

PARSI CHARITY RELIEF
AND
COMMUNAL AMELIORATION

OR

(A brief study of the prevalent system of Charity Relief among the Parsis, some proposals for its Improvement, and some suggestions for Constructive Welfare Work and Employing the Unemployed.)

BY

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(Author of "Lāchārinō Atkāṅ Athvā Unnatinē Mārgē." i. e., 'Prevention of Destitution or On the Road to Uplift.')

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DEDICATED

TO

MR. M. P. KHAREGHAT, I.C.S., (Retd.),

MR. KAVASJI JALBHOY SETT, J.P.,

SIR HORMUSJI C. DINSHAW ADENWALLA, KT.,

THE HON'BLE SIR PHIROZE C. SETHNA, KT.,

SIR SHAPOORJI B. BILLIMORIA, KT.,

DR. DADIBA N. SAHER, L. M. & S., J. P.,

SIR COWASJEE JEHANGIR, BART.,

THE TRUSTEES OF THE PARSİ PUNCHAYET FUNDS
AND PROPERTIES, BOMBAY,

And

LADY RATAN TATA, J. P.,

THE HON'BLE SIR PHIROZE C. SETHNA, KT.,

MR. J. D. GHANDY, SOLICITOR,

MR. S. D. SAKLATWALLA, M.L.C.,

THE TRUSTEES OF SIR RATAN TATA CHARITY TRUST,

IN GRATEFUL APPRECIATION OF THEIR KIND ASSISTANCE
AND ENCOURAGEMENT WHICH HAVE RENDERED THE
PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT POSSIBLE.

Man is the measure of all things. (*Protagoras.*)

Life is as dear to people of no account as it is to the eminent; and when our concern is with making life secure, we should ignore the classification into "notables" and "nobodies." (*Die Vernichtung der Not' or 'An End to Poverty,' By Fritz Wittels: From the Works of Josef Popper-Lynkeus.*)

The chief needs of mankind seem to be—food, lodging, cleanliness, clothing, recreation (including rest, amusement and exercise), air, education, mental development, legal aid, family-life, medical help and nursing during sickness, prevention of accidents and first-aid, economic training. (*Sir Charles Loch Memorial Lecture by Fraulein Ilse Von Arlt, Directress of the Vienna School of Social Work. 'Charity Organisation Quarterly,' Jan. 1934.*)

It may strike some readers as an odd phrase, but it is true that most animals and plants live in extreme poverty. They have no reserves, that is to say, they live from hand to mouth. *Homo sapiens* is alone among living creatures in the possibility that he may abolish want, for himself and perhaps for many plants and beasts. (*The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind.' By H. G. Wells.*)

The economic world machine is rapidly coming to resemble an unhealthy over-grown body which is accumulating two sorts of unwanted secretion. On the one hand, it has been accumulating the new, generally functionless rich, the Consuming Unemployed, a sort of plethora, and on the other it is developing a morbid mass, a huge tumour now growing very rapidly, of Penniless Unemployed. These two developments are so independent that it might be quite possible to eliminate one and still leave the other increasing formidably. We have already pointed to possible processes that may lead to the resorption of the irresponsible rich. The graver riddle is certainly this New Poor, this menace of the unemployable expropriated. (*Ibid.*)

The broad fact underlying the whole spectacle of the alleviation of distress that we glance at in this fashion is that the modern community has been gradually recognising and accepting the responsibility for the maintenance of every one of its citizens at a certain low minimum standard of shelter, food and clothing, irrespective of the productive activities of the particular individuals concerned. It does not compel them to work in return. That is the worst aspect of this sort of relief. What the community offers is dull, dreary, and undignified, no doubt—"pauperization," to give it its proper name—but, nevertheless, life and continuation. (*Ibid.*)

Modern poverty is not the poverty that was blest in the Sermon on the Mount: the objection to it is not that it makes people unhappy, but that it degrades them; and the fact that they can be quite as happy in their degradation as their betters are in their exaltation makes it worseSuch poverty as we have today in all our great cities degrades the poor, and infects with its degradation the whole neighborhood in which they live. And whatever can degrade a neighborhood can degrade a country and a continent and finally the whole civilised world, which is only a large neighborhood. (*"The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism."* By George Bernard Shaw.)

We cannot afford to have poor people anyhow, whether they be lazy or busy, drunken or sober, virtuous or vicious, thrifty or careless, wise or foolish. If they deserve to suffer let them be made to suffer in some other way; for mere poverty will not hurt them half as much as it will hurt their innocent neighbors. It is a public nuisance as well as a private misfortune. Its toleration is a national crime. (*Ibid.*)

Human beings can multiply very fast under favourable conditions. A single pair, if their posterity managed their affairs well enough to avoid war, pestilence, and premature death, might have twenty million descendants alive at the end of four hundred years.

The practical question for the mass of mankind is not whether the population shall be kept down or not, but whether it shall be kept down by preventing the conception of children or by bringing them into the world and then slaughtering them by abortion, exposure, starvation, neglect, ill-usage, plague, pestilence and famine, battle, murder and sudden death. (*Ibid.*)

The virtues that feed on suffering are very questionable virtues. There are people who positively wallow in hospitals and charitable societies and Relief Funds and the like, yet who, if the need for their charitable exercises were removed, could spend their energy to great advantage in improving their own manners and learning to mind their own business. There will always be plenty of need in the world for kindness; but it should not be wasted on preventible starvation and disease. Keeping such horrors in existence for the sake of exercising our sympathies is like setting our houses on fire to exercise the vigor and daring of our fire brigades. It is the people who hate poverty, not those who sympathise with it, who will put an end to it. Almsgiving, though it cannot be stopped at present, as without it we should have hunger riots, and possibly revolution, is an evil. (*Ibid.*)

We should refuse to tolerate poverty as a social institution not because the poor are the salt of the earth, but because "the poor in a lump are bad." (*Ibid.*)

"The poor always ye have with you." That has been accepted too readily as a divine assurance that the prevention of poverty is impossible. (*H. G. Wells.—Op. cit.*)

Until the community is organised in such a way that the fear of bodily want is forgotten as completely as the fear of wolves already is in civilised capitals, we shall never have a decent social life. (*Preface to 'Androcles and the Lion,' by George Bernard Shaw.*)

PREFACE.

The prevalent system of charity relief or the want of it among the Parsis has been under the continuous bombardment of critics at least for the last twenty years. This criticism has lately taken a more severe form, as naturally it would with such a great increase of distress among a rapidly growing number of our people—distress which has been greatly aggravated by the world-wide economic crisis coming in the wake of the World War. The post-war articulateness and impetus to search deeper into social wrongs and maladies and the refusal to take social ills as inevitable or ineradicable have lent greater force to such criticism.

Much of it, however, being unenlightened by factual data and therefore lacking in the indication of effective remedies or substitutes, has failed to produce the intended improvement in the sprawling system. On the other hand those controlling the charities have been too busy with details, too isolated or too individualistic to be able to mark and study the growing problems of poverty, destitution, unemployment, begging, deception, overlapping, uncoordinated multiplication of charities, demoralisation, unfruitfulness of relief, etc. They have consequently not been able to take a comprehensive view of the whole problem and effect the required co-ordination of scattered charity relief, which alone can lead to a vigorous policy of needed improvement.

It is heartening to note however, and we must give credit where it is due, that a very large and

respectable number of Parsi men and women, many occupying influential and trusted positions in life, are ready to apply their minds and some to unloosen their purse-strings in order to make a studied and concerted attempt to tackle at the very roots some of the problems of poverty, destitution, unemployment and distress among a growing section of our community. There is not mere frothy effervescence for which orientals in general seem to be so notorious, but there are distinct signs of depth of thought, sincerity of feeling and earnestness of purpose both among our youths and elders. These must be harnessed in time and methodically to the great end of the solution of our many social ills and of planning for the greater welfare of the community in the sphere of material prosperity as well as its higher cultural and spiritual development.

For a methodical handling of any social problem *fact-finding, planning and execution* are three very essential stages, and thanks to the encouragement given me by the trustees of the Parsi Punchayet Funds and Properties and the Sir Ratan Tata Charity Trust, I have been enabled to study some of the problems of Parsi Charity Relief and collect facts on Parsi poverty and destitution as far as available. In the first part of the book, I have tried briefly to give some of the collected data obtained mostly from the General Register maintained at the Parsi Punchayet Office, and from some other records of the same body. I have also tried to indicate therein the working of our system of charity relief not referring to any particular charity trust or institution but that generally obtaining in the community.

A word may be said about the statistical tables and figures given in the book. An attempt has been made to work these out for the first time and there is some likelihood of small mistakes here and there, particularly in view of the fact that the various figures and tables had to be worked out from a bewildering mass of unsystematised and scattered records, which, moreover, were not naturally kept from the view-point of the author. It may, however, be said that the available material has been as carefully sifted as possible under the circumstances and the margin of error has been tried to be reduced to the minimum.

In the second part, I have ventured to suggest some possible improvements in the handling of the problems of poverty, distress and destitution and in our methods of relieving the same. I claim for these suggestions and proposals no more finality or authority than may be warranted in the judgment of impartial readers by their practicability and efficacy to achieve the desired ends. But what I should like to emphasise with all the earnestness of a humble student, who has looked into the various problems related to Parsi poverty, unemployment and charity relief, and the concern of a practical worker, who has had the opportunity to come into closer contact with the realities of the situation, that these problems have grown to such magnitude and they involve such dangers of social deterioration when looked at from the standpoint of a healthy communal life, that some constructive measures ought to be taken and taken as early as possible to check the growing helplessness, misery and demoralisation of the stricken section of our

society. This need for quick and consolidated constructive effort at all-round social melioration, planned on a far-sighted view of the future of the community, is all the more urgent at a time when we are suffering from the effects of the general slump that has struck the world at large, and especially when we find that the politico-economic position enjoyed for so long by the community in its land of adoption is undergoing such rapid and arresting changes, on the whole to the detriment of its numerous members.

Now, for taking measures for the greater cultural and spiritual development of a community any time in its history may be the right time. A little delay may not cause grave communal loss. But when a community or a large section of it suffers from such set-backs as widespread unemployment, growing poverty and destitution, increasing demoralisation, lack of cohesion and social solidarity, those who wish well by the community cannot fold their arms and wait for the right moment to come or for unpleasant things and circumstances to right themselves in course of time. No such heavenly *manna* or good fortune is known in recorded social history to have fallen into the laps of a merely praying, wishing or dreaming community or group of people. Men must *study, think, organise* and *act* if they wish to encompass social betterment. And when there are graver economic and social crisis in the life of a community, in order that the adults may not deteriorate past redemption, and more in order that the handicaps and degeneration of the parents may not affect or be handed down to the offspring, social remedies for countering poverty, disease, ignorance,

economic dependence, social parasitism, begging, etc., which bring in their train the community's physical, mental and spiritual deterioration, should be taken at the earliest possible moment. 'A stitch in time saves nine' is vastly more true regarding holes in the social fabric, and if our social disease of poverty and begging had been a little more constructively and far-sightedly tackled only a decade or two ago, our position would not have been so bad as it is to-day.

Our economic and poverty problem has grown very acute and mere patch work or isolated effort will not carry us far. Some of the suggested improvements in our entire system of relief can no doubt be effected immediately and by each individual charity trust. But it will be seen that for the larger effort that is required for checking the growth of unemployment, poverty, destitution and begging, and preventing the unfruitful expense of communal resources, concerted action on the part of those who are in the fortunate position of helping the community is urgently needed. The problem is much bigger than can be effectively brought within the compass of a single individual or charity trust. There is moreover no single panacea for the various social maladies and we shall have to attack 'the whole problem from many facades. For its effective handling and for making the most of communal resources, all our charities and other free social services whether personal, pecuniary or institutional will have to be co-ordinated. All co-ordination needs a heart larger than one centered in the narrow circle of self. It must encompass the whole community and its common good, but more, it must

have the vision to envisage greater efficiency and communal development that will ensue from co-ordinated activity. Small minds, though apprehensive, obstructive, or a drag at first, will surely in course of time come to understand this larger purpose if they are allowed an opportunity of expanding their narrow vision. The lightly talked of and little understood *amalgamation* of all charity trusts is of course completely out of question for the present. But *co-operation*, *co-ordination* and *concerted action* can be achieved at once if personal predilections are put aside and the communal purpose kept solidly in view.

There is work for all in such co-ordinated social activities and nobody needs fear that his or her altruistic aims or desires will be thwarted if he joins others in doing good. There is room for individual independence of thought and action even in a co-operative effort for the common weal. For, after all, the purpose of all in such efforts seems to secure the greater welfare of the community. In such work, merely selfish or personal ends and self-aggrandisement can rightly have no place. It may do more harm than good and we must therefore learn the essence of *team-work* and realise that the end to be attained is *not personal but social*. It is a pity that in this century of social awakening we still have to emphasise the value of this idea particularly in the case of an enlightened community like the Parsis, some of whom strangely enough, seem to be so individualistic and ego-centric from the best of motives of altruistic service.

I believe owing to an exaggerated sense of individualism and self-opinionativeness we have been talking about our problems so much more and so diversely than we have thought about or studied them, and consequently we have almost been paralyzed from taking any action. We now badly need a small body of picked, energetic and well-trained youths, and experienced, liberal-minded elders, who can get together, expeditiously but after mature deliberation thrash out the essential facts, come to some understanding and agreement at least on the minimum to be done, and then after wise planning through still smaller sub-committees, begin to do something constructive and substantial. There will be both voluntary or missionary workers and influential and rich men coming forward to help the cause of *planned communal welfare*. The Trustees of the Parsi Punchayet Funds and Properties and of the other charity trusts can give a good lead by supporting such efforts, for, after all, all such work cannot be undertaken or executed by a single body, however earnest or enthusiastic it may be. The Trustees can help in ensuring the essential of the *co-ordination* of such efforts, so that they may not be scattered or lack cohesion, and the work may be invested with the needed element of authority and responsibility. The appointment of one or more special officers exclusively attending to the work of the co-ordination of charity relief and the organisation of ameliorative welfare work will put the entire effort on a sounder and more systematic basis and may help to crown it with the deserved success.

My personal thanks are due to the Panchayet trustees for so kindly allowing me time to study the problem of Parsi poverty and its relief, as also to the Trustees of the Sir Ratan Tata Charity Trust for kindly assisting me to undertake such a study by providing the salary of a special assistant to help me in the collection of data. But for such generous help from the two co-operating charity trusts I would not have been able to publish this humble study at this stage. My thanks are also due to my brother, Burjore Feerose Bulsara, who very ably carried out the research and fact-collecting work entrusted to him, and to the office staff who have variously heartily co-operated with me in my work, both giving me their valued suggestions. I must also thank the Proprietors of the Sanj Vartaman Press for allowing me all facilities and giving me useful hints in the printing and publication of the work.

The report has been lengthier than I expected it to be. Knowing that busy people may not have time to go through the whole unless specially interested in the subject, I have thought it advisable, at the risk of repetition, to give as complete though brief a summary of the whole as possible in the last chapter. If on the perusal of this, the busy reader desires a more detailed treatment of the subject, he may refer to the particular chapter he is interested in.

Finally I hope the few relevant facts and suggestions based on them that I have been able to place before the Parsi public will lead them to view the whole problem of Parsi poverty, charity relief

and amelioration in all its varied aspects as affecting the welfare of the community. I also wish that they may move at least some socially-minded men and women to a deeper study of the problem, and other influential and wealthy people to launch on an earnest attempt to take all effective measures for the all-round uplift of their fellow brethren.

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CONTENTS.

Part I.

	PAGES.
PREFACE	vii - xv
INTRODUCTION	1 - 6
Ch. I—A brief Survey of the Growth of the System of Parsi Charity Relief ...	7 - 21
Ch. II—A brief Examination of the Number and Types of the Recipients of charity relief	22 - 29
Ch. III—The Advantage taken of charity relief by the generality of Stipendiaries and the Demoralisation of a fair number of them	30 - 51
Ch. IV—Some of our Methods of charity relief as instrumental towards the Applicants' Demoralisation	52 - 60
Ch. V—The General Economic, Educational, Hygienic or Sanitary, and Housing conditions of the Recipients of charity relief	61 - 81
Ch. VI—The Aims and Objects of Charity as they are and as they might be ...	82-103

Part II.

A few Suggestions about the Improvement of our System of Charity Relief, some Remedies for our Social Ills, and possible Measures of Welfare and Regeneration.

Ch. VII—Some Rules of Guidance in the proper Distribution of charity relief ...	104-133
Ch. VIII—The necessity of an Employment Bureau and an Industrial Home for men as well as women, and a Work-securing or Marketing Agency or Sale and Show Room	134-150

Ch. IX—Co-operation among charity bodies and donors imperatively necessary and enormously useful. Need also of a Central Charity Investigation Bureau and an Advisory Council on Social Welfare	151-173
Ch. X—Some concrete Suggestions for improving upon the existing Ways and Methods of giving Stipendiary and other Relief from charity funds ...	174-218
Ch. XI—The necessity of giving Better Treatment to and providing reasonable Facilities for the Applicants for relief at charity offices	219-227
Ch. XII—Simultaneous Constructive Welfare Work, a <i>sine qua non</i> of all good charity relief	228-237
Ch. XIII—The necessity of Preventive Welfare Work and Educative Propaganda ...	238-245
Ch. XIV—Helping the Poor and Destitute out of their slough of Despond and possible Degeneration	246-257
Ch. XV—The Unemployment Problem and a possible though partial Solution ...	258-295
Ch. XVI—A New Turn to Charity and a Regular Collection of Vital and Social Statistics and an Annual Stock-taking of Parsi Conditions and Problems badly needed	296-314
Ch. XVII—Our Educational System and its Relative Importance in further constructive efforts for the checking or reduction of <i>future</i> Poverty and Destitution	315-329
Ch. XVIII—Summary and Conclusion	330-379

APPENDICES.

	PAGES.
Appendix I—A short account of a Visit to Dayal- bagh at Agra and to some other Institutions... ..	380-410
„ II—Some Facts and Figures about Parsi Housing in the City of Bombay	411-415
„ III—An Outline Scheme of an Industrial Home for men seeking charity relief	416-434
„ IV—A Table showing the Minimum Food Requirements of a single individual and families of two, three or more persons	435-437
„ V—A Statistical Synopsis of the results of a test Medical Examination of the Boys of the Sir J. J. School, Fort, carried out with the help of Dr. J. B. Dhanbhoora	438-444
Index	445-452
Errata	453

CONTENTS.

Part I.

	PAGES.
PREFACE	vii - xv
INTRODUCTION	1 - 6
Ch. I—A brief Survey of the Growth of the System of Parsi Charity Relief ...	7 - 21
Ch. II—A brief Examination of the Number and Types of the Recipients of charity relief	22 - 29
Ch. III—The Advantage taken of charity relief by the generality of Stipendiaries and the Demoralisation of a fair number of them	30 - 51
Ch. IV—Some of our Methods of charity relief as instrumental towards the Applicants' Demoralisation	52 - 60
Ch. V—The General Economic, Educational, Hygienic or Sanitary, and Housing conditions of the Recipients of charity relief	61 - 81
Ch. VI—The Aims and Objects of Charity as they are and as they might be ...	82-103

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Ch. VIII—The necessity of an Employment Bureau and an Industrial Home for men as well as women, and a Work-securing or Marketing Agency or Sale and Show Room	134-150

	PAGES.
Ch. IX—Co-operation among charity bodies and donors imperatively necessary and enormously useful. Need also of a Central Charity Investigation Bureau and an Advisory Council on Social Welfare	151-173
Ch. X—Some concrete Suggestions for improving upon the existing Ways and Methods of giving Stipendiary and other Relief from charity funds ...	174-218
Ch. XI—The necessity of giving Better Treatment to and providing reasonable Facilities for the Applicants for relief at charity offices	219-227
Ch. XII—Simultaneous Constructive Welfare Work, a <i>sine qua non</i> of all good charity relief	228-237
Ch. XIII—The necessity of Preventive Welfare Work and Educative Propaganda ...	238-245
Ch. XIV—Helping the Poor and Destitute out of their slough of Despond and possible Degeneration	246-257
Ch. XV—The Unemployment Problem and a possible though partial Solution ...	258-295
Ch. XVI—A New Turn to Charity and a Regular Collection of Vital and Social Statistics and an Annual Stock-taking of Parsi Conditions and Problems badly needed	296-314
Ch. XVII—Our Educational System and its Relative Importance in further constructive efforts for the checking or reduction of <i>future</i> Poverty and Destitution	315-329
Ch. XVIII—Summary and Conclusion	330-379

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	PAGES.
Appendix I—A short account of a Visit to Dayal- bagh at Agra and to some other Institutions... ..	380-410
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Index	445-452
Errata	453
