and providing rest, food, medicine, and shelter to travellers for safety during their journey or pilgrimage significantly shaped the early landscape of social work. This authentic origin extends to an ancient period, documented by the renowned Chinese traveller and Buddhist monk Fa-Hien (Faxian), who observed and introduced this phenomenon to China. Subsequently, it spread to Middle Eastern countries and eventually reached France, England, and the USA, emerging as almshouses (Legge, 1886). This historical trajectory suggests that India established the foundation for professional social work long before forming the Charity Organisation Society (COS) and the Settlement House Movement. In India, almshouses performed a crucial role in providing care and support to those in need and laying the groundwork for the future growth of professional social work. This article explores the history of the almshouses, the connections between charity, welfare, and rights, as well as the necessity of employing skilled individuals to assist the underprivileged. Also, it explains how voluntary efforts evolved into a recognised profession known as professional social work.

2. Review of Literature

The researcher reviewed several papers and discussed the findings of a select few articles. Retief and Cilliers (2006) provide insight into the early existence

of hospitals, reporting that a form of hospital was present in ancient Mesopotamia towards the end of the 2nd millennium BC. The monastic system established by Buddhism in India also resulted in institutionalised healthcare facilities as early as the 5th century BC, which then spread to other regions such as Sri Lanka, China, and Southeast Asia. Caliph El Welid further contributed to the development of hospitals by constructing the first Arabian hospital in Damascus in 707. Subsequently, comparable institutions emerged across the Near East throughout the ensuing centuries, including Baghdad, Antioch, Jericho, Mecca, Cairo, Medina, and even in Spain. Riva and Cesana (2013) attribute the origins of public hospitals to the early Christian era when individuals were motivated by the Christian message to establish centres dedicated to caring for the sick and destitute. These centres began operating within the bishop's residence, later transitioning to monasteries and eventually evolving into independent hospitals, financially supported by the donations of wealthy patrons. During the middle ages, hospitals had a variety of uses, as Johnson (2012) explains. They served as a place to house pilgrims, almshouses for people experiencing poverty, and even as training centres for future physicians. According to the Christian Medical College Library archives (2017), early European hospitals resembled hospices or homes for the elderly. They offered admission to vulnerable individuals such as senior citizens, people experiencing poverty, pilgrims, travellers, orphans, and others facing financial hardship. The literature review on the origin of the social work profession reveals a limited number of articles, primarily attributed to the parallel development of hospitals and almshouses. The scarcity of available studies indicates a need for more focused research on the specific origins of social work. The profession's historical roots intertwine with the evolution of institutions such as hospitals, resembling the development of almshouses. This connection suggests that the emergence of social work may have been influenced by the broader societal response to healthcare and welfare needs, with implications for the profession's historical development. However, the review highlights the need for more targeted investigations to provide a comprehensive understanding of the origins of social work.

3. Objective

This article aims to explore the evolution of social work in India, Europe, Britain, and America from its inception to the early 21st century.

4. Method

The researcher employed historical research methods to collect the necessary data for this study. Various sources, such as public records, meeting minutes, corporate and government documents, letters, diaries, journal articles, newspapers, university archives, and libraries were consulted. Oral interviews with informed people were also conducted to gain a comprehensive understanding of the place's history (Section 5.2 delves into the deliberations concerning the establishment of dedicated shelter facilities for children, and lactating mothers on the travel and pilgrims). To confirm the validity of the data obtained about the distinctive shelter home for nursing mothers, the researcher also conducted field visits. This study is exploratory, as the selected research topic has not been extensively examined before.

5. Almshouses and Charity

5.1. Almshouses in India

The origins of almshouses span more than two millennia. Initially labelled Bede Houses, Hospitals, or Maison Dieu, they were typically established by benefactors to offer a secure and sheltered residence for individuals in need. Almshouses, established by benevolent individuals or institutions, offer affordable housing for those in need, typically the elderly or impoverished and the Charity is the voluntary act of giving, driven by compassion or altruism, benefiting individuals or groups like the homeless, sick, disabled, or oppressed (Bremner, 2009; Price, & Harlow, 2019; The Almshouse Association, 2023; Wagner, 2005). Social work has a long history, reaching its modern professional form in the late 19th century. This development draws from ancient practices such as poor relief, popular education, and care for neglected children (van der Linde & Limperg, 2014). While many commonly believed that social work originated in Britain and the USA, primarily through British almshouses that supported the poor and distressed, records reveal an earlier origin in India. Today, social work in India has attained great heights, especially in the context of social work education, which has also entered the online realm (Krishnan & Joseph, 2023). This however does not mean that there are fewer issues to tackle with. In India, problems such as child trafficking still exist (Krishnan, 2023). In India, Almshouses, known as Choultry, Chatram, Chavadi, Madam, Viharam, Hospitals, etc., trace their origins back to Buddha in the 6th and 5th centuries BC (Monier-Williams, 1963). Goose and Moden (2010) assert that almshouses have existed for thousands of years. Monasteries initially associated themselves with them, establishing the first ones in India and Ceylon between 400 BC and 260 BC. Buddha Vihar establishments flourished during the lifetime of Lord Buddha (563 BC to 483 BC) and expanded across India, spanning from Kashmir to Cape Comorin. It provides facilities to travellers and

pilgrims during challenging seasons. Originating in the 2nd century BC, initial instances include caves hewn from rock in Karli, Nasik, Junnar, and Bhaja. As per Barker (1987), hospitals were founded and expanded across India in 400 AD. These establishments served as refuges for the impoverished and disabled, with their facilities more closely resembling almshouses than modern hospitals.

5.2. Trade and religious links between the Tamil Kingdom, Rome, Greece, and Arab countries

The Sangam literature, including Ahananooru and Purananooru, suggests that the Tamil Kingdom had trade connections with Rome, Greece and Arab countries. Records indicate that trade between India and these regions existed as early as 300 BC (The Hindu, 2000). Thiruvalluvar, an ancient Tamil poet who lived in the early first century BC, emphasised the importance of extending charity to those in need in poems 221 to 230 in his work, Thirukkural.

Historical records from literary, archaeological, and numismatic sources confirm the existence of direct maritime trading connections between the Tamil Kingdom and Rome. Under the leadership of Augustus (Julius Caesar, 63 BC–14 AD), the Roman Empire greatly prospered in trading Indian pearls and spices - highly sought-after commodities (Brainkart.com., 2018). Archaeological discoveries, including Roman coins and jewels in the Tamil Kingdom, further highlight these trading links. Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador, is recorded to have landed at Madurai in 302 BC. Additionally, the Pandya kings actively traded with Rome as early as 400 BC, as documented by The Hindu (2009; 2011; 2017).

Historical records also indicate that scholars believe Buddhism was present in the Tamil Kingdom around 300 BC, specifically in the port city of Poompuhar during the Sangam period (Way of Bodhi, 2019). Emperor Ashoka of the third century BC is also said to have built a Buddha Vihara in the Port City of Nagapattinam, as documented in an old Burmese record (Government of Tamil Nadu, 2024). The Buddhist Vihar, also known as the China Pagoda, was further developed in Nagapattinam in 720 AD by a Chinese ruler with the approval of King Narasimha Varman, also known as Rajasimha II. Merchants involved in the Silk and Spice trade and pilgrims arriving from China and other regions within his realm established these Vihars as early as the 2nd century BC to cater to their needs (Minakshi, 1977; Walter, 1878; Yule & Cordier, 1993).

Madurai, a city in the Tamil Kingdom (under Pandiyas rule), was referenced by various Roman historians, among them the Greek geographer Strabo (64 BC – 24 AD), Pliny (77 AD), and Ptolemy (140 AD). These indicate that Madurai engaged in maritime trade with Greece and Rome. As a result of this historical exchange, almshouses similar to the Buddhist monasteries in the Tamil Kingdom may have been established in Rome and Greece, inspired by models such as Poompuhar and Nagapattinam (The Hindu, 2009; 2011; 2017). Additionally, it is worth noting that in 52 AD, St. Thomas arrived on the Malabar Coast, located on the western side of the Tamil Kingdom, which is present-day Kerala (Zacharia, 2016).

In the seventh century, King Cheraman Perumal of the Malabar region, situated on the western side of the Tamil Kingdom (present-day Kerala), was introduced to the teachings of Prophet Muhammad by merchants with trade links to Arab countries. In 629 AD, he travelled to Mecca and met the Prophet Muhammad. He also constructed the Cheraman Perumal Masjid in Kodangallur. This mosque served not only as a place of worship but also as a site for traders and travellers seeking shelter and food and a hub for education and community gatherings across all faiths (Range, 2018).

In 1006 and 1090 A.D., Rajaraja Chola and his son Rajendra Chola allowed the Sri Vijaya empire to construct a Buddhist Vihar (also known as Chudamani Vihar/Perumpalli, which means the grand palace) in Nagapattinam. These Vihars were built to provide traders and pilgrims travelling to the Tamil Kingdom with a place to stay, food, and medical care. The Anaimangalam copper plates (also known as **Leiden copper plates** preserved in Leiden University in the Netherlands) reveal the generosity of the Chola kings, who contributed villages to the Buddhist monastery in their time, ensuring the maintenance of the Buddha Vihars initially established by the King of Sri Vijaya in Nagapattinam (Aiyer, 1934). According to the acclaimed novelist Kalhi Krishnamurthy (2017) in his historical novel, "after returning from the conquest of Ceylon, the Chola prince Arulmozhi Varman, also known as Sivapada Sekharan (Rajaraja-I), sought medical treatment and stayed at the Buddha Vihar in Nagapattinam." These historical events suggest that the Buddha Vihar not only catered to the needs of merchants and pilgrims but also served as a hospital for treating needy people.

During his travels to the Pallava Kingdom in the seventh century AD, the Buddhist monk **Xuanzang** (Hiuen Tsang) from China made note of Buddha Vihars in Kanchipuram and Nagapattinam (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024; Rajavelu, 2014). The trade and religious connections between the Tamil kingdom and the Chinese, Arab, Roman, and Greek empires may have paved the way for similar establishments like almshouses in the Middle East.

Throughout ancient and medieval India, rest houses known as choultries (or Dharmasalas) provided pilgrims, travellers, and traders a much-needed respite. Equipped with kitchens, these establishments offered vital refreshments, rest, and shelter for those travelling along trade routes or visiting religious sites. A possible origin of dharma is the Sanskrit root "thar", which means to uphold or sustain. India has a long tradition of social responsibility and service. Social work emerged from this dharma tradition, not as a foreign concept but as an expression of our innate nature (Dubey, 1978; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2023;

Fennell, 1892; Goetz, 1959; Sewell, 1882). Constructed by a Pandiya King in the 6th century AD, the Meenakshi Temple in Tamil Nadu exemplifies a rich tradition. It offers 'Puttu,' steamed rice flour, coconut, and jaggery dishes, as part of the country's worship culinary experience (CNN, 2021; Tulabandula, 2023). In addition to meeting spiritual needs, Indian temples have historically provided for material needs such as food, medicine, and shelter. Many typical Indian temples, whether in a city or village, will have their the kitchen in which these meals are prepared, cooked, and served is either provided at no cost or for a little fee, but also play a vital social role by providing meals to the masses (CNN, 2021). This practice, dating back to the 7th century AD, is deeply embedded in Tamil Nadu's tradition of Temple Kitchens or "Madaipalli," where devout servants of God and devotees receive nourishment (Gautaman, 2008; UNESCO, 2021). These kitchens play a crucial social role in feeding the masses and are integral to India's cultural heritage.

On the roads named after Queen Mangamma of the Nayak Empire, in addition to offering lodging for travellers, pilgrims, and traders, separate shelters were constructed with amenities catering to nursing mothers, infants, and children. One such shelter, "Pillai Madam," offered baby cradles, infant milk, and a resting place for lactating mothers. In Tamil, "Pillai" denotes infant or child, while "madam" signifies a care home. An illustrative case of a child shelter exists in Idiakhal village on the Madurai-Tenkasi national highway in the erstwhile Tenkasi Taluk of Tirunelveli District in Tamil Nadu. This shelter, still visible today, echoes the ancient origins of almshouses². Many of the ruined monasteries that were constructed for the use of travellers and pilgrims during Queen Mangammal's reign may still be seen while travelling on Tamil Nadu's national and state highways as well as local roads.

Another vivid illustration is "The Sathya Dharma Salai," established by Ramalinga Swamikal to provide free food for people experiencing poverty in Vadalur, Tamil Nadu, in 1867. On the inaugural day, he kindled the fire in the stone stove and declared that it should burn continuously, ensuring a perpetual food source for the hungry. The establishment, which remains operational and is managed by volunteers, consistently provides free food to all individuals, irrespective of their religion (My Dattatreya, 2021; Prasad, 2022; The Hindu, 2022). Existing literature indicates that India is a pioneer in establishing almshouses, considered the earliest form of social work. These trace the authentic beginnings of social work to a much earlier era in Southeast Asia (Legge, 1886). James Legge also reported that the renowned Chinese traveller and Buddhist monk **Fa-Hien** (Faxian) (between 399 AD and 412 AD) documented and introduced this remarkable phenomenon to China. These almshouses housed the poor, orphans, widows, widowers, childless individuals, maimed and disabled, providing medical attention and sustenance. This alms-house model extended from India to China, the Middle East, and Europe in the early Christian era, demonstrating its widespread impact.

Currently, the South India Buddha Vihar in Chennai and the Karnataka Guest House in Tirumala are prime examples of modern establishments carrying on the tradition of almshouses, or choultries, in Tamil Nadu. These places offered weary travellers a place to rest, nourishment, medical aid, and lodging, leaving behind tangible evidence of their rich history (Tulabandula, 2023).

5.3. Almshouses in China and the Middle East

Hospitals like those in India have expanded to China and the Middle East, marking their first appearance in Europe. The oldest known hospital or hostel of God, Hotel-Dieu, was founded in Lyons³ in 542 AD by Childebert-1, King of the Franks⁴ (Barker, 1987). In 652 AD, St. Landry established the renowned Hotel-Dieu of Paris. In comparison, historians believe that Santa Maria Della Scala in Siena founded Italy's oldest hospital in 898 AD. Hospitals emerged in Damascus in 707 AD, Cairo in 874 AD, Baghdad in 918 AD, and three in Egypt between 925 AD and 977AD (Christian Medical College Library, 2017). These hospitals paved the way for almshouses in Europe, notably London's establishment in 936 AD.

5.4. Almshouses in Europe and Britain

King Athelstan introduced almshouses to Britain in 936 AD, establishing St Peter's Hospital in York. Established in 990 AD, the Hospital of St. Oswald in Worcester is the oldest surviving British alms-house. However, these almshouses were diverse, categorised as Bedehouses and Maisons Dieu. Bedehouses resembled hospitals, while Maisons Dieu were smaller and informal, often requiring residents to beg. Subsequently, tax-supported poorhouses emerged as residential institutions for those financially struggling, serving as precursors to "outdoor relief." Managed by a poor master or overseer of the poor, poorhouses aimed to provide long-term support but also housed those convicted of public begging (Crannell, 2014; Sweetinburgh, 2004; University of Cambridge, 2016).

5.5. The Legal Origins of Welfare and Rights

Welfare involves state or institutional assistance to improve citizens' well-being, especially for the disadvantaged or vulnerable, through social support programs. Conversely, rights include legal, moral, or social entitlements claimed by individuals or groups, protecting dignity, autonomy, and interests tied to

their status, identity, or well-being (Bremner, 2009; Price, & Harlow, 2019; The Almshouse Association, 2023; Wagner, 2005). The roots of welfare and rights can be traced to the Magna Carta, the first written law or constitution source. On June 5, 1215, King John of England conceded to the barons' terms amid a conflict stemming from his diminished status after papal excommunication and defeat by France in 1213. Struggling to replenish his treasury, King John demanded money from non-combatant barons for military services. This financial imposition instigated a feud, culminating in King John's surrender and the signing of a charter by the barons on June 5, 1215, a pivotal moment in the evolution of legal and constitutional principles (Trueman, 2015). Initially named the "Articles of the Barons," this document evolved into the renowned Magna Carta four days later. After modifications, the King and barons released the final version, signifying "the great charter" in Latin. Acclaimed as the first constitution in the history of Europe, it established fundamental human rights for the nobility. After King John's passing, his son, Henry III, reissued the Magna Carta in 1217 and 1225, solidifying it as the definitive version (The National Archives Education Service, 2020; British Library, 2020).

On June 18, 1349, King Edward III issued The Ordinance of Labourers, a pivotal moment in the history of welfare and rights. Imposing restrictions on peasants' mobility prohibited them from seeking better job opportunities. The ordinance mandated residency in their home manors, labouring for lords irrespective of wages, and criminalised begging and almsgiving (Ibeji, 2011). Only those incapable of working were allowed exemption. A distinction was drawn between the "deserving poor" – elderly, disabled, widows, and dependent children and the "undeserving poor," encompassing non-disabled but unemployed adults (Barker, 1987). The Statute of Labourers in 1351 mandated gainful employment for individuals under 60 and regulated fair pricing for food, preventing excessive profits. This approach was enacted through Parliament, shaping welfare policies (Rothstein & Liebman, 2003). According to historical records, the origins of English labour law can be traced back to the ordinance of 1349. In 1526, Juan Luis Vives, a Spaniard, crafted an influential relief scheme. It featured four components: registration of the impoverished, creating job opportunities for the non-disabled, raising private and institutional funds, and supporting the remaining impoverished. Vives' ideas influenced European nations and laid the groundwork for the British Poor Laws (Rothstein & Liebman, 2003).

5.6. The Poor Laws of Britain

In 1531, Britain introduced the first statute to address poverty, empowering local magistrates to grant licenses for alms solicitation to specific individuals (elderly and disabled) and severely penalising unlicensed beggars. The Vagabonds Act permitted begging only in designated areas, imposing imprisonment or flogging for violations. Unfortunately, the legislation did not cater to the jobless, offering them little choice beyond starvation or unlawful means. It was not until 1535 that a bill proposed a public works system, funded by an income and capital tax, addressing unemployment concerns (Intriguing History, 2017). In 1536, the Henrician Poor Law emerged, marking a pivotal shift in welfare strategies. While imposing harsher penalties on beggars, it mandated public officials to mobilise resources from churches to aid the needy, infirm, and elderly. Additionally, officials were encouraged to utilise church funds for job creation and offer craft training to children aged 5 to 15, ensuring future gainful employment. The Henrician Poor Law represents a crucial turning point, emphasising empowerment over pure charity (Trattner, 2007).

In 1572, a crucial development in addressing poverty emerged with the implementation of the Parish Poor Rate, a nationwide levy aimed at providing for those unable to support themselves. These alleviated the government's dependence on voluntary church contributions, with a portion earmarked for creating employment opportunities. Under this taxation system, those requiring assistance must register with the government (UK Parliament, 2023). In 1601, the Elizabethan Poor Law further shaped welfare strategies, decentralising poor relief administration to the local level. Authorities taxed parishioners to support their indigent residents, and they established apprenticeship schemes for underprivileged children and workhouses for dependents. The law's pivotal shift in mindset emphasised that aid should solely target the genuinely destitute, not supplement wages (Alchin, 2017).

6. Individual Efforts for the Relief of the Poor

6.1. St. Vincent de Paul (1581–1660) was a French Catholic priest (also known as the Great Apostle of Charity) who served the underprivileged for his whole life. He founded the "Ladies of Charity" in 1617 to visit the poor in their homes" (Watson, 1922). Since this organisation did not perform as expected, The "Daughters of Charity" were co-founded by him in 1633 and was recognised as the first organised charity in Europe. It provided family services after screening and classifying families according to their capacity for self-sufficiency. In addition, it also established a system of friendly visits to the impoverished and a way to avoid giving to those who can do some things for themselves (Gladden, 2018). He also arranged fundraisers to support famine, slavery, and war victims, showcasing his generosity, humility, and compassion. His example inspired many to practice kindness, and people revere him as the patron saint of voluntarism and charity (Alchetron, 2022; Aleiteia, 2021; Attwater, 1982; Hallow, 2023; Encyclopaedia of Britannica, 2023a; Unionpedia, 2022).

6.2. Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) formulated a 'community-based friendly visiting system' in the most impoverished area of Glasgow, Scotland, in 1819. He chose Glasgow because of its status as an industrial hub and influenced by severe poverty (Loch, 1888). Rejecting public poor relief, he advocated local community solidarity and empowerment over charity. Chalmers structured his parish into districts, each overseen by a deacon responsible for conducting home visits and collateral contacts. Regarded as the **Pioneer of Scientific Social Work**,⁵ Chalmers embraced the scientific method by personally validating the needs of the impoverished and needy, laying the groundwork for future casework. Deacons fostered relationships, considering material conditions, family connections, and friendships foundational for providing care and support. Concurrently, Chalmers instituted quality primary education and weekend schools, integrating secular and religious components for children. Chalmers's concept of "empowering the poor towards self-reliance" and principle of "help the poor to help themselves" resonated and influenced notable figures like Octavia Hill, Joseph Tuckermann, Charles Stewart Loch, and Mary Ellen Richmond. Chalmers' concepts exerted such a widespread influence that they even reached Germany (Elberfeld system) in 1853 and the Netherlands (Charity According to Ability) in 1871, illustrating their global impact (Humphreys, 2001; Loch, 1910; Roof, 1972; Smith, 2002; Steyaert, 2010; Young, & Ashton, 1956).

6.3. The Elberfeld System (1853): The German city of Elberfeld (1853) developed and implemented the Elberfeld method in 1800, representing a unique way to assist people experiencing poverty (McMillan, 2019; The Hospital, 1888). Elberfeld, a municipal division within Wuppertal, Germany, established the "Allgemeinen Armenanstalt" or "**General Poor House**" under the guidance of social reformer and Wuppertal mayor Johann Jakob Aders and co-founder Caspar Voght. Funded by the municipality and church groups, its goal was not merely financial aid but also addressing the root causes of poverty (Sillem, 1896)—initial efforts involved appointing volunteer visitors to assess relief applications in 1802. By 1841, the city adopted a district-based structure with elected boards of supervisors. A new "poor order" based on Thomas Chalmers's theories was implemented at Elberfeld in 1852 by Daniel von der Heydt, the head of the poor administration and often regarded as the grandfather of the Elberfeld System (Willis, 2016). It was successfully implemented in 1853 and became known as the "Elberfeld System." This innovative approach spread beyond German towns, influencing developments in England and America (Butterwege, 1998; Krabbe, 1989; Loch, 1888; VinDaj Inc, 2011). The Elberfeld System's impact reached far beyond its origin, shaping the trajectory of social welfare practices internationally.

6.4. The Netherlands Experiment (1871): "Liefdadigheid Naar Vermogen" (LNV) translates to "**Charity According to Ability**" in Dutch. Founded by Louis Blankenberg at 18, along with family and acquaintances, on January 1, 1871, in Amsterdam, it marked the Netherlands' inaugural modernised poverty relief society. LNV's mission focuses on uplifting and promoting self-help through personal volunteer engagement with impoverished families. Pioneering cooperation within Amsterdam's municipality, LNV became the cradle of modern social work in the Netherlands, emphasising hands-on support and collaboration (van der Linde & Limperg, 2014).

7. Organised Efforts for the Relief of the Poor

7.1. Charity Organisation Society

The society "Organising Charitable Relief and Repressing Mendicity" was founded in London on April 29, 1869, at a meeting held at the home of Lord Lichfield (Family Action, 2011; 2023), marking a pivotal moment in the evolution of professional social work (Willis, 2016). It became the "Charity Organisation Society"⁵ (COS) on April 9, 1870. Influenced by the **George Joachim Goschen Minute** (Poor Law Board, 1871), a group of social reformers led by Octavia Hill, William Ewart Gladstone, John Ruskin, Helen Bosanquet, CBP Bosanquet, WH Fremantle, Lord Anthony Ashley-Cooper, Henry Edward Manning, Martha Beatrice Webb and Sidney James Webb,⁶ Edward Denison, and Charles Stewart Loch⁷ founded⁸ the COS. From 1869 to 1870, Edward Denison held the position of honorary secretary for COS. From 1870 to 1875, C. B. P. Bosanquet was the first full-time secretary, succeeding Denison. Sir Charles Stewart Loch, the acknowledged founder of COS, held the secretary position from 1875 to 1913. One of the founding goals of the COS was to advocate for policy changes to help those experiencing the consequences of poverty to create a more objective assessment of the relief requirement. The COS also aimed to coordinate charitable agencies in the city, shifting from indiscriminate almsgiving to targeted philanthropy. Women volunteer workers conducted meticulous interviews to tailor assistance to individual needs, concentrating on tackling individual challenges and documenting for effective coordination. By the end of the 1870s, volunteer family-visiting workers were placed with families to provide the practical and emotional support they needed. This pioneering approach laid the foundation for "modern social casework and counselling", impacting the trajectory of "professional social work" (Family Action, 2011; 2023; Humphreys, 2001; Otter, 2005; Roof, 1972 as cited in Smith, 2002; Shigemori, 1999; Winsten, 2015; Young, & Ashton, 1956). **Octavia Hill** (1838–1912), one of the principal founders of the COS, was inspired by the German Elberfeld System. As a founding member of COS, she began a home-visiting programme that formed the groundwork for modern social work (Darley, 2004). She embraced the motto "**Help without Alms**", rooted in Thomas Chalmers's concept of

"empowering the poor towards self-reliance". She trained volunteers to focus on "helping the people to help themselves rather than doling out money". Hill's training for volunteers at the COS shaped contemporary social work. Throughout the twentieth century, COS continued to be instrumental in the progress of social work as a profession (Family Action, 2011). As a "pioneer of the affordable housing movement," Octavia Hill is celebrated as the **"founder of modern social work"** (Steyaert, 2010).

7.1.1. The American Charity Organisation Society

The COS movement found its way to the United States through the initiative of two individuals: Rev. Stephen Humphreys Gurteen, who had previous experience with the COS in London (Watson, 1922), and Guilford Smith from Buffalo, New York. Witnessing the escalating destitution during the Long Depression of the 1870s, they embarked on a plan to address the issue. Rev. Gurteen travelled to England in 1877 to study the operations of the London COS. Upon his return, he collaborated with Smith to establish the first city-wide COS in Buffalo in 1877, marking a pioneering effort in the USA (Hansan, 2013).

7.1.2. The Buffalo Charity Organisation Society was pivotal in forming the National Association of Societies for Organizing Charity, the precursor to the Alliance for Children and Families (Hansan, 2013). 1882 Josephine Shaw Lowell founded the COS of New York City, laying the foundation for the New York Social Service Association. Shaw Lowell's group pioneered investigations into systemic causes, significantly contributing to the growth of the field of social work (Alliance for Strong Families and Communities, 2020). Consequently, the London COS, established in 1869, served as a model for the COS movement in the USA (McMillan, 2019). A pioneer in applying scientific methods to social work, **Mary Ellen Richmond** (1861–1928) was a trailblazer in implementing scientific methodology within professional social work and explored the causes of poverty and social marginalisation by examining the relationship between individuals and their environments. She started her career in 1889 at the Baltimore branch of the Charity Organisation Society. Formulating the theory and practice of "social casework diagnosis," she emphasised tailoring care to individuals within their unique situations or environments. She authored two influential books, **Social Diagnosis** (1917) and **What is Social Casework?** (1922), earning recognition as the **"Mother of Social Casework."** She also stands as one of the key figures in social work history and is regarded, along with Jane Addams, as **the mother of professional social work**. Hence, she is considered a **"principal founder of the social work profession"** stressing the importance of professional education (Steyaert, 2010).

7.2. Settlement House Movement

Settlement houses presented a distinct contrast to the friendly visitors, representing a different aspect of the development of social work. They aimed to help the poor working class through education and fostering societal transformation. One of the first was Toynbee Hall, founded in 1884 in East London by Canon Samuel Augustus Barnett and his wife, Henrietta Barnett. Toynbee Hall derived its name from Arnold Toynbee, a 19th-century social reformer. (Kiger, 2023). Inspired by the English model, some people in the UK set up similar houses in the US. The first was the Neighbourhood Guild, founded in 1886 by Stanton A. Coit in New York City (later University Settlement House). **Jane Addams** (1860-1935), a social activist, feminist, Nobel laureate, and Ellen Gates Starr, established **Hull House** in Chicago in 1889 (Hansan, 2011). It provided various services, such as food, job training, childcare, and arts, to those who needed them. Addams' work shaped the basic ideas of social work. She inspired social workers to find and meet needs and to enable people to help themselves. Her vision of 'helping people to help themselves' is the essence of social work. Through Hull House, Addams offered education for employment and presented a new means for individuals to sustain themselves and care for their families. The core of social work, encapsulated by the concept of 'help the people to help themselves', reflects Addams' visionary approach to community support. Hence, Addams is acknowledged as one of the pioneers of modern social work and recognised as the **founder of the social work profession in the USA** (Addams, 1931; Darley, 2004; Social Work Degree Centre, 2016; Stuart, 2013). The link between charity, welfare and rights leads to challenges arising from different approaches to human rights. In order to address the challenges (arising from different approaches -charity, welfare and rights), philanthropic, humanitarian, and human rights organisations began providing training to volunteers who worked for them and employed paid staff who applied scientific methods to assist the underprivileged and suffering. Thus, social work eventually rose to prominence as a career both in Western nations and beyond.

8. Formation of Educational Institutions for Professional Social Work

To meet the demand for skilled professionals working with individuals, groups, and communities, philanthropic organizations established training centres for their workers. These centres were subsequently integrated into Higher Education Institutes and Universities. According to Huff (2022), contemporary social work has a scientific foundation and is believed to have originated from three distinct sources. The initial strand involved individual casework initiated by the COS, contributing to establishing social work as a recognised profession. (Family Action, 2011). The second aspect involved social welfare administration,

encompassing various methods to alleviate poverty. The English Poor Laws of the 17th century introduced the idea of relief for paupers, which the Charity Organisation Society later formalised. Thirdly, the Settlement House Movement improved social conditions through political action, working with groups and communities (Lymbery, 2005). The COS was a key player in advancing social work and properly training social workers.

1895, COS developed the School Care Service and the Institute of Hospital Almoners to address social issues affecting school children. To further their efforts, the COS organised lectures for its district offices and established a Committee on Training in 1897 (London Metropolitan Archives, 2006). COS committees at the local level found that offering financial assistance was often insufficient to help families navigate difficult times. Consequently, "social casework" was introduced, amalgamating financial support with emotional and practical assistance. These laid the groundwork for contemporary social work practices. Committees consisted of volunteers, and as "social casework" gained popularity, it became apparent that staff members required training. In the 1890s, COS published a Volunteer Training Manual, which played a significant role in the professionalisation of social work (Family Action, 2011).

The modern social work profession can be traced back to the establishment of the **first school of social work in Amsterdam** Netherlands, in 1899 (Kendall, 2000). However, Octavia Hill, who trained volunteers in housing management and 'friendly visiting' in the 1870s, can be traced back to the origins of social work education. The expansion of this training in the 1880s resulted in a planned one-year curriculum of classes and fieldwork in 1890 (Kendall, 2000). COS also inaugurated the first social work training programme in 1901 (Family Action, 2023). The School of Sociology was established in 1903 as a spinoff of the COS and merged with the Department of Social Science and Administration at the London School of Economics in 1912. Founded by the COS, its primary purpose was training welfare workers. In 1913, it received financial assistance from the **Sir Ratan Tata Trust of India** to support research into India's economy and labour (particularly on poverty, inequality and welfare). As a result, the Department of Social Science and Administration engaged in teaching and research purposes. It underwent a renaming in 1999 and became known as the Department of Social Policy (LSE, 2024; Platt, 2024).

In 1915, the COS launched its 12-month social work training programme in collaboration with Bedford College, giving students from other courses real-world experience. Paid professional social workers progressively took over the district offices' workloads, diminishing the significance of voluntary workers (London Metropolitan Archives, 2006). Mary Richmond embarked on caseworker training in the United States through a summer course. Social workers have been at the forefront of forming private and charitable organisations to assist those in need since the inception of the first social work course in 1898 (NASW, 2023). The New York Charity Organization Society established a comprehensive graduate training program in 1904, eventually developing into the Columbia University School of Social Work, the first social work school in the United States (Columbia University, 2023).

In 1925, **Clifford Manshardt**, a theologian from America, relocated to Byculla in Bombay. Inspired by London's Settlement House Movement, he established the Nagpada Neighbourhood House in 1926. Realising the importance of professional social work training to address issues in Indian slums, Manshardt secured funding (\$15) for the Nagpada Neighbourhood slum improvement programs from the 'Tata Trust.' He became the Director of the **Sir Dorabji Tata Trust** due to his dedicated efforts. His contributions led to the establishment of the **Tata Graduate School of Social Work** named after **Sir Dorabji Tata** in 1936, a turning point in his career that shaped his legacy. From 1936 to 1941, Manshardt was the institute's founder and director. The Institute, as the first of its kind in India and South Asia, aimed to offer professional training specifically for individuals working with slum dwellers and mill workers. 1944, the school was renamed the **Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS)** and was granted university status in 1964. Today, TISS is a leading institution of social work education and research in India and worldwide. As the need for better training grew, more schools of social work were established with the approval of universities, becoming professional institutions recognised by the community (Healy, 2001; Indian Christian History, 2021; Mukhopadhyay, 2005; Pathare, 2014; Social Workin, 2020; The Tata Group, 2019).

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, while the origins of modern social work may initially seem rooted in the West, a more in-depth analysis reveals that the concept of charity, which underpins the development of social work, originates in the East, with India playing a significant role. Today, social work has gained a significant foothold in the country which includes a wide range of settings from working with the intellectually challenged (Krishnan & Meena, 2023) to palliative care (Krishnan & Butola, 2022). The roots of social work extended and matured further in subsequent years, particularly in the Western nations of Britain and the USA. A pivotal moment in the profession's evolution occurred with the distinction between charity and social work practice. This differentiation enhanced the discipline and made it a valuable profession in Britain and globally. Consequently, there is a compelling need to revisit and revise the literature on the evolution of Social Work, recognising India as the birthplace where Social Work first emerged.

Footnotes

- ¹ Buddha Vihars not only offered food and resting places for travellers, pilgrims, traders and the poor and needy but also functioned as hospitals for medical treatment.
- ² Information was gathered through direct Interviews with A. Durairaj and S. Manohar, as well as direct field visits by the researcher.
- ³ The city of Lyons, located in southern France, has been populated since prehistoric times and was home to numerous major Roman Empire cities.
- ⁴ German-speaking invaders, the Franks, arrived in the fifth-century Western Roman Empire.
- ⁵ In 1946, the COS was renamed the Family Welfare Association, and in 2008, it became Family Action.
- ⁶ Martha Beatrice Potter Webb and Sidney James Webb were the co-founders of the London School of Economics in 1895.
- ⁷ Charles Stewart Loch, one of the founding members and a longstanding secretary of the COS, was born in Calcutta and was the son of an Indian High Court Judge.
- ⁸ Roof (1972) pointed out that there is disagreement over who among Thomas Hawksley and Henry Solly were the founding members of the COS.

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