

## The Joy of Giving

Seventy-five million households give for charitable causes in India.

In every religion, contribution to society is mandatory for its followers. The concept of *dana* (voluntary giving) has been the cornerstone of the spirit of volunteerism in India. A noteworthy feature of all major religions has been the emphasis they placed on charity and sharing of wealth with others, especially the poor and the needy. In all probability, it is the persistence of the above preaching flowing from generations that the psyche of an average Indian has been completely ingrained with the concept of benevolence. Most think that God loves those who feed the hungry and those who give their clothes to the needy.

The contemporary understanding about the phenomenon of giving and volunteering lacks authentic information base. The official statistics has never collected any information on the subject. Thus, the contribution of charity or of volunteer force to the national economy remains unaccounted thus far. Likewise, one has no clue on whether philanthropic contributions are channeled into economic activities and if so, does the phenomenon imply any tangible benefit to the country.

PRIA has just completed a nation-wide survey aimed at mapping the broad contours of the non-profit sector in India, the first ever of its kind. Since philanthropy is intertwined with charity and volunteering, the subject matters of giving and volunteering were also studied as a part of the overall study. Nearly one lakh households were interviewed in the study. The results of this part of the study show that most giving decisions are, in fact, taken jointly by the family rather than by individuals and indeed close to 41% of all households nationwide donate annually, in either cash or in kind. The estimates vary widely from region to region. For example, both in eastern India as also in northern India, the proportion of donor

families exceeds well over two thirds of all families. All this implies that nationwide more than 75 million households give for charitable causes annually. Interestingly, two thirds of all givers live in rural areas. The survey showed that Indians contributed, in the year 1999- 2000, a sum of rupees 42,433 millions (that is, rupees 42,433 crores) in cash and kind together. While 55% of these resources went to individuals, remaining 45% percent was given to institutions, implying that donors strongly endorse the work programmes of organisations they are donating to. More interestingly, 87% of this amount came from persons with an income of less than Rs. one lakh per year or about Rs. 8,000 per month. Even those not fortunate enough to have gone beyond primary education seemed to have their heart closer to the interests of society; they had a share of over 26 % percent in the total kitty. That is, at least one out of every four rupees contributed came from persons with rather low education.

Why do people donate at all? The survey brought out that people at large inherently felt that they had moral obligation to give something back to the society and charitable acts upheld their religious beliefs. Quite a large number of respondents thought that if the government were more responsible, there would be less need for charity. Most of them would be happy to continue to contribute in future as well.

Saint Guru Nanak said that 'Remember, only the merit you earn by giving will follow you to the other world.' All this has left a general impression that most Indians are likely to be givers without any ado. However, what is generally not realised is that only individuals need not be the beneficiaries of this benevolence; organisations, particularly the ones involved in activities of community welfare and public good are also significant benefactors of the largess. It would be wrong to surmise that only governments, corporations and foundations are concerned with the welfare of the society. Individuals also are equally, if not more, anxious to be of help to fellow individuals as also to the group of individuals acting for the

betterment of the society at large, particularly in areas where government has seemingly failed or has not acted at all.

On volunteering front, the practice of providing volunteering services was not found as prevalent as was the case with giving. However, unlike in the West where volunteering is practiced more as a career option, the present survey clearly brought out that the Indian volunteers had genuine interests to serve the disabled, the poor and the elderly. Nevertheless, most volunteers had relatively low education and also came from poorer sections of the society. Presumably, these persons had lower job opportunities on the one hand and also the need for providing help without costs was greater in these sections. The survey results showed that people volunteer their services because they feel that the type of services they can provide can not be provided by paid professionals; they were fulfilling a moral obligation; and volunteering would broaden their horizon. It is encouraging to note that three fourths of respondents were willing to volunteer more, if asked.

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