

*Whilst youth feels deeply for the underprivileged, more so than several earning adults; their zeal to act on this need could be further developed to become more passionate and sustainable.*

Management scientists claim that human progress through life is measured on a continuum from being a 'taker' to becoming a 'giver'. A child will lay claim to any and everything – be it the toy or its useless packing. Adults in their senior years proudly announce and showoff their belongings, whether a TV set, a car, a home, a spouse; wanting to continuously add more to this list of possessions. They make the transition from 'taker' to 'giver' much later in life or never at all. On the other hand, I've met teenagers who feel the pain of the less endowed, and make time to serve them. They have made the transition into the realm of maturity. A life without this shift is a life of immaturity.

Pakistan is known as the third-biggest philanthropic nation in the world. Our companies and individuals alike possess the zest of contributing to social uplift. This fact itself is mind blowing, as it is an indicator of how much philanthropic involvement is needed. However, the other end is a bottomless pit – no matter how much is put in, very little change is visible.

These are some challenges our youth face; those who wish to be part of social change. Some such youth venture out in the world of development to fulfill a university credit requirement. Here, a social project is treated like an assignment where giving happens as a prerequisite for getting credits. No matter what the outcome, this act is a starting point for young people to realize the pain of others; to learn to empathize; to step out of their world of security, studies and slumber; see the immensity of problems that surround us; understand that they, too, are responsible and have the muscle to do something about it. Such acts breed the germs of giving, not only to communities but the awakened sense of giving is activated in other relationships, may these be with parents, siblings, friends and later, with spouse and children.

Other youth I've met have been inspired by stories of those who have given their life for the down-trodden. Conferences, forums, seminars are great venues to meet social change agents, invited to address audiences who are ready to be stimulated to contribute their time, intellect and energy. This youth connects with existing NGOs or grass-root organizations to volunteer their time and learn how to initiate great causes. Others take the leap and set up their own little organization; with their development agenda customized to local needs. They manage to initially engage youth from their institutions and, with a lot of hard work, are able to work with a few, as starters. Some of these organizations have grown to be recognized nationally for the thousands they impact to bring about positive change.

Still others have faced famine, drug abuse, illiteracy, poor hygiene conditions, bad health etc under their very own roof and have risen to amend ways. With nothing to start with except an idea, courage and faith, they venture out to make a mark. Through seemingly endless struggle, they manage to face all odds and bring constructive change in their environment.

A few students, who study abroad and have experienced affluent societies, are touched by the huge gap they see when they return home. Such contrasts heighten sensitivities and equip

these youngsters with the eye to pay attention to their own potential to bring change. Some enroll with existing organizations to invest personal time and effort to actualize mutually felt goals; while a few initiate action groups. At times, students that return abroad to pursue higher studies, set up student bodies to advocate social responsibility; engage organizations in their respective countries to assist in their social cause and even register youth from those countries who then travel to Pakistan to work in remote areas for social uplift for a certain time duration.

Some organizations have included Corporate Social Responsibility in their set of values. One way of living this value is to have their employees agree to work with NGOs etc, on a voluntary basis, a certain number of hours per week or month. I've seen younger employees often jump to such opportunities more willingly; while a few with families, have even ventured to involve their children in such activities to develop the spirit in them at an early age. However, such sporadic and random presence is difficult to harness as social work requires more intensive commitment over longer time periods. Yet, it is a fabulous way to interact, feel and be part of social uplift.

I've worked with organizations that are heavily into giving. Every week, hundreds of requests are received for donations, charity, zakat and sponsorships. Even though they are restrained by budgets, companies dole out millions for this purpose. Sure it gives them tax exemptions; yes, some use this for publicity; but as long as a good is done, so what?

Then there are communities who toil hard to uplift their people. The Aga Khan community, the Memon community and their likes extensively engage in building their members and have achieved extraordinary results.

From the above analysis it seems all is in place and in order. Many segments of the population are intensely involved with giving. Yet, to have real effect, this effort has to be increased many-fold. It is up to parents to initiate this process as part of early child-raising so giving becomes part of the child's repertoire from the very on-set. Schools can institutionalize this process as part of their curriculum – a few already have. This is the time during which habits are formed. When a sense of giving is inculcated, it becomes a natural routine of daily life.

If most of the youth of Pakistan get organized, a revolutionary social uplift program can be initiated with speedy impact. Another segment is that of retired people. If all the retired people of Pakistan start an education program, for kids to be taught in mosques (that lie empty all day except for the 5 times prayers), the country's landscape can change in a few years.

While looking at the receiving end, there are other considerations. Much of why no great difference is being achieved can be ascribed to how we give. More often than not, educational institutions, hospitals etc are setup to provide 'free' services for the poor. Once such an offer is utilized, an expectation sets in for all to be free forever. Unless one has a stake in what one gets, value for that item or service is not realized. The financially constrained will stop taking initiative to improve their quality of life if they receive everything free. Pakistan seems to be the only Nation where children are paid to get education from some NGOs. What ever the reasons, this is an indication of a mindset that is quite frightening. Even if it means that parents of children have to come and sweep the floors of the school, some sort of return for the service must be required. When communities have been involved in setting up projects there are

greater chances of succeeding as the people are engaged at the grass-roots and a sense of ownership is developed.

I've often sat with people at langers, who come to sit there all evening hoping someone will come and feed them. Urging myself to understand what they want out of life and how they plan to get it, I have only one, singular realization – they want one meal a day, preferably free, and have not an iota of thought beyond that. There is eyesight, but no vision. All they are abundantly bestowed with are masses of children who run around in the dirt, mindless of their existence. That is, however, ascribed to Allah and His Will. With the lowest of aims in life, how can a nation progress? When I give them ideas of how to earn a better living, most such ideas are shot down by them on the pretext of anaa (ego, honor, respect). Many have become poor, or are still poor because they have borrowed money for a daughter's wedding. Why it takes so much to have a wedding, is beyond my comprehension. Their reason is that if the baradary is not invited and fed, their nose will get cut off (naaq cut jaye gi). Thus, we are poor not because we do not have resources, but because of our egos.

We can gratefully claim the exemplary story of Sattar Edhi. He is mentioned in the Guinness Book of World Records for the biggest fleet of ambulances. What an unusual human being who feels the pain of any and all humanity and acts on it. It is said he spends millions a day to take care of millions. I've seen ladies from poor households come to an Edhi Centre, and from the corner of their chadar, unwrap Rs 20 do donate to the Centre, a bit they managed to save from their household budget. Once, whilst standing outside the Edhi Centre, I counted three cars come every minute; big ones, from Prados to Mercs, to drop off goods or funds. Such is the trust Edhi Saheb arouses in a Nation. Each member of his team is equally blessed with the spirit of service. When my relative was killed in a wardaat, the Edhi ambulance driver was the only one who agreed to pick up the body. After he and his team gently and caringly bathed the body and wrapped it in the kafan, my family offered the driver some money to thank him. His reply: please go and rest as you are in grief. When you feel better, please come and put this money into this donation box. He could very well have pocketed the money, as at 4 am, no one was watching.

Dignity comes from giving. Taking for free reduces self-esteem. Making 'takers' part of the process of uplift increases value, dignity and respect for self, others and the environment.

Pakistan is blessed with any and every resource. It is a piece of Heaven on earth. It has more natural and human resources than Japan or Malaysia. Yet we are poor. Why? If we do not value what we have, we will remain as we are. God only helps those who help themselves.

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