

## Need of the Hour is to Give

*“We make a living by what we get, but a life  
by what we give”*

*-Anonymous*

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Success is often described/defined in terms of what we earn, amass and position. In India successful people who have accumulated wealth (such as Mukesh Ambani presenting a chartered flight to his wife on her birth day) often flaunt it and are insensitive to their surroundings. This is unfortunate as mindless extravagance and waste happen in a world of deprivation and want. There is a lot to go in if we practice giving as a cherished value. It can change lives-ours and those of others. It is by giving that we step outside the self-centeredness of our lives and find the humanity that binds us together.

### Why to Give?

“We all know that “Rivers do not drink their own water, nor do trees eat their own fruit, sun does not give heat for itself. The wealth of the noble is used solely for the benefit of others”.

Giving, taking, earning, stealing, squandering hoarding- all these are human impulses and we wouldn't be human without it. Yet on this list only one item – giving appears in the worlds wisdom traditions.

It may be worth recalling what Einstein has said once in this regard:

Einstein said: “A successful man is he who receives a great deal from his fellow men usually incomparably more than corresponds to his service to them. However, the value of a man should be seen in what he gives and not in what he is able to receive”.

We all should remember that nature has its own way of rewarding our good deeds. Let's look at one such instance:

### What goes around comes around

His name was Fleming, and he was a poor Scottish farmer. One day, while trying to make a living for his family, he heard a cry for help coming from a nearby bog.

He dropped his tools and ran to the bog. There, mired to his waist in black muck, was a terrified boy, screaming and struggling to free himself. Farmer Fleming saved the lad from what could have been a slow and terrifying death. The next day, a fancy carriage pulled up to the Scotsman's sparse surroundings. An elegantly dressed nobleman stepped out and introduced himself as the father of the boy Farmer Fleming had saved

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“I want to repay you,” said the nobleman

“You saved my son's life.” “No, I can't accept payment for what I did,” the Scottish farmer replied, waving off the offer.

At that moment, the farmer's own son came to the door of the family hovel. “Is that your son?” the noble man asked. “Yes,” the farmer replied proudly. “I'll make you a deal. Let me take him and give him a good education. If the lad is anything like his father, he'll grow to a man you can be proud of.

“And that he did. In time, Farmer Fleming's son graduated from St. Mary's Hospital Medical School in London, and went on to become known throughout the world as the noted Sir Alexander Fleming, the discoverer of penicillin. Years afterward, the nobleman's son was stricken with pneumonia. What saved him? Penicillin. The name of the nobleman? Lord Randolph Churchill. His son's name? Sir Winston Churchill.

So, as some one once said: what goes around comes around.

Now let's look at philanthropy in India as we have a great tradition of it.

### **Philanthropy in India**

In 1841, Lady Avabai Jeehebhoj built the mahim causeway connecting present day south Mumbai to mahim at a personal cost of Rs 1,57,000 on the condition that government would not charge a tax to its citizens for its use. On the other hand the Rajiv-Gandhi Bandra-Worli Sea link that today connects the same two islands, built by the Government of India, charges its citizens Rs 50 for its use. Between then and now that is the difference.

“As Nandan Nilekani, who recently donated over \$5 million to the IIT's apart from

donations worth Rs \$ 40 million to various causes, puts it “India's cities were built on philanthropy. My wife and I were motivated to give because we received our education at an Institute like IIT barely paying Rs 200 as fees. So we are obligated to give back. India has a great tradition of philanthropy. It's important to ask what all the people who have excess money are doing with it”

In a survey published in 2008, Business week listed the 50 most generous philanthropists of the last five years. Warren Buffet of Berkshire Hathaway and the second richest man in the world, tops the list. Of his \$ 52 billion earnings, he has pledged a massive sum of \$40 billion-78% of his net worth to charity. The estimated lifetime giving of Bill Gates, the richest man in the world, seconds buffet at \$28 billion.

However, despite the fact that four out of 10 of the world's richest men are Indians (Forbes=2008) not even a single name features in the list. In a country with about 300 million people living below the poverty line on less than Rs 10 a day, the demand for philanthropic initiatives is aghast and the scope enormous. It is not to say that we Indians don't give in. Most of us have good intentions but at times entertain doubts as to whether we can make a small difference, through our deeds, to others lives.

Now, let's look at some of the outstanding humanitarian work being done by our fellow human beings, by giving in their own way.

**Anshu's Goonj-** Lending a hand to those who need it most.

Anshu Gupta was studying journalism at Delhi when he came across Habib, who used

to take care of abandoned bodies near LNJP hospital. And Habib's daughter would, quiet often during winter; cling to a corpse to keep herself warm. Similarly Anshu saw people, while working with earthquake victims of Uttarkashi, wearing jackets made at of gunnysacks. They didn't want food or money. They just wanted warm cloth.

Then Anshu chucked his job with Escorts and started '*Goonj*' by taking all the extra clothes he found at home and the houses of friends and relatives and distributing them on Delhi Roads. What started as a single-room, one-man organization now has 15 offices, 125 employees and a fleet of volunteers across the country. Anshu says *Goonj* is helping to "change the mindset of the urban population about the optimal utilization of vital resources through concepts like recycle and reuse, as well as lending a hand to those who need it most.

### **Case of inspired son giving back to society**

Nandakumari was not a climate change expert and had never attended high-profile meetings on environment issues. But despite having studied up to class X and battling the stigma of being thrown out of the house by her husband in Nizamabad with in three years of marriage, she did manage to do a little more.

She encouraged her son to use public transport even as she would fret over the hectic mining activity in the state that was depleting the ground water level. Four months after her death (of blood cancer, recently) when her lawyer son K Ranveer Reddy donated property worth crores of rupees to the government for environmental and charitable purposes, he highlighted the most important lesson he had learnt from his mother - that of

giving back to society. Interestingly Ranveer Reddy ,who has donated not only the property which his mother had inherited as her share from her father but also donated half of the ancestral property he inherited from his paternal side, had to take a loan from his friends four months ago for the treatment of his mother (who was battling blood cancer and eventually died).

This is a case of mother who lived frugally and asked son to handover a fortune to the government.

Now, having looked at some of the individuals from the modern world, let's look for similar instance from our great epics.

### **Story of Ranthi Deva**

Ranthi Deva, who retained his faith in God and exhibited his compassion for the suffering, despite the extreme privation to which he was reduced by the vicissitudes of life. To feed a hungry man, he and his family gave up the meager food they had gathered and denied themselves even water, to relieve the thirst of a man crying for water. The Divine had subjected him to these ordeals and later blessed him with grace.

During a period of devastating famine in his kingdom King Rantideva spent the whole of his wealth in feeding the hungry and the distressed. Deeply pained by the sufferings of his people and by way of atonement, the King undertook a fast for forty-eight days and did not take any food or even water during that period. On the forty-ninth day, when he was satisfied that almost all the hungry and the distressed in his kingdom had been well looked after, he decided to break his fast. Just as he was about to do so by taking a morsel of food and a cup of water he heard the piteous

cry of a person of low caste (Pulkasa as he is called in the Purana), asking for water to quench his thirst. The King was then in the midst of his ministers and councilors'. He stopped tasting the water placed before him and ordered that the cup be given to the Pulkasa. The people around him remonstrated strongly at this suicidal act on the part of the King. It was pointed out by them that it was too much on his part to take the risk of sacrificing his own life for the sake of a pulkasa after this long fast of nearly forty-eight days. Immediately afterwards the King began to take the morsel of food. Even for that food there came a guest at his doors. At this stage, Ranti Deva made the famous pronouncement recorded in fitting terms by Vyasa:

“I do not seek from the Supreme Lord the highest Bliss attended with the eight powers or siddhis. Nor do I care for *apunarbhavam* or cessation of the cycle of births and deaths. But my only desire is to be present in all beings, undergo suffering with them and serve them so that they may become free from misery.”

In the next verse he continues to say:

“Hunger, thirst, fatigue, loss of strength in limbs, distress, languor, grief, disappointment, delusion – all these undesirable features of my distressed soul have all disappeared upon my giving water to one who was suffering from acute thirst.”

The *Trimurtis*, the rulers of the three worlds, revealed themselves to him and praised his heroic sacrifice and infinite mercy for his suffering fellow men. There can be no higher or nobler humanitarian ideal than the one revealed by this episode. Not only did

Ranti Deva seek to relieve the misery of his fellow men, but he also desired to so identify himself with them and become a part of them so as to undergo their suffering and thereby share their miserable predicament.

Three Basic Truths in this story - This great utterance of Ranti Deva lays down three basic truths for the guidance of mankind:

- The paramount duty of relieving the suffering of others both for moral purification and for bettering the lot of our brethren.
- The doctrine of sharing the suffering of others both for moral purification and for lessening the burden of the sorrow.
- This duty of relieving the suffering of others is greater than that of working for one's own salvation or the attainment of *moksha* or of *siddhis* or miraculous powers.

Mahatma Gandhi took hold of this great teaching of the Srimad Bhagavatam as the inspiring motto of his life. He inscribed this verse in front of the Sabarmati Ashram founded by him for the inspiration and guidance of his followers. The fundamental basis of the great national movement started by Mahatma Gandhi was suffering and sacrifice for the liberation of his countrymen from foreign yoke.

### **Extending a helping hand...**

We all are, no doubt, busy with our material pursuits. But if we can take out some time or spare few moments to make others day better it would be great. Now let's look at one such instance.

A mother wished to encourage her small girl's interest in the piano and so took her to a

local concert featuring an excellent pianist. In the entrance foyer the mother met an old friend and the two stopped to talk. The little girl was keen to see inside the hall and so wandered off, unnoticed by her mother. The girl's mother became concerned when she entered the hall and could see no sign of her daughter. Staff was notified and an announcement was made asking the audience to look out for the little lost girl. With the concert due to start, the little girl had still not been found. In preparation for the pianist's entrance, the curtains drew aside, to reveal the little girl sitting at the great piano, focused in concentration quietly picking out the notes of "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star".

The audience's amusement turned to curiosity when the pianist entered the stage, walked up to the little girl, and said. "keep playing".

The pianist sat down beside her, listened for a few seconds, and whispered some more words of encouragement. He then began quietly to play a bass accompaniment, and then a few bars later reached around the little girl to add more accompaniments. At the end of the impromptu performance the audience applauded loudly as the pianist took the little girl back to her seat to be reunited with her mother. The experience was inspirational for everyone, not least the small girl.

It takes just a few moments to make somebody's day, to help someone with their own personal aims and dreams, = especially someone who looks up to you for encouragement and support.

So far so good. But shouldn't we know some thing about the present day younger generation, who are hope of tomorrow,

especially their attitude (disposition towards charity/philanthropy).

### **Young Indians and philanthropy/charity**

The young Indians have often been called the "me-first" generation; stereotyped as a lot who don't give a damn about the rest of the world as long as life for them is one unending picnic, but is that how young, urban Indians view themselves? Not at all, it turns out. In an eight-city survey of the youth's attitude towards charity, Times-Synovate poll found that 80% of those between 18 and 50 thought of themselves as charity. Further women were more likely to regard themselves as charitable (76%) than men (24%). This news is definitely something for all of us to cheer about.

### **Conclusion**

One cannot wish away the ethical context in which one can hoard much more wealth than what he can consume in a decent lifetime while millions of children elsewhere die of easily preventable diseases. Poverty is a relative term and there is a possible dilemma between helping a poor household in a developed country applies a coat of paint to his house exterior or using the same resources to save a poor child's life.

In other words, every society would need to find a way of reining in great fortunes for the benefit of society at large, while ensuring that the motivation for wealth creation is not diluted in any way. Giving even a part of our selves and sharing our wealth and knowledge often creates ripples of goodwill that induces others to come forward and join in.