

Chapter I - The Spirit of Philanthropy

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Made publicly available in the spirit of open access by its author, Noshir Dadrawala (CEO, Centre for Advancement of Philanthropy), and collaborators CAP and Forbes Marshall.

People often use the terms 'philanthropy' and 'charity' interchangeably and think the two are synonymous. Social scientists, however, consider this to be incorrect and rightly so. Charity (which mostly involves alms-giving) generally addresses the symptoms, while philanthropy (Greek *philanthropos* meaning love of human beings) tends to strike at the root of various issues facing society. They say, if you give fish to a poor person, you have done charity. You teach this person to fish and that's philanthropy. You give clothing to a poor man and you have done charity. You teach this person the skills to stitch clothing and that's philanthropy.

A generally-accepted comprehensive definition of philanthropy does not exist, and many leading scholars in the field doubt that one can be developed. Some scholars feel some vagueness is inevitable and even desirable. Contemporary philanthropy has come to be recognised as being broadly concerned with improving the quality of life for all members of society by promoting their welfare, happiness and culture. It usually focuses on interests and concerns of all income classes, such as protecting the environment, preventing diseases, improving education and recreational facilities, enhancing the arts, preserving historic landmarks, etc. Charity on the other hand, has come to mean serving mainly, if not only, the poor.

According to Paul Ylvisaker, "Philanthropy takes a more impersonal and dispassionate approach to bettering the human condition by institutionalising 'giving,' focusing beyond the immediate condition of people on root causes of human problems and systemic reform, recognising a responsibility to the public interest and helping to effect societal change."

Dr. Robert L. Payton, former president of the Exxon Foundation and ex-U.S. ambassador to the Cameroons, defines philanthropy to include, "voluntary giving, voluntary service and voluntary association, primarily for the benefit of others." Dr. Payton calls philanthropy, the "prudent sister" of charity.

Ancient and Varied Traditions

Ideas of philanthropy have varied with the customs of people, with changing needs and with the development of the human mind and desire to make life happier for others. One of the oldest records of 'giving' is in 'The Book of the Dead', the chief monument of religious literature of Egypt, which goes back to about 4,000 B.C. It says, "I have given bread to the hungry man and water to him that was athirst and apparel to the naked man and a ferry boat to him that had no boat. I have made propitiatory offerings and given cakes to the Gods."

The Greek and the early Roman concept of philanthropy was radically different; it consisted in doing kindly acts 'towards people', not towards the poor. It was not alms-giving, it had little or no connection with poverty, and it was seldom motivated by pity. One of its earliest expressions is in Homer's lines: "and generally was he loved, for courteously he welcomed to his house besides the way all comers". The Greek ethic of general kindness was "do not overlook an un-hired body; kindle a fire; give a share of water; tell the way; advise truthfully."

In India, feeding the cow, the dog and the Brahmin was practically a routine in the daily life of a Hindu householder. There is a chapter devoted to charity in the Rig Veda, and charity is divided into three classes - Satvik, Rajasi and Tamasi; centuries later, in 1180 A.D., Rabbi Moses Ben Marmon said that there were eight degrees in giving charity, one higher than the other. Lowest on the scale was charity given meagerly and by a person as if forced; somewhat higher was charity contributed adequately but only after it was asked for; even better was aid given in such a manner that neither the giver nor the person assisted knew the identity of the other, and the highest of all was assistance that enabled a person to achieve self-support by helping him to find work or to open a business.

Under the Islamic faith, charity forms one of the basic obligations. Zakat is a compulsory poor-tax which a Muslim must pay not only on the surplus of the year, but also on the value of his total movable assets. The other forms of charities known in Islam are the khairat and sadqa. In the early centuries, zakat was highly organised through the institutions of *baitulmal* or the treasury. Every

Muslim was required to send his zakat to the *baitulmal* with such instructions as he desired for the disbursement of the fund.

The concept of philanthropy and universal love for man is sprinkled all over the 'New Testament' and it is little wonder that even in a country like America generally branded as 'materialistic' the practice of setting aside private funds for public use has thrived and continues to grow from strength to strength. In fact, apart from being the largest in the world, the American foundations are today known to bestow wealth to the entire world. Apparently, Americans take the theological reference, "for God loves a cheerful giver", (II Corinthians 9:6-7) quite seriously. Corinthians 13:1-13 goes a step further: "If I should speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have charity, I have become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And if I have prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, yet do not have charity, I am nothing."

Among the Jews, *Zedakah* implies the fullest obligation that people owe to one another. *Zedakah* calls for more than mere alms-giving, because in its exercise, there must be kindness, tenderness, not to shame the poor or put him to disgrace. Sacred unto the Lord is the human dignity and personality of the recipient of charity, and they must not be hurt or lowered. Moreover, of greater merit than giving to the poor is to help him to become self-supporting.

If the name 'Parsi' is synonymous with 'charity', it is, once again, thanks to the emphasis of this ethos in their religious scriptures. The Zoroastrian religion is not a religion in the sense in which the term is commonly understood. It is rather a scientific and rational explanation of existence, of reality as a whole, of man's place in it, his duties while in this life, and the high destiny which he can achieve by establishing his conduct in accordance with the Eternal and Immutable Law of Nature which Zarathushtra called the Law of Asha.

Five things, according to the Pahlavi Dinkard, were considered worthy of merit: a) truthfulness b) charity c) skill d) endeavour and e) giving encouragement to others in good deeds. In the Handarz literature, Aturpat Mahraspand, the high priest at the court of the Sasanian king, Shapur II, speaks of three kinds of charity:

1. To give without being asked or requested to give
2. To give immediately on being asked or requested to give
3. To give at the promised time, if one has promised

Aturpat adds that charity is good when one expects nothing from the receiver in return and entertains no such expectation. Good charity, according to him, is never done for publicity, show or personal gain. Thousands of years have passed since Prophet Zarathushtra walked this planet, but his small yet dedicated band of followers remember to the last breath, his timeless message, "Happiness comes to him who seeks happiness for others." (Yasna 43.1).

Altruism among other life forms

Altruism is recognised in some way or the other by individuals of all cultures, and it is generally regarded as a trait favourable to the coherence and continuity of social groups and society in general. Brian O'Connell, in 'America's Voluntary Spirit', makes a fascinating observation, "...altruistic behaviour is an invention of nature herself..... the earliest philanthropic activity occurred many millions of years before Homo sapiens appeared, and that nature must value such behaviour since she has seen fit to continue it over vast periods of time."

To support his theory, he writes, "An article in a scientific journal on 'The Evolution of Altruism' reported that some seventy million years ago, as is known from fossil records of miocene times, there existed organised societies of termites and ants. Within such insect societies - bees, wasps, ants, and others - there were then, and still are, groups whose activities can in some broad sense be labeled as altruistic, with members of these groups performing specialised functions for the good of the larger society, often at individual sacrifice.

"More recently, a biologist, studying the chain of life in the sea, found 'support for a community theory of evolution according to which short-term advantages to individual species are sacrificed for long-term benefits for an entire living community.'

"Many people would be surprised to learn the extent to which animals help their own kind. Even the popular view of wild animals of Africa as ferocious beasts, 'red in tooth and claw', is at least partially mistaken. Throughout the animal world, there is much behaviour which is peaceful, cooperative and even altruistic."

Richard J. Butler and David C. Wilson, in 'Managing Voluntary and Non-Profit Organisations', have said, "Altruism is a fundamental part of human rationality and altruistic behaviour is the foundation stone of very many charities in Britain and elsewhere in the world. Without unselfish regard for others, there would be no place for charitable organisations in our society. A society that is based solely on self-centered considerations cannot function. There must be some concern for others'

needs if there is to be any continuing collaboration of the type that makes for social coherence and continuity."

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