

## The Maulana's Lieutenant

Diabetes is taking its toll. He walks slowly, deliberately, looking much older than his 47 years. His slightly bent posture suggests also a bad back. Occasionally, you notice pain run across his dark, worn, smiling face. He does not mention his ailments. When a concerned visitor asks he understates: 'Jee haan thori si taklif to hai'.

He toils like a demon for 14 to 16 hours a day sticking his fingers in Pakistan's neglected, overflowing dikes of human misery. On days of disaster when social violence breaks out on a large scale as it did in Sindh in 1990, or when nature vents its fury as with the floods in 1992, the tips of his fingers get sore from dialing the phone for an ambulance here, a rescue mission there and, all over, deliveries of transfusion blood to stricken people. "During emergencies he works", says one associate, "until he is able to walk no more." Sore fingers or bad back, Kazmi Sahib likes his job. He is the right hand, or perhaps the left, of Maulana Abdul Sattar Edhi.

I met him about twenty years ago when, out of the university, he was a trade, union organizer. He had left the fractionalized National Awami Party, and was then active with the Mazdoor Kisan Party (MKP). I remember him as a rare leftist who had an open mind. Once, during a visit to Karachi, before an MKP audience I questioned the contemporary value of and risks inherent in the Leninist concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The audience was stunned and upset. Kazmi was among the few who were open to discussion. He was allergic to factionalism, and quit MKP as it too began to split.

Like most serious leftists, Anwar Kazmi was interested in people and in their quest for justice. He was not drawn to the arcane 'theoretical' disputes of those he calls "communist mullahs". As with most genuine people, his commitment to the 'wretched of the earth', did not wane with fashion, nor with the vicissitudes of age. He had some acquaintance with Abdul Sattar Edhi since 1962 when the Maulana operated from Mitha Dar with two Suzuki pick-ups converted to ambulances. In 1972, he was deeply touched by the speed and efficacy with which the Maulana delivered relief at the disaster struck Bismillah Building. Kazmi was hooked. "That was a turning point", he says, "for Maulana Sahib also." A year later, when the floods came Edhi operated with 17 ambulances and trucks.

By 1982, Anwar Kazmi was a full timer, "in a different kind of party", he says with a sly smile. "How different?, I ask. He replies reflectively: "Its mission is limited but it is more free. In NAP and MKP I felt like a tenant (muzareh) in relation to the leaders. Here, I feel like a responsible citizen. This is a modern organization (Dor-i-hazir ki tanzeem hai); the make of the left parties was feudal." There are of course, other contrasts.

The Edhi Welfare Trust is a marvel of organizational achievement. Few examples of social work on this scale are to be found anywhere in the world. And none, to my knowledge, is superior to it. Its mission and methods are different from those of Dr. Akhtar Hamid Khan's Orangi Pilot Project. But in a country where vast government and semi-government institutions are models primarily of waste and inefficiency, these two private organizations are worthy of serious study in management, social motivation, and ordinary people's yearning and capacity for progress and social justice. I shall return someday to Khan Sahib's Orangi; for now Kazmi Sahib and Edhi's welfare kudos:

Figures do not tell the full story but do give you a sense of what men and women with the right motivation can do in this country. Edhi's three hundred and twenty-five emergency (325) centers are spread throughout the country. The three thousand plus workers employed in them offer relief to the stricken on a 24-hour basis. Linked by

wireless, they also, constitute the best round-the-clock national network for monitoring disasters and accidents, for rescuing victims and rushing relief. The last tremor in Quetta occurred at 9.10; Edhi's alert went out at 9.15 before any government organizations. When the Mangla(?) dam broke signaling the devastating floods of 1992, Edhi's rescue teams beat by two hours the army's relief squads to Jhelum.

Alertness, mobility, and audacity are the hallmark of Edhi's rescue and medical teams. In June 1992 a small news item reported that two Bangladeshis were killed crossing the border near Cholistan. Edhi's emergency team rushed to find them, traveled 940 kilometers, found and gave burials to eleven victims. Six others were buried by a Ranger unit. Police and army units have come to rely on Edhi's audacious and speedy style of work. When three buses full of passengers were stranded hopelessly in Gawadar, Rangers called for help and got it. Edhi Trust's ambulances serve an average of 100,000 persons per month. In 1988, the Trust added an eight seater plane to its ambulance fleet; now it also has a helicopter. During the floods of 1992, these two made a total of forty flights in upper Punjab and twelve in Multan area bringing relief supplies to some 36,000 victims.

Edhi's health centers have grown gradually from the Maulana's original base in Karachi. Hence there is a heavier concentration in Sindh but their presence is growing elsewhere in the country. Edhi's project to open emergency centers along the National Highway is nearly complete with sixty--E.41.ve centers already operating. Along the sparsely populated Karachi-Quetta highway, there are seven such centers. In most places, they are the only health and ambulance service available to Pakistan's neglected citizens. Its health centers treat just 100,000 outpatients monthly. Each month 1200 to 1300 abandoned children, abused women; mentally disturbed, or emotionally disturbed, and seriously ill people are admitted in Edhi's 'homes' and hospitals. When I checked a few weeks ago, about six thousand in-patients were living in Edhi's facility.

These establishments combine the virtues of tradition with modernity. They are clean places with an air of dignity and pride I have not, seen in any public hospital in Pakistan. They are austere, participatory institutions. By working for it, inmates learn, gain self-respect and motivation, and take pride in their institution; and the organization gets maximum mileage from its meager resources. At the Home for Children in Korangi, some 200 criminally incriminated kids, can be seen performing their duties diligently. They run the place, supervised by a staff of only six persons. Administrative costs in government projects generally exceed 40%, and are frequently in the range of 60-70% of total outlay. In the Edhi Trust, administration absorbs only 10% of the total budget.

In the sixty-five (65) acre Edhi complex outside Karachi, there are sixteen hundred (1600) mental patients. Most of them work, under supervision of course. They are neatly dressed. Kazmi Sahib explains: "We get lots of clothing in donations. So we can afford frequent change of clothing." I should admit here to deep personal gratitude. A niece of mine was emotionally disturbed. As she deteriorated through the years, her widowed mother and unmarried sisters could not any more keep her at home. On a visit from the U.S., I and my wife looked in Karachi, Lahore, and Islambad-Pindi for a place where she could get inpatient treatment. We found a couple of expensive private 'hospitals' where affluent families had parked their infirm relatives. They were abominable places of fancy incarceration. In one of them, two patients committed suicide two weeks after our visit. Edhi's simple but clean Home seemed, by contrast, a humane environment for the mentally ill. My niece lived and died there. When I last visited, Maulana Sahib and his wife Bilquees remembered her fondly.

There is a popular misconception that Edhi's services are used by the poor and disinherited people of our society. The truth is that more people from the affluent and middle classes draw on the services of Edhi Welfare Trust than make contributions to it.

Edhi does not accept money from foreign agencies. And the affluent classes contribute barely 20% of its resources. Humble, working people are the organization's financial backbone. Its beneficiaries no less than its funders and detractors provide a profile of Pakistani society fuller and more accurate than any government report or scholarly book I know.

The Edhi Welfare Trust is generally associated with the great and true Maulana of whose anguish I shall soon write. That too is a misconception of sorts. Edhi's work rests on a team of men and women whose dedication to the service of humanity is a reminder that idealism; absence of greed, and an operative concern to eradicate misery still exists in this country. Anwar Kazmi, an old comrade, is but one among many I have come to regard as the Maulana's true successors.

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