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VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

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Gratitude for true charity by civil society

Concerned citizens have taken upon themselves to feed those who are hungrier now than they normally were before the lockdown clicked in



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Locked up in my daughter's house in Mumbai, I read that the migrant labour trudging miles on foot to avoid hunger are, in fact, grateful to Modi for the food they are being provided by the government on his instructions.

I have no doubts in my mind that Modi would be happy if these labourers are fed, but whether the government has the will to do so, whether it has the resources to feed so many mouths over three or more months and if both answers are 'yes', then if the government can mount a sustained effort to do the job well and truly, will be the crucial questions that need to be asked.

I have my doubts on all the three answers that are likely to be advanced by officialdom. Thankfully, we have a civil society that has shown it cares. Locked down, or locked up if you like, concerned citizens have taken it upon themselves to feed those who are hungrier now than they normally were before the lockdown clicked in!

Like every other citizen, my daughter is confined to her flat. She cannot conduct her business of interiors like she would have done otherwise. But she always had a feel for the defenceless and felt that she could help them even if she was not able to cross the threshold of her flat. Online and by liberal use of the mobile phone, she got in touch with like-minded souls and arranged to feed 500 Adivasi families in two 'padas' (hilltop villages) in the adjoining district of Palghar.

There are numerous other kind souls like her in my city of Mumbai, who have got into the act. My daughter enrolled a staffer from my NGO, the Public Concern for Governance Trust, and an old intern of the same NGO, both of whom were already working to ameliorate the marginal existence of the residents of those two Adivasi villages.

I learnt from my friend and IPS colleague, Satish Sahney, that another resident of our co-operative society building was also busy doing his bit in a similar venture. Anami Roy, who like Satish and I, was a former Police Commissioner of Mumbai, with the help of his elder daughter, Soumya, has arranged to feed migrant labour residing near his non-profit micro-finance company in Govandi. He has fed 11,000 families, plus those that BMC officials promised to feed but could not, in Worli Koliwada.

MR Reddy, a former head of PM's Security, is also a member of our housing society. He told me that Sivanandhan, another former Police Commissioner of the city, runs an NGO called 'Roti Bank' to feed homeless people since the last two years! I phoned Siva and learnt that he has included the migrants housed in different parts of Mumbai in the venture. As of today, he feeds 30,000 individuals every day. The Tata group is his principal donor.

The government, pardon my saying so, would not have been able to do this work of true charity as efficiently or probably as honestly as Sivanandhan. Siva has 11 vans, drivers, and many young volunteers on his project and employs a girl with an MBA degree to run the entire operation.

If two ex-IPS officers are involved in working for others in the time of Covid-19, there must be many more compassionate individuals in the city who have jumped into the vacuum created by the lockdown. A girl on the staff of PCGT has teamed up with workers of another NGO in which I was involved, the Mohalla Committees Movement Trust, to help the poorer slum dwellers in distress. These kind souls do not mind if Modiji gets credit for their work for the simple reason that they did not get involved for recognition, but because of genuine concern for the poor.

My wife and I had locked ourselves in our residence 10 days prior to the one-day curfew of March 22. When Modiji announced the lockdown, we shifted to our daughter's house since we did not employ a live-in cook. I spent my time profitably catching up on my reading. Every human being adjusts to difficult circumstances and my wife and I did just that.

But those restless and more thoughtful, albeit younger and more energetic, souls who cater to the basic needs of other less fortunate mortals deserve our thanks and praise more than those who have helped in supplying the affluent who are locked in with their requirements.

Our NGO, the PCGT, is on a mission to mould the younger citizens, mostly students of law, into more caring and compassionate human beings willing to help people in dire straits.

There are many Good Samaritans in my city. I wish I knew their names but I know that they are there and serving those in need. My young friend, Nitai Mehta, is one of them. My heart goes out to him and to countless others in gratitude. Modiji would possibly not have heard about them.

Link:- <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/comment/gratitude-for-true-charity-by-civil-society-76418>