

Chapter - 1

Childhood and Schooling

People who live along banks of the Indus river in the Thatha region of Sindh mainly depend on agriculture for their living, though some of them also work as small traders, shopkeepers and hawkers of goods in the rural countryside. Till about 300 years ago, they had been Hindus, but then had converted to Islam under the influence of Muslim religious preachers. They then began to be called Momins, which later got modified to Memmon. Due to lack of employment and economic opportunities, many of them had migrated through Kutch and Rajasthan to Gujrat and had settled there.

Many of these people had settled in the town of Bantva and set up their businesses. Among them was the grand-father of well known and popular Pakistani leader and social worker, Abdul Sattar Edhi. His name was Gazhi Rehamat Ullah. He was a small trader, and according to social set up of the time, his family could be called middle-class. Edhi's father, Abdul Shukkur Edhi, though unlettered, possessed business sense. He went to Bombay and became a commission agent of a trading company. The goods produced by the company were sold in cities such as Calcutta, Rangoon, Dhaka and Colombo among others. Edhi's father had to spend about 9-10 months in a year away from his family while visiting these places on business. The men of the Memmon tribe had a predilection for trade and were considered good businessmen. Some of them founded huge companies such as Habib Bank, Dada

Limited and Aham Limited etc. They naturally preferred young men of their own tribe for employment in their companies.

Abdul Shukkur Edhi had two wives, but unfortunately both died, one leaving a son and the other a son and a daughter. This was a period when men far outnumbered women in population and it was therefore considered socially acceptable to marry widows and divorced women. Before marrying Edhi's father, Edhi's mother Gurba had been married to another man, by whom she had had a son and a daughter before being divorced from him. After her marriage to Edhi's father, the two children had been taken away from her and adopted by her sister. Edhi's mother had great love for these children but was never allowed to meet them. Throughout her remaining life, she kept pining for them and remembering them, would often become sad and depressed.

Bantva had by this time developed into a medium-sized town and its streets and lanes had become crowded with new houses, shops and stalls. About three-fourths of its 25000 inhabitants were Memmons. Edhi's family lived in a small house in the Dhobi Colony. The house was small and became quite crowded due to large size of the family, as the children of Edhi's father's previous wives, were also living with them.

Edhi's Father had a modern outlook. Though he observed the Shariat, he had no liking for the religious ritualism. Undesirable practices that had crept into the religion of his people were largely ignored by him and he was quite liberal in his religious views. He made arrangements for the education of Edhi's elder sister Zubaida and younger brother Aziz.

Small towns like Bantva did not have adequate medical facilities in those days. For critical cases and treatment of serious

diseases, people had to go to places like Junagarh, hundreds of miles away. Many patients would die before they could be taken to large towns for treatment. Edhi's step-sister, who was 13, was taken to Junagarh when she had high fever, but despite best efforts of the family, she died. Such cases were quite common at that place those days. Abdul Sattar Edhi was very young at the time and had not even started going to school, but such deaths for want of medical treatment left deep impression on his young mind. He would persistently quiz his mother about this.

Edhi had a well- built body and was smart and nimble in everything he did. He was not very good at studies, but was often made monitor of his class owing to his smartness and leadership qualities. Edhi, from his early youth, learnt to lead others. He was good at sports and games played at school, but excelled most in running, and could outrun every other child in school, even those older than him by many years. It always appeared to spectators that he had already reached the finishing point when the race had barely started. They also played in open fields and the adjoining woods. Chhatapoo was one of their favourite games. Edhi was a naughty child. He would be the ring leader when his playmates stole fruit from fruit gardens and picked up watermelons from the carts going to market. Edhi had to help his mother in household chores, but it gave him great pleasure to share his mother's work.

Edhi's father occasionally sent boxes of dry fruit, containing nuts, kishmash, raisins and almonds. Edhi's mother would pack the fruit in small bundles and ask Edhi to toss them into houses of the poor, but in such a manner that they should not know from where the fruit had come. She would tell Edhi that a gift loses

its meaning if the giver was known. She said while giving a gift the left hand should not know what the right was doing. She would give him two paisa everyday while sending him to school, instructing him to spend only one paisa on himself and give the other to some needy child. But she also warned him to find out before giving whether the recipient really deserved help, as money gifted to wrong people was often used for wrong purposes. On his return from school, she would often confirm from Edhi whether he had really given the money as instructed by her. During the days of Id, she would make a number of small packets containing gifts, which she would ask Edhi to deliver to the houses of the poor in the manner he had done with the dry fruit packets.

Edhi would go and toss the gift packets through any open windows of the houses of the poor when they were not looking, and before they saw who had done it, he would disappear. As Edhi was good looking and a playful child, men and women of the locality would playfully catch hold of him and detain him for hours, talking to him. But when he returned home and found his mother pining for her missing children, he would also become sad and depressed.

One day, going to school, Edhi saw a man lying on roadside. The man was injured and in high fever and was groaning with pain. Edhi saw that he did not look like a common beggar. He came home and told his mother about the man's condition. The mother gave him food for the man and also some medicines and bandages. Edhi went back to the man and gave him food; he also cleaned and bandaged his wounds. Then, Edhi started carrying food for him regularly. He would sit by his side and listen to him discoursing about God and religion for hours. He became

convinced that the man was some divine being and listened very attentively to what he said. His friends and other people knew what Edhi was doing for the man, but if any one asked him about it, Edhi would modestly deny having helped or cared for the man in any way. Then one day, the man left and disappeared without a trace. Edhi looked for him everywhere but could not find him. He never saw the man again but what he taught Edhi about God and service to mankind, still acts as a source of light and inspiration for him.

One day, while going to school Edhi found some boys pestering a mentally deranged person. They had a rope twisted into the shape of a snake, with which they were trying to scare the man, who yelled with fright taking the rope for a snake. Then the boys would withdraw the rope and laugh uproariously before repeating the trick. After watching the scene for few minutes, Edhi came forward and barred their way. He chided the mischief-makers for pestering a hapless man instead of helping him. He said if they could do nothing to help him, they had no right to torment him.

But the boys picked on Edhi for spoiling their sport and gave him a thorough beating. A boy bigger than Edhi and who was obviously the ring-leader of the group, led the others in thrashing him. Edhi returned home with bruises all over his body and narrated the whole incident to his mother when she asked him about his injuries. Though concerned about his injuries, Edhi's mother expressed happiness about this show of courage on the part of her son in helping an unlucky person. She applied balm on his bruises and encouraged him to repeat such acts of kindness and compassion in future and assured him that such actions were indeed worthy of praise.

Edhi left school and began to work for a cloth merchant for a monthly wage of five rupees. In addition to doing his real job, he had also to perform many other chores for his employer, which included sweeping and wiping the floor of his house, making tea, and accompanying his children to and from school. He had to carry a heavy bundle of cloth over his back every day to the neighbouring villages and sell the cloth from wandering from house to house. The merchant had a number of other boys doing the same job. They would go to villages and take the cloth to the houses of prospective buyers, usually women, who would haggle for hours before a bargain was struck. Then they would go to other houses and the whole bargaining game would be repeated.

Edhi was thrifty by nature; out of his five rupees salary, he was able to save at least three rupees every month.



Chapter – 2

Partition of the Country and Settlement at Karachi

During this period, a bus carrying a marriage party met with an accident near Bantva, and a large number of passengers got killed and wounded. This tragedy left a deep scar on Edhi's young mind. He would often stare at the wreck of the bus and ponder over the thin line that separates the living from the dead. He would think about the lives of the dead passengers who had met sudden death due to a silly mistake of one individual, the driver, and which had put an end to all their ambitions and plans. Such melancholy thoughts occupied Edhi's mind for many days.

This was the period when the British were leaving India, dividing the sub-continent into two nations before they left. Mohammed Ali Jinnah addressed a huge public rally at Bantva and urged the Memmon community to migrate to newly created Pakistan. He wanted to use the community's business acumen and spirit of entrepreneurship for the economic development of Pakistan. Congress Leader Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, on the other hand, appealed to the community to remain a part of secular India. During these days, Edhi's mind was engaged in the study of two rival philosophies, the religion, and the Marxism. On the whole, he liked the Marxism as he felt that Marx's ideology was based on historical facts and offered a better explanation for the present condition of human society than did the religion.

Then the news of Hindu-Muslim riots began to arrive in Bantva, which caused great anxiety to the Memmon community. A communal frenzy seemed to have taken hold of the minds of the people of both religions and a large number of innocent people lost their lives on both sides. The riots were mainly confined to the provinces of Punjab, Rajasthan and Bengal, where large scale migration took place across the new borders between India and Pakistan. The killed included men, women and children of all communities, be they Hindu, Muslim or Sikh. Edhi's mind was greatly perturbed by this senseless violence. One silver lining in the dismal cloud was Mahatma Gandhi's declared resolve to remain in Calcutta and fast till all violence stopped there. Edhi was greatly impressed by the success of this one-man moral army.

But clearly, anxiety in the Memmon community for safety of their lives and properties was great; they decided to leave the land of their birth and migrate to Pakistan. Though Indian government had given assurances regarding protection of their homes and lives and had also put in place an assistant commissioner to ensure it, the fears of the members of the community were not allayed, and they began to gather at the Port of Okha with their bag and baggage for transit to Pakistan. One can understand their state of mind as they left the land where they were born and brought up, and with which they had great emotional bond.

They had to stay for five days at Okha before they were able to get tickets for a ship to the Port of Karachi. The ship stayed at Okha for another two days after the passengers embarked, before departing for Karachi. At the Karachi Port, they were assailed by smell of rotting fish such as they had never

experienced before. Though Karachi boasted of many tall buildings, its suburbs were full of narrow and crowded streets. Edhi missed the open spaces of Bantva and the green fields surrounding that town. The contrast between Bantva and Karachi was great indeed.

Edhi's family found shelter in a one-room house in a crowded street. There was hardly any living space left after they piled their baggage in the small room. Edhi's mother reserved a corner of the room for her cooking. Edhi felt depressed living in such cramped quarters and spent much of his time wandering outside. While roaming the city streets, he saw people of diverse communities, who had flocked to the city from different parts of the Indian sub-continent to find homes and work. There were Rai Muslims from Gujarat, Urdu-speaking people from U.P., the Frontier Pathans, Punjabis and Bengalis. Most of them seemed to be in a race to grab the homes and properties left behind by Hindus. They advised Edhi's father also to do the same, but he disliked the idea. On the contrary, he told them that one should earn one's living and not covet the property of others.

Leaving home and property and settling in a new place is a formidable challenge for anyone. Edhi's father had experience as commission agent and was at last able to find a job. Edhi was interested in business but the family lacked finance to help him. While in Bantva, he had bought shares of a corporate company but had left them in a utensil in the house while leaving the place for Okha. Those he now missed sorely.

While walking through the streets of Karachi, Edhi saw stalls selling ice-cream, juice, pakodas, samosas and other eatables and saw that despite flies hovering over them the whole day, these items sold well. Edhi's father gave him some money, with which he

bought pencils, towels and match-boxes etc. and started hawking them in the city streets. He found there were two kinds of buyers: those who wasted time talking and bargaining but bought little, while others talked less but bought more. Soon, he became adept in avoiding the former and finding the latter. But the venture did not bring much success in terms of money; therefore, he took to selling paan. While buying his stock in the wholesale market, Edhi found that small traders like himself were kept waiting while the big ones got preference. Later, he bought a handcart, which made his work a lot easier.

One day, he saw a Pathan chasing and yelling after a man in the street and after catching up with him, stabbing him with a dagger. The man fell down and died on the spot, in a pool of his own blood. Later, he came to know that the man was a Sikh, whom the Pathan had recognized for what he was. This daylight murder shocked him and he wondered at the perversity of human behaviour, which made a person kill a member of the rival community in cold-blood without any rhyme or reason. In his view, the fight should have been against poverty and injustice; any fight against fellow human beings was meaningless.

Edhi saw that his mother was growing weaker by the day and was mentally ill. He shared household work with his mother but ate his food outside to ease her work, for which his mother often chided him. But he persisted in this practice. His brother Aziz was five years younger than him and was studying at school. He was getting used to the city life and had started dressing in the manner of city lads. Edhi had great love for his younger brother and while returning from work, would bring some tit bit for him. Aziz used to eagerly await his return. Edhi's father

had by now made a considerable sum of money. His friends urged him to give Edhi money to help him establish his own business, as they found that Edhi had an aptitude for business. But his father said Edhi should first learn enough about business before starting his own. In 1948, some Memmon families subscribed money and opened a charitable dispensary, which they called Bantva Memmon Dispensary. It had eight workers, Edhi being the youngest of them. Memmon businessmen had donated large sums of money for the dispensary. They asked Edhi's father also to donate some money to the dispensary but he said he had donated his own son to the dispensary.

By now, Edhi had started to trade in textiles and after finishing the day's work, would come to work in the dispensary. He found that corruption had spread its tentacles even to charity work. The workers at the dispensary often did not work full time and would sometimes even close it before time and go home. He also found that the charity work could provide only a temporary relief to those needing help and support, and did not provide any lasting solution to their problems. In his opinion, it was better to help people stand on their own feet than to give them temporary relief in the form of handouts. In the meanwhile he continued to work for the dispensary, often till late at night, and would sometimes sleep on a concrete bench outside the dispensary. His mother used to worry about his neglect of food and sleep.

Due to difference in outlook, the Memmon businessmen were not happy with him. In a meeting one day where they gave speeches, which seemingly impressed their audience, Edhi stood up and asked permission to speak. Majority of those present there, discouraged him from doing so, but one or two said

there was no harm in hearing what he had to say. This was enough for Edhi and he spoke in these words: “You have made the widows and orphans, you pretend to help them by throwing worthless scraps to them; you do this to make them your slaves for life, but you never help them settle and to be able to earn their own living; your real motive is that these helpless people should continue to come crawling to you every month; this is a perverse satisfaction on your part. You want to see gratitude and admiration in the eyes of those whom you exploit to fill your own coffers. This meeting is a festival of fools which you celebrate now and then, by giving sewing machines and cast off clothes to the poor. You want to look great in the eyes of public; you want the people who are otherwise ignorant of your glory, to know about your kindness through the press. But this is a futile exercise, which cannot give you any real satisfaction. This is merely a means of self-aggrandizement on your part”.

Edhi had hardly finished what he had to say when the lackeys of the Memmon tycoons started booing him. Then they grabbed him and rained punches over his body and beat him with shoes. Edhi looked in vain for help from his friends, none of whom came forward to rescue him, fearing the wrath of the rich. After this incident, even his friends from Bantva days started avoiding him for fear of incurring the anger of Memmon businessmen. But Edhi did not lose heart; he resolved in his mind to undertake some great project to help the poor and needy. He resolved that in future, he will never depend on the charity of those who wanted to keep the poor permanently dependent on them and had no appreciation of sincere work. Edhi wanted to help the poor in such a way that they could earn their own living and live with dignity. 

Chapter – 3

On Track of Social Service

Then, he received an offer to escort a sick man to his family in Bihar, which he accepted gladly as he wanted to see the outside world. He took the person by air to Calcutta, but the man became mortally ill before he could take him to Bihar. With help from the Red Cross, Edhi got him admitted in hospital and then went on to his relatives in Bihar and brought them to Calcutta. Then he returned to Karachi; but this glimpse of the outside world intensified his desire to see more of it.

In the meanwhile, he made a small beginning to give practical shape to his desire of helping the sick and helpless by buying a small shop measuring 8' x 8' in Meethadhar and setting up a dispensary there. Later he added another room and made it into a maternity home. He also hired part time services of a doctor to see the patients. He usually slept at night on a bench outside the dispensary. He nailed a small box to the outside wall of his dispensary for the public to drop in their donations. Then he thought of another idea to finance his charity work. He appealed to people to donate the skins of sacrificial goats and used the money he got by selling them to run the dispensary.

In 1956, Edhi embarked on a journey by bus to see foreign lands. He went to Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and England. He carried no baggage and had only a cotton wrap to protect him from weather. The custom and immigration officials of the countries he visited, would look and wonder at this

unusual traveller. In England, he stayed with an old friend from Bantva who had a job there. He advised Edhi to stay back in England and also promised to find him a good job. But Edhi declined the offer, telling his friend that he still had much to do in Pakistan. When he came back to Karachi, he found that the job in the textile business was no longer available. He also encountered a number of other hurdles in resuming his charity work at the dispensary, but he did not give up. He had made a firm resolve to serve mankind, and to this resolve he was to stick throughout his life. But for this he thought it best to depend on no one but himself.

The foreign tour had widened Edhi's mental horizons. While observing foreign cultures, Edhi saw that people in the West were more practical and knew the value of time, while in Pakistan, people had plenty of time but did not understand its value, or know how to use it. He had also observed that the basic and fundamental values of different religions were the same; only the outward form and rituals differed, which in their turn were influenced by geographical conditions, the climate and the way of life. The problems faced by mankind were basically the same.

Edhi's charity work was not to the liking of his younger brother Aziz, who considered it a waste of time. But Edhi was single-minded in his resolve to serve the poor. During this period, Edhi saw that there was a general shortage of trained nurses in the country to care for the female patients. He made arrangements at his maternity home to run a course for the training of nurses and had it widely advertised. There was a flood of applications for the course. He charged rupees 150 for a three months practical training, followed by on job training for another

three months. These courses turned out to be immensely popular and highly successful.

But the success of the nurses training course and his increasing popularity aroused the jealousy of his detractors, the Memmon businessmen, and they began casting aspersions on his character. Edhi's father gave him full moral support and told him that the best answer to such malicious propaganda was practical work.

Along with dispensary work, Edhi had also to look after his sick mother, who was growing weaker day by day. She remained sad and dejected. Edhi did all household work except the cooking. One day, while working at the dispensary, he got a message that his mother had collapsed at home. Edhi rushed there and saw that his mother had an attack of paralysis and one side of her body was totally paralyzed. When he looked for an ambulance to take her to hospital, he was shocked to know that there was only one Red Cross ambulance for the whole City of Karachi, and it was virtually impossible to get it, the demand being so high. Somehow he took his mother to hospital.

His mother's treatment was to be a long drawn out affair, and now Edhi had to devote more of his time to her care. He had to bathe her, change her clothes, and administer medicine and injections, as well to do the cooking and cleaning at home. His mother would helplessly watch her son doing these chores with tears in her eyes; but Edhi would try to raise her spirits with sweet talk. Sometimes, he would lift and carry his mother around the house, saying that when he was a child, she had done the same for him. He would jokingly tell her that now she was the child, and he was doing the same for her. Seeing

such devotion, his mother's eyes would fill with tears. She was not much educated but she would recite the name of Allah in her weak voice, which provided great solace to both herself and her son.

Then his younger brother got married and began living separately with his wife in a rented house in front of their own. Edhi's mother was full of anxiety for Edhi's future, but he would remind her that it was she who had put him on the path of service and self-sacrifice when, in his childhood, she gave him packets of fruit to deliver to the homes of the poor and encouraged him to help the poor and the weak. He told her that he now found great happiness in this life of social service and was fully content. But for Edhi, it was just a beginning; he wanted to do much more.

The thought of marriage had sometimes occurred to Edhi's mind, but he wanted a life partner with the same spirit of public service; he also wanted her to be smart and hardworking. A girl called Amina worked at his dispensary. Though a divorcee, Edhi saw she had most of the qualities which he looked for in a wife. He proposed to her but she did not give any reply for a number of days. When Edhi reminded her about his proposal, she gave him a tart answer. She asked him what kind of life he had to offer her, reminding him that he himself had only a bench to sleep on. After this, Edhi proposed to seven other girls, one after the other, but the answer was negative in every case. Edhi's physical appearance was not much to boast of. He was growing in age also.

Edhi's mother was in pathetic condition. She would sit staring at the door, waiting for his arrival; but as soon as he appeared, she would begin shedding tears. Some deep sadness

gnawed at her soul. Then one day, a vein in her brain ruptured and she died suddenly. Edhi went to the cemetery with his father, brother and others to bury her, and when her body disappeared into the grave, he left the others and sat alone, thinking about his mother and his own life. Later, he came back to the dispensary and wept sitting alone with the door shut. The day his mother rested in her grave, Edhi resolved once again to dedicate his remaining life to the service of mankind.



Chapter – 4

Facing the Detractors

But, Edhi was essentially a man of action. “Next morning, I chalked out a programme of action, a programme that was within my capacity. I had no longing to win a seat in heaven by doing good work, but I wanted to do what was in my power to do, as a duty”, said Edhi. There was a big pile of garbage near the dispensary, which had been a source of awful stench and was increasing in size due to more garbage thoughtlessly dumped there every day. It was a nuisance for the residents and shop-owners of the area, but though everyone expressed their disgust, no one took any action to remove this menace to their health. They expected some one else to do it for them.

Edhi went to the garbage dump one morning with a spade and basket and removing his shirt, set to work. Horrible stench assailed his nostrils as soon as he lifted the first spadeful of this filth. The passersby covered their noses in disgust as the stench spread. It being a road junction, many people passed by, but no one lent him a helping hand in this public work, nor did any one speak an encouraging word to him. But Edhi was fully absorbed in his task and was indifferent to what people said. He carried basketfuls of garbage over his head and put them in a ditch, away from the site. By late evening, he cleared the whole dump, but, as usual, no one said a word in praise. Edhi did not care; he did it as a public

duty. For the next two weeks, Edhi undertook the task of cleaning drains in the locality. Now at last the people noticed his good work and started praising it.

Many of Edhi's friends were employed in wellpaid jobs. They praised his work at the dispensary and urged him to let rich donors, the Memmon businessmen, contribute money for the works of charity undertaken by him, as they thought he would not be able to finance it all by himself. The businessmen, on their part, were ready to donate money, as they did for many other charities running in Pakistan. But Edhi was wary of taking their money, as he believed that by contributing large sums of money to charity projects, the rich tended to make them entirely dependent on themselves and to treat those working in them as their own servants. They only helped these charity works to publicize their own names. Edhi devised other methods for getting donations for his work. He put a notice board outside the dispensary, giving details of works undertaken by his charity institution and the amount of money already spent, and more money needed for this purpose, and appealed to public for donations.

Edhi stopped wearing colorful shirts and took to wearing drab clothes worn by ordinary people. He stopped all activities of life not connected with charity work. He had been fond of songs and music, but now he gave up even this pleasure. Most of the work Edhi did himself. Whatever was to be carried from one place to another, he carried on his own head. Day and night, he laboured like a coolie. He did not mind doing anything, however mean, which contributed even a little to the welfare of mankind.

Edhi's work was fully transparent. He declared that

anyone who donated money to the charity run by him could check his accounts.

During 1957, there was an epidemic of flu and large numbers of people in many countries became its victims. The disease also spread to Karachi and many people succumbed to death as a result. Edhi took his volunteers and set about the task of providing relief to those stricken with the disease. He set up 13 relief camps in the region, where arrangements were made for the care and medical treatment of flu patients. Thousands of lives were saved as a result of the good work done by Edhi and his co-workers. It was the first occasion, when Edhi's work got public recognition and publicity. Impressed by his charity work, a rich businessman donated 20000 rupees to his charity institution. On the same evening, Edhi bought an old Hillman Van and hired the services of two doctors to work for his charity organization. Edhi's co-workers had the words "Poor Man's Van" painted on the body of the van. There were only five ambulances those days in the whole city of Karachi and paradoxically, one had to book them in advance, as if one could know in advance that one is going to have an emergency. Edhi's van was available to all. The first priority was transportation of the injured to hospital, and the second, the conveyance of dead bodies.

Sometimes, Edhi found that a dead body had started to decompose, but the relatives still wanted to take it to their village for burial. He did not hesitate to tackle even such corpses. Edhi worked as his own mechanic for the van. While carrying a dead body, if the van had a breakdown enroute, he would immediately take out his tool-box and set to work to rectify it.

Gradually, the services of his van began to be requested by government agencies, hospitals and the police. The van thus became another means of advertising the work of his dispensary. Due to increasing demand for the van, Edhi sometimes expressed to his friends the idea of buying a helicopter for the purpose, but they would poke fun at him, saying that he had not rid himself of the habit of building castles in the air, as he used to do in the days of his childhood in Bantva.

Edhi would see old men and women suffering, some of them blind; he would see destitute children and cripples begging on the roads and streets, in thick and fast-moving traffic, and think about their plight. Who had the responsibility for looking after them? Whom could they depend on? He felt the government should be reminded of its responsibility. But would the government listen?

Edhi's father lived in the old house. Edhi sometimes went to visit him, and while there, would remember his mother and sorely miss her; he would become immensely sad. His father too sometimes came to visit him at the dispensary. Whenever he found his old father approaching the dispensary, clad in his black sherwani and red cap, with his walking stick in hand, Edhi would leave his work and sit by his father, and they would talk about Edhi's work. His father would ask him many questions about his work, and would later go back home, walking through narrow streets and by lanes.

His brother Aziz and his wife lived in a nearby house and sent food for their father. Though Aziz sometimes helped his elder brother with money, he did not like the work he was doing. But Edhi knew that Aziz was not alone in such thinking; he belonged to that majority of people who stood

on pious principles, but did little to help the poor and the destitute.

In poor countries, where the dignity of labour should be valued above all other things, it had little value, while in rich countries it had immense value. Same is the case with the value of time.

The sale of donated goat skins fetched Edhi considerable sum of money; so his dispensary work thrived and he was able to help increasing number of needy people. He would pick up corpses in his van from sea beaches, river banks, roadsides, hospitals, gutters and railway lines and convey them to their families at distant places. The bell of his telephone kept ringing day and night. The number of accidents per day was more than even the number of hours each day contained. Edhi knew he could not help everyone but whatever best he could do, he would do. The work never tired him. Then he undertook another project.

He rented a number of old buildings and provided shelter to the homeless, i.e. those sleeping on roadsides, footpaths, railway stations and bus stands. But his old detractors, the Memmon businessmen, began slandering him again, saying that he kept these people in filthy conditions. They also accused him of embezzling charity funds. But Edhi said they had no right to ask him how he used charity funds as he had not asked them to donate any money to his charity organization. He said he was answerable only to those who had donated money and if they asked him to account for the money spent, he would give them the details of every penny spent. He also offered to return money donated by anyone who wanted it back. He renamed his dispensary “Edhi”. When in 1958, Edhi's father divided the family

property, Edhi's share amounted to a considerable sum of money. His charity work became easier as he now had his own money to supplement the donations.

Edhi's 24 hours social service had by now become very popular throughout the city. It was called upon for help by many social organisations to which it promptly responded. But, the Memmon businessmen were still engaged in constant propaganda against him, saying he was a communist; and that no one should donate money to his charity. They used all kinds of weapons for propaganda against him.

But one day, the son of one of these businessmen fell from the roof of his house. He tried desperately to arrange for ambulance to take his son to hospital but none was available. He had no choice but to ask Edhi's dispensary for the ambulance. The staff at the dispensary was taken by surprise. Though they did not say anything, their thoughts could be read from their faces. But Edhi responded promptly and immediately went to the businessman's house with the van and took his son to the hospital. He acted with the same sense of urgency as he had, when he had got the news of his own mother's collapse, remembering his promise to her that he would act with the same compassion to help others as he had done in her own case. After this incident, the businessman completely gave up his opposition to Edhi.



Chapter – 5

Marriage

Edhi knew he was able to help only a tiny section of the human population, while there was a sea of suffering humanity that had no one to care for them. When he went to far off places of Sindh while delivering dead bodies to their relatives, he would see small children playing in streets in biting cold without shoes on their feet. During intense heat of summer, he would see children of the poor helping their parents at work, walking barefoot on the burning sands of the desert.

He would see old crippled people trying to scratch out a living for themselves because they had no one to care for them. He felt the first priority of political leaders should be the care and welfare of such people. Healthcare of the old and destitute people, providing employment to the disabled, support of widows and orphans, should be the responsibility of the government.

Memmon businessmen again became active in slandering him. They called him a communist and urged people not to donate money to his charity. One story they published in newspapers had this title: ‘Embezzlement of money donated for social welfare.’ But Edhi ignored such malicious propaganda. He knew that the essence of any charity was practical work it did to alleviate suffering of mankind. He knew, if he tried to answer all such false charges levelled against him, he would not be left with any time for his

essential work, i.e. management of the dispensary, providing of shelter to the homeless, care of the mentally-ill, disposing of unclaimed dead bodies and medical care of the poor and destitute people. In addition to these demanding tasks, he had to cook his own meals.

Edhi was now 25. He dreamed of a better world. He now became active in persuading the government to sponsor works of charity. A number of students came out in his support and started countering the allegations levelled against him on their own initiative. One such group of students came to him and took him to meet a socialist leader. When they boarded the bus, they found only one vacant seat and asked Edhi to take it. A well-dressed gentleman was sitting on the adjoining seat, and when Edhi's knee by chance touched him, he began to shout at Edhi, saying he had polluted his clothes with his filthy self. The students became angry and told the man he had no idea to whom he was talking. They said when he died there may not be any one to pick up his rotting corpse; and possibly this same man would come and help burry his dead body. The students became very passionate in their support of Edhi but he pacified them, saying it was not only the fault of the man himself but of the social system in which he lived.

Edhi noted a strange phenomena in politics. Whenever a new government came into power, the rich welcomed it with open arms and vied with each other in showering praise on the new incumbents of power. Edhi fought the general election of 1962, ordered by Field Marshal Ayub Khan to 'establish a true democracy' in Pakistan. Memmon businessmen opposed him in a big way, but he turned out to be the only candidate who got elected unopposed. Ayub Khan then stood

for the presidential election, in which these representatives of 'the true democracy' were to vote. During election, Edhi supported Ayub Khan's rival candidate, Mohatarma Fatima Jinah, the sister of Mohammed Ali Jinah. Though she lost the election, Edhi again got elected from Meethadhar.

Ayub Khan spoke at a public meeting, extolling achievements of his own government and making new promises to people, which he could scarcely have fulfilled. When he finished his speech, Edhi got up and said in loud voice that the president had told lies and the reality was completely different. But no one gave any attention to what he said. Later, one minister made a wry comment: some discontented people are tardy in their work. The comment dismayed Edhi; he realized that politicians lived in a world of make believe. The social work undertaken by his charity should have been among the primary functions of the government, but it paid scant attention to this aspect. This was a matter of grave concern to Edhi.

Edhi's dream of establishing a welfare state lay shattered. He did not attend a rally held in 1964 in opposition to Ayub Khan's election as president. Edhi decided to depend on his own resources. The memory of his mother and her advice to him, gave him constant courage. The opposition of Memmon businessmen only increased his determination to continue the good work he was doing.

The Indo-Pak war of 1965 brought an increase in the work of his dispensary. He took training in civil defence and led his volunteers in providing relief to the wounded. They picked up the wounded, sometimes 14-15 of them, and took them to hospitals.

Edhi was totally disenchanted with politicians. He would advise his co-workers to shun them, as they only used their poor countrymen as tools to advance their own political careers. Sometimes, he pondered over the human condition: a human being comes to this world and then, forgetting his own mortality, tries to make it his permanent home, thinking he will live for ever; but just a small interruption in the air that he breathes can cause his death; and he leaves this world never to return.

It was now 14 years since Edhi had started his charity work. He had almost abandoned the idea of getting married nine years ago. Five of the seven girls, to whom he had proposed marriage, had by now found their life partners. Amina, his first choice, was still working at the dispensary, on a look out to catch some rich husband. She was domineering among the women working at the dispensary, who did most of the work while she claimed most of the credit. She would sometimes tease Edhi, saying to other women within his hearing: 'Girls, hurry up, work fast, otherwise that Maulvi (Edhi) will kill you.' As to Edhi's proposal of marriage, she would say that had she married him, she would have had only the dispensary bench as her bed and dead bodies as guests. The other girls who had also declined Edhi's offer of marriage would laugh at her comments.

At that time, a girl called Bilquis, who was quite beautiful and smart but had managed to fail thrice in a single class, was taking nursing training at the dispensary. Her maternal aunt worked at the maternity home adjoining the dispensary. Bilquis's mother, Rabia Ma, had become a widow when she was 19. She had two sons beside Bilquis. Though her parents and relatives had tried to get her married again,

she had not done so. She lived with her sister's family with her three children. The uncle was a drunkard, who spent most of the hard earned money of his family on alcohol.

Edhi did not know the exact year he was born. It may have been 1928, 31 or 32, but he guessed he was now about 32 years old. He made another attempt at matrimony; he proposed to Bilquis, but the girl said, he should talk to her aunt instead. Edhi spoke to the aunt and then eagerly waited for her reply for a number of days. The aunt talked to Bilquis's mother, Rabia Ma, and after considering the proposal for another few days, they agreed to the match. A simple marriage ceremony took place, and Edhi and Bilquis became husband and wife.

But marriage did not bring much change in Edhi's work routine or his habits. Only a few minutes after marriage, he got a distress message from someone in need of help and leaving his wife and relatives, went out to work and did not return home until the next day. Edhi wished his wife to become a partner in his work as well. He would ask her in appeal: 'Will you help me? Will you give me support in my work?' Day and night, Edhi was absorbed in his work.

Now, Bilquis started helping her husband in emergency situations. Together they would go to the scenes of accidents and help the victims. One day a bus, full of passengers, got rammed by a train due to the bus driver's rashness, who had thought he would be able to cross the railway line before the train reached the crossing but had turned out to be wrong, with disastrous results. The passengers' limbs and baggage lay scattered over a wide area. Such accidents were quite frequent; Edhi did whatever he could on such occasions.

There was another tragedy that took place in the Nazimabad colony. A family of twenty two members had gone to a sea-beach for picnic. While swimming off the beach, fourteen of them got drowned. Edhi carried the bodies to their home. It was painful to see so many members of one family lying dead. An old woman had lost her three sons and daughters-in-law, two daughters, three nieces and three grand-daughters. Edhi had a shamiana rigged up in front of the house, where he placed the bodies in a row for mourning.



Chapter – 6

Challenges of Social Security

Bilkias was emotional by nature and had been naughty as a child. She often went to meet her childhood friends at their homes, some of whom were now married women, and would ask Edhi to accompany her on these visits; but Edhi would invent some excuse or another to avoid going. She often argued with Edhi that they should improve their standard of living and dressing, but when some one else criticized him regarding such matters, she would immediately come to his support. She also pestered Edhi for more money to spend, but if her mother or aunt asked her about it, she would say that she had more than she needed. Edhi usually refused to give her money for wasteful expenditure, at which she would temporarily become angry with him. When she told Edhi to find time to take her on a pleasure trip to some river bank or hill station, he would put her off with a joking remark: “Then who will bring about the revolution?”

Edhi had been used to facing hardships and harsh realities of life around him, but Bilquis had not been. She would sometimes think about her life with Edhi and finding no real hope of relief in future, would become depressed. One day, she found a cat making restless noises from within a room of their neighbours house. Edhi paid no attention but when Bilquis went inside the room, she found mutilated corpses of four adults and six children inside.

One day, while Edhi was sitting in his office, a man came shouting, "Where is Edhi? Where is he?" He had come to protest about Edhi's practice of bringing dead bodies to their neighbourhood,—a complaint which a majority of people in Meethadhar had against him. The man said he should find another place for the dead bodies, but Edhi ignored him and gave no answer. When the man left, Bilquis asked Edhi why he had given no answer to his protest. Edhi said the man was a fool. After three days the man returned to his office weeping, and said that his brother had fallen from the sixth floor of a building and had died. He requested Edhi to pick up his body.

Bilquis too, objected to his bringing dead bodies home. She argued that accidents took place every other day and people got killed in them, but this was no reason for him to bring their corpses home. But Edhi made no comment.

Bilquis gave birth to a son which Edhi named Qutub.

It took Edhi's wife a long time to get reconciled to the kind of work he did. He would try to make her understand that accidents and tragedies were part of life on this earth and that one should not try to run away from them; they happened suddenly without warning; therefore one should try one's best to help the victims. Day and night people came to Edhi's door and asked his help. Workers at the dispensary worked day and night to help the poor and afflicted.

A woman had three children, of whom, she cared with all her loving attention day and night. She was very devoted to them and was overprotective in their care. Like all mothers, she was ever anxious about the health of her children. One day while they were playing with a matchbox in their room, a foam mattress accidentally caught fire. They could not open

the door as their clothes also caught fire. Hearing their cries, their father tried to break open the door with an axe, as it had got locked from the inside. The mother clawed at the door with her bare hands. Then the people from the neighbourhood came and the door was at last forced open. But when they went inside, they only found the children's charred bodies. The mother could not bear this tragedy and became insane.

In another tragic incident, a man had come to the airport to board a flight for England, where he was going for a bypass surgery. His family members had come to the airport to wish him safe journey, after conducting a prayer meeting at home. They wished him good luck and drove home when the flight departed. On the drive home, their car met with accident and all five of them got killed. The man got news of the tragedy when he landed at Heathrow Airport and flew back home. His son, daughter-in-law, two nephews and a son-in-law were killed in the accident. He had no other child; later, he adopted some one else's child.

Edhi had observed that craze for material things and luxurious living increased dependence on others and gave rise too much evil, as to satisfy one's craving for them one often succumbed to corrupt practices. Edhi did not want such corruption creeping into his family life or his charity institution. He had high moral values. One day, his sister Zubaida was standing in queue at the dispensary to get medicine. Some one recognized her, and told her to take the medicine ahead of others standing before her. Edhi noticed this and got angry, shouting that every one got equal treatment at his dispensary. Zubaida went home without taking the medicine. Edhi's mother-in-law, who worked in the maternity home, was

one day gossiping with some girls when Edhi passed by. Edhi shouted at them that it was a health centre and not a picnic spot, and that they should not waste time in idle talk. When Bilquis learnt about the incident, she got so angry she told her mother to leave her job at the maternity centre but, on the contrary, her mother praised Edhi and said he was right. She told Bilquis, “You should either belong entirely to some one or make him to entirely belong to you.” This was said in a casual tone but its meaning was profound.

Many poor, helpless women approached Edhi for monetary help, but Edhi wanted to help them in such a way that they could help themselves in future. He believed that women were in general more sincere and compassionate than men and were therefore better fitted for social work. He would advise them to take nursing training at the dispensary to be able to support themselves by taking care of the sick and the old. Many women including those who came from distant places of the country such as Musa, Liari, Amirpur Khas and Khar, became trained nurses; thus they became self - dependent and economically independent. Such women whose husbands had abandoned them also found shelter with Edhi's charity. He made Bilquis incharge of the ward containing the homeless and the mentally sick. She befriended these people and won their trust. Her mother told her that women often made silly matters a question of life and death and ruined their family lives. Many times Amina would start criticizing Edhi in front of Bilquis, but Bilquis would silence her with the remark: “It is not an easy thing to be the wife of a great man.”

After Qutub, Bilquis gave birth to two daughters: Kubra and Almas. Due to poor financial condition of her aunt, she had also

adopted her aunt's daughter Jeenat. All these children were looked after by her aunt. They stayed at her aunt's house and were happy there. Bilquis wanted them to remain at her own house, and would bring them back; but the children would miss their old home and insist on going back there; so they had to be sent back to her aunt's house. Bilquis visited them every day, and after Friday prayer, Edhi would also pay his weekly visit to the children, who waited in the street for the sound of his horn.

Edhi believed one should always live within one's means and should not aspire to a standard of living beyond one's reach. He had no desire for such things as big cars, costly furniture or sprawling bungalows and was content to live the life of an ordinary citizen. He knew there were many people for whom the "roti, kapda and makaan" was just a dream. Edhi was thrifty by nature and never spent a penny unnecessarily. He was well known as a miser. His mother-in-law and her sister were all praise for his simple and inexpensive life style.

Amina got married and left her job at the dispensary. Edhi's father had grown quite old and weak by now. He would still thread his way through the crowded streets and come to Edhi's home to talk to his grand-children and share sweets with them.

The Napier Road was quite near the place, where they lived. It was a notorious flesh market full of brothels. Talking on the subject, Edhi would point out to Bilquis, "These women are victims of circumstances; we should not hate them, but have sympathy for them, because it is society that has forced them into this evil; who are we to judge them?" Edhi saw that many teenage girls had been forced to marry lecherous old men, who already had three or four wives. There were others who had been

deceived and sold into prostitution. A middle aged woman came to seek shelter with Edhi's charity institution. She said, she did not know, who her parents were. She had lived in a brothel on the Napier Road ever since she could remember. But now, that she had become diseased, the brothel-keepers had thrown her out. The woman died of her disease within six months. She was one of many such unfortunate women.



Chapter – 7

Visit To Mecca By Road

In 1967, Bhutto emerged as popular leader in Pakistan. He promised the people food, clothing and shelter, which the majority of them had lacked so far; they, therefore, came out in his support in overwhelming numbers. Impressed by his promised programme of social welfare, Edhi met Bhutto, as he hoped, he could become instrumental in alleviating the hardships of poor and down-trodden masses of Pakistan. While talking to his friends, Edhi said, the government could do a lot more towards social welfare and those who join politics should have people's welfare at heart.

Bhutto's party gained popularity because it had a socialist agenda. It declared that the alleviation of poverty will be its top priority. Many landlords had also declared their support for Bhutto when they saw his party was likely to come to power. Though they paid lip service to Bhutto's socialist ideals, Edhi knew their real motive was to share the spoils of political power.

In 1970, elections were held for the parliament and provincial assemblies. Edhi stood for election from the Meethadhar constituency. But Edhi's election campaign was not as intense as that of other candidates, as he neither took a retinue of supporters on his election tours nor addressed any large election rallies. He did not spend money on feasts to win over voters. He would go alone, driving his van to street corners, and speak to people through megaphone about what the role of

government ought to be regarding social welfare work. He also spoke about the work his charity organization was doing. But he did not chant slogans or make false promises to people like other candidates. Bilquis warned him that in today's society, voters could not be won over by this method of campaigning, but Edhi would not change his ways. One day, when Bilquis offered a glass of sherbat to somebody, Edhi reproved her, saying his centre was not a restaurant but a place to deal with emergencies.

He urged those candidates who supported Bhutto not to make false promises to the people. He was of the opinion that students in their last year in college, should be inducted into public institutions to train them as future leaders, so that in the next fifteen years a new generation of competent leaders becomes available. Edhi felt that when promises made to the people during election remained unfulfilled, they lose faith in the political system. He said: Only about ten percent of the people really take part in the political process, and the rest 90% are content to be ruled by this minority.

Edhi lost the election because his method of campaigning did not suit political culture of the time. He decided to abandon this avenue of public service and to concentrate entirely on his charity work. Bhutto won the elections with a thumping majority and formed the new government both at the centre and in the provinces.

When a seat became vacant, Edhi was offered the candidacy for the bye election but he declined, saying that whatever he had to say by way of politics, he had already said and had nothing more to offer. He carried on with his charity work and withdrew from politics.

After the 1971 Indo-Pak War, East Pakistan became an independent country—Bangladesh— and Shaikh Muzib-ur-Rehman became its president. In West Pakistan, Bhutto became prime minister. Many people from West Pakistan, who had gone to live in East Pakistan, had to leave it for fear of ethnic violence. They had to abandon their homes and properties and come back to West Pakistan. Many of them had been donating money to Edhi Foundation. They were now in dire need of money, so Edhi decided to return their money to them, and also help them to resettle in every way he could. There was a severe earthquake in the North West Frontier Province in 1972, which took large number of lives. The number of injured was much more than the killed. Edhi Foundation went there with its ambulance vans, doctors and medicines, and was instrumental in saving a large number of lives. Its volunteers dug through the debris with bare hands where the cranes were unable to reach. The Foundation arranged picking up and proper burial of dead bodies and the medical treatment of those who were wounded.

Bilquis too, went there to help in rescue work, especially the medical treatment of injured women, but she was not allowed by government authorities to take part in the rescue work. They said, it was no place for women to work and told her to go back. When she resisted, they put her in a rest house and posted an armed guard outside the door of her room. Edhi tried to argue with the authorities that her help was needed in the care and medical treatment of injured women but no one listened to him. Next day, Bilquis had to walk many kilometers to take a bus to Islamabad, from where she returned to Karachi by air.

Edhi arranged for a mobile hospital so that those needing medical treatment could be reached quickly. He also set up a number of free dispensaries. His volunteers spent two months in the quake hit area, and worked 24 hours to provide relief to those affected by the quake. Edhi himself got so absorbed in relief work that he did not care for his own health. It was the month of December and the weather was bitterly cold. Edhi caught a chill and became sick.

At Meethadhar, Edhi was always absorbed in work. One day, his uncle phoned that his father had chest pain and was seriously ill. He left everything and went to see his father. But before he reached there his father died. After a quiet burial, Edhi and his brother Aziz followed separate routes and went back to their homes. Edhi saw there was now a wide gulf in their relationship.

There were severe floods in the Sindh Province in 1973, which took a huge toll of life and property. Volunteers of the Edhi Foundation went to the affected areas and deployed their vans to carry relief material to victims. A number of relief camps were also set up by the Foundation, mainly at Naushehra, Feerjo and Moro. Many rich capitalists offered money to Edhi for relief work, on the condition that his volunteers work in their names, but he declined to avail of their money, saying that he needed help, but not from those with vested interests.

Many people had camped on mounds of earth and other high ground to escape flood waters, Whenever they noticed Edhi Foundation volunteers in their proximity, they would wave white cloth to signal for help; and the volunteers would arrange help for them through military helicopters.

The relief work carried out by Edhi Foundation during the floods won praise from many quarters, including the government. The government offered monetary aid to the Foundation but Edhi declined it, reminding the government of its own duty.

By this time, the attitude of his brother Aziz had undergone a great change, and he now offered to help his brother in his work. Edhi was delighted and forgetting all their past differences, accepted his help gladly. Trusted friends and workers were always needed in the organization and Aziz's help lightened Edhi's work load considerably.

It had been Edhi's dream from early childhood to go on a Haj pilgrimage to Mecca by road. He now obtained permission from the government to proceed on this journey in company of some 250 people. The caravan consisted of eight buses and a Volkswagen ambulance van. Edhi also took a stock of medicines to help the needy enroute, as he wanted to use the journey for charity work as well. Bilquis packed some food items and warm clothes for the journey and stowed them in the ambulance; she wanted the trip to be pleasant and comfortable. But Edhi got angry and threw these items out of the vehicle, saying these could be purchased enroute as and when needed.

On the journey, the caravan passed by the place in Sindh where Edhi had once buried a large number of corpses of accident victims. As he now noticed the graves by the roadside, he became sad thinking about their fates.

It was bitterly cold as the caravan passed through the hills of Balochistan. The cold wind made their ears and noses numb. Edhi saw that Bilquis was suffering from the cold, her teeth chattering. He now regretted his angry outburst at her attempt

to take warm clothes at the start of the journey. When they halted at Quetta, Edhi bought some warm clothes for her. They camped in a school ground for the night and prepared their food. Quetta was covered in snow at this time of the year; there was an eerie silence all round.

After Baloachistan, the caravan entered Iran. The trip through Iran took three days. It too was intensely cold, and two of their companions, both elderly persons, died. After burying them they resumed their journey, and then entered Iraq. After travelling through narrow and dusty roads of Iraq, they came to broad and even roads of Kuwait. When they finally entered Saudi Arabia, they had already spent 20 days enroute.

On a Saturday, they started on the final phase of their Haj pilgrimage. They hired tents and bought water for bathing. The water was sold in drums, but there were no towels or soap available. They bought Ihram, the unstitched white cotton cloth, and wore it like every one else. Every one wore the same kind of cloth, which symbolized that in the house of God, there was no distinction based on caste or financial status. Edhi stood and prayed with lakhs of other people. He prayed Allah to shower his mercy on the millions of poor and helpless people of the world, because, without His blessings, there could be no peace or prosperity.



Chapter - 8

Return and Routine Work

Edhi saw that the sacrificial sheep were kept in miserable conditions, remained hungry for days, and by the day of the sacrifice they were almost dead. He could see fear in their eyes. They ran about on the roads and would sometimes collide with vehicles and get injured. Edhi hated this barbarous practice. He believed that religion was much above such rituals; it was service to mankind, rising above one's petty self. Edhi and Bilquis would spend the day dispensing medicines to the sick, and at night, they would make sleeping room by clearing the medicine boxes from the floor of their tent. Many homes in Mecca had offered them accommodation but they preferred to stay in their own tent. They also got a number of dinner invitations, but Bilquis accepted only two of them.

After Mecca, they visited the holy city of Medina, where they pegged their tents near a building under construction. Here, Edhi fell ill with chest infection, which he insisted upon treating with his own medication. Bilquis became worried about his condition and wanted to take him to medical specialist, but Edhi had full faith in his own medical knowledge; he successfully treated his own disease. He made a complete recovery from his illness in a few days.

Then they started on the return journey. Bilquis got sick by the time they reached Kuwait. Edhi sent her back to Karachi by

air and continued the journey by road, leading his caravan of vehicles. They made a halt at Karbala while passing through Iraq. The site where the city stood was once a piece of desert. While sitting alone, apart from his companions, Edhi pondered over the religious significance of this centre of Islamic pilgrimage. He saw that despite efforts of religious teachers and holy men, the world was still divided between oppressors and the oppressed. He saw the futility of such rituals as animal sacrifice to appease God, while what was really needed was the sacrifice of selfish desires and the craze for power to subdue fellow human beings.

After returning from this religious journey, Edhi again plunged into work at Meethadhar. He had no other desire than to serve mankind. After the first Haj pilgrimage, subsequent visits to the holy place lose much of their appeal for most people. One day, while talking to a group of people going on the Haj pilgrimage, Edhi remarked that if their wealth included any money robbed from the poor, then their pilgrimage will benefit them little.

In 1973, Edhi had to deal with problems connected with labour union. It was not permitted to form any union of workers employed by an emergency relief organization, yet these problems confronted him every day in one form or another. Bilquis proved to be a pillar of strength to Edhi during these troubled times.

By now, Edhi's charity organization had become well-known throughout Pakistan. In 1974, he had the Abdul Sattar Edhi Trust officially registered and also set up the Edhi Foundation. Bilquis's brothers Iqbal and Mehmud Gaznavi also worked for the Foundation and had become quite popular due to their hard work and genial nature. Once, some one

introduced Iqbal, saying he was Edhi's brother-in-law. At this, Iqbal said people should know him for what he did and not because of his relationship with Edhi, because so far as work was concerned, Edhi made no distinction between relatives and other workers. He had stayed at Iqbal's wedding for just 15 minutes. Later in life, he altogether gave up attending such ceremonies.

There was acute shortage of drinking water in Karachi. Purified sea water was supplied to some localities of the city, but for only one hour each morning and evening. At the water supply taps, women had to stand in queue for hours to get a pot of water; many squabbles took place between them. One day, at one such queue a girl who was suspected to be a TB patient, was accused of spitting on another woman's pot, no doubt by mistake, at which the woman slapped her; a fight broke out between them when the girl's female relatives came out to support her. A melee took place at the tap; kicks and fisticuffs were freely exchanged. The Edhi Foundation had become so famous by now that some women shouted, they would report the matter to Edhi, so that the sick girl could be sent to his sanatorium; others said that they would make a complaint to Edhi that the sick girl was beaten unjustly.

One day, Edhi got a phone call that a multi-storied building had collapsed and a number of people had got buried in the debris. Edhi was eating curd from a bowl. He quickly finished and started for the site. A six-storey building had collapsed and become a heap of debris, 13 feet high. No one knew how many people were inside the building when it collapsed. They found a two year naked child at the site whom they later sent to the Meethadhar Centre. The rescue work

began. A make-shift tent was erected at the site where dead bodies were laid and the injured given first aid before being sent to hospitals for treatment. The debris was shifted with great care to prevent further injury to those who may have got buried but may still be alive.

It was revealed in subsequent enquiry that the contractor who had built the building was guilty of using substandard material for construction. His greed for money had ruined the families living in the building, some of which had lost all their members. It was human tragedy brought about by human greed. Edhi Foundation was now an institution recognized by the government. Its work was greatly admired by Prime Minister Bhutto, who came to the scene and embraced Edhi. He told Edhi to ask for whatever aid he needed from the government, promising that whatever he asked would be given. Edhi said he wanted nothing for himself, but compensation should be paid to the affected families and arrangement of alternate accommodation for them should be made. Bhutto agreed to these suggestions and announced the required aid.

On the third day, while shifting the debris, they heard a faint sound from below. On further shifting, they found a young boy trapped underneath and rescued him. He later told them that the two year old boy they had earlier found was his brother Javed. He said it had raised his spirits greatly when he heard Edhi's name spoken, while he lay buried beneath rubble. It was not celebrated in that locality that year.

There was another building in the area which was considered unsafe. Its owners had been repeatedly requested to demolish it, but they paid no heed. One day, the building

collapsed, wiping out entire families. One resident who had escaped death told Edhi that he was an alcoholic. His wife and daughters sewed clothes to scratch out a living; but they got to eat barely one meal a day, as most of what they earned he spent on alcohol. They had often prayed to God to give them death because he regularly beat them; they had to often sleep with empty stomach. Ironically, they had indeed got what they prayed for; he considered himself responsible for their deaths. Edhi knew there were countless families in a similar plight and wondered where the root of the problem lay. Edhi's children went to school on foot. Bilquis would daily argue with him that they should have bi-cycles; but Edhi gave a set reply that when all other children got bi-cycles, he would also buy bi-cycles for his children. Bilquis also complained that there was no TV in the house and that the children had to go to the neighbours' to watch TV, but Edhi said, the children should be kept so busy that they should have no time to watch TV.

One day, Qutab told his father that his mother had already purchased a TV set and kept it hidden in the clothes cupboard so long as Edhi remained at home. He also told him that Kubra and Almas helped their mother in hiding away the TV. Edhi came to know that the TV had been purchased on loan. He threatened that unless the TV was returned to the shop, he would stay away from home, at Meethadhar. The family was thus compelled to return the TV to the shop from where it had been purchased. Edhi's children regularly complained to their father that even their minor needs were ignored by him; the other children refused to believe they were indeed children of the famous Edhi. But Edhi kept his

children in ordinary circumstances and told them not to dream of such things as cars and bungalows.

Edhi was sometimes called upon to transport dead bodies to far off, remote places. Once a woman requested him to transport the dead body of her daughter to the Sarkanda area of Sindh. Bilquis and their five children also accompanied him on this trip as they wanted to have an outing. Enroute, they stopped at a clear patch and ate their lunch; then they resumed their journey. The place was a long way off and before they could reach it, it was dusk. But the woman had lost the way. At intervals, she told Edhi to stop the van, where she would climb some nearby mound and call aloud in her native tongue, but there would be no response from who ever she was calling.

Then Edhi saw four masked horsemen approaching them from straight ahead. Seeing them, the woman got terribly frightened and immediately rushed back into the van. She said the men were dreaded dacoits and they usually shot before they asked any question. The horsemen rode up to them, the hooves of their horses kicking dust from the sandy earth, and encircled their vehicle before one of them approached Edhi and asked who they were. Edhi replied that his name was Abdul Sattar Edhi and that he had come to deliver a dead body but had lost the way. The horsemen whispered among themselves and then told him which way to go, warning that he was in dangerous territory and should be careful.

Such incidents often took place in Edhi's work but he managed to wriggle out of such tight corners by tact and humility.



Chapter - 9

Accident of the Van

One day, five boys came to his office and told him that one of their friends had died in jail one month ago. His mother had told them to approach Edhi for help, to have his body exhumed and taken to their village in Sialkot district of Punjab. Edhi accepted and had the body exhumed, finding that its condition was alright. The journey was to be a long one. Bilquis also found an excuse to accompany him, saying she had to buy some items for the Foundation from Sialkot.

Before starting, Edhi went to the Centre for Mental Patients for a routine check of accounts. While doing his work, he heard shrill voice of a mentally sick girl abusing the staff. Sometime later, the Ward In-charge came to Edhi and complained about the girl's behaviour.

Edhi could not control his temper; he slapped the girl; at this, she became quiet and subdued. Bilquis and Qutub sat in front of the van with the driver while the boys sat in the back seat with the dead body and they started for Punjab. Edhi began to regret his anger at the mentally sick girl and felt, he should not have raised his hand at her. He prayed for God's forgiveness for this lapse. After a long journey their van reached Rehmyar Khan on the Punjab-Sindh border, where they stopped for breakfast.

After breakfast, they resumed their journey. Near Iklabad, the van met with an accident and overturned. A

couple of men sitting on a cot near the roadside rushed to the rescue and later other people gathered there. Bilquis and Qutab were unhurt but Edhi got badly injured. He heard Bilquis crying for help as he lost consciousness.

Edhi had always carried cash to meet such emergencies. As he regained consciousness, he took out 2500 rupee and gave them to the boys and asked them to go on their way. Bilquis procured help from a passing car and took Edhi to the civil hospital at Rahimyar Khan. The lane leading to the hospital was so narrow that the car could not pass through. Bilquis had Edhi shifted to a tonga and reached the hospital.

The civil hospital was a hospital only in name. It did not have any x-ray machine or operation theatre. Neither any doctor nor medicines were available. In desperation, Bilquis rang up Meethadhar office and told the staff that Edhi was dying; she urged them to reach Rahimyar Khan Hospital as soon as possible. The staff at first thought it to be a bogus call. After four hours, Bilquis received a call from them on the hospital telephone. Bilquis shouted at them, “You are still there! For God's sake, please start immediately!”

At Karachi, news spread that Edhi had died. People began to mourn his death; the shops downed their shutters. The telephone at Edhi House kept ringing. No one knew for certain what had happened. Meethadhar Centre gave the information of Edhi's accident to his brother Aziz. He started by car and reached the hospital in 24 hours. That day Prime Minister Bhutto happened to be in Karachi to distribute flats to the victims of Bismillah Building collapse. When Bhutto learnt of Edhi's condition, he ordered the plane of the chief minister of Sindh to fly Edhi to Karachi. Edhi was brought to

Karachi and admitted to the Civil Hospital. He had sustained multiple injuries: right eye bleeding, collarbone broken, all teeth on the right side knocked out and a number of ribs broken. At Meethadhar Centre, there was a notice on the board: Edhi is alright.

Edhi partly recovered from his injuries in two months but was still weak in body. As he reflected on the accident, sitting on bench in Meethadhar, Edhi thought perhaps he had been punished by God for raising his hand at the poor mentally-ill girl. When he thought about lack of medical facilities at government hospitals due to which a lot of people, who could have lived if proper facilities existed, died, he was dismayed. He resolved to launch a large programme for providing medical facilities to the needy. His co-workers felt it was virtually impossible to undertake such gigantic project and make it a success; but they also knew that once Edhi had made up his mind to do something, there was no stopping him. This man who could find sleep lying among dead bodies, may succeed after all, they thought. Edhi had been thinking about undertaking this huge project for the last 25 years; he now wanted to see it completed.

The people of Pakistan had by now turned against Bhutto, and those who had earlier called him the messiah of the poor, had now come out on the streets against him. Many got arrested and were put in jail but the protests continued.

In the meanwhile, Edhi continued his work. He took the sick to hospitals and helped bury those who died. His ambulances were constantly on the move. In 1977, the law and order in Pakistan almost broke down; General Zia-Ul-Haq overthrew Bhutto government and seized power. He

declared martial law, arrested Bhutto and his supporters, and assumed power as Chief Martial Law Administrator. Though a dictator is at times better fitted to execute development works and social service projects, the people still fear and distrust him. It was Edhi's belief that revolutions and rebellions took place mainly due to corruption among those who ruled.

In the beginning of the month of Ramadan, Edhi had 50000 pamphlets printed and distributed, appealing people to donate money for the charity. He had become a hard task master and did not overlook any sloth or negligence on the part of his workers; Bilquis was no exception. She would sometimes demur at Edhi's uncompromising attitude, but he could not help himself.

Bhutto was hanged in 1979. The situation in Pakistan did not see much change. Edhi would tell his companions that they should not expect much from politicians, as it was not part of their agenda to undertake charity work. They had no liking for such work. There was war in Afghanistan in 1978; large number of refugees came to Peshawar and Karachi. They suffered much hardship. Edhi established relief camps for them and worked day and night for their welfare. Bilquis had freed Edhi from household responsibilities by taking over the children's care and education.

Edhi, now, undertook the task of providing home for abandoned children. He would pick up these infants from ditches, bushes, religious places and even garbage dumps; he was amazed to see that they survived when given proper care. He would put them up in the children's ward and give them baby food. Thus, these so called illegitimate children, condemned to death by society, including the clergy, would get a new

lease of life. Edhi had number of prams placed outside his centres, with these words prominently displayed on their sides: “Do not commit another sin, give your child into our care.” There arose intense debate among people about the ethical propriety of Edhi's work, some saying that by caring for such illegitimate children, Edhi encouraged people to have them. It was mainly the clergy which objected to Edhi's work; and to which he would put this question: “Where should I throw these infants? Does any religion allow them to be abandoned?” God’s decrees are based on compassion, he would point out.

One day, Edhi and his son Faisal were travelling by a van. While passing over a bridge they felt a strange stench and stopped the van. Edhi got down and went to investigate; despite Edhi's advice Faisal too started following him. Edhi found a number of people gathered below the bridge. Seeing Edhi, they pointed to something lying at a distance. Edhi saw that there was a corpse lying at the edge of a small pool of water. The corpse was badly decayed and was full of maggots. Edhi put it in a sack, and carrying it over his shoulder, walked off towards the van. Faisal was so shocked at seeing the corpse that he became sick with fever after coming home; he had nightmares for many days. Bilquis was angry at Edhi, but he considered it all a part of the day’s work. He believed that, along with lessons in mathematics and geometry in school, children should also be taught about real life with all its unpleasant facts. Later, when Faisal saw more of these corpses in Meethadhar, many of them badly burnt, mutilated or decayed, they did not shock him any longer, and he accepted them as part of life. Zeenat sometimes told her

mother that they saw nothing other than pain and suffering in their lives.

In recognition of Edhi's work, General Zia-Ul-Haq sent five lakh rupees to his charity, but Edhi returned the amount, saying he was not doing any favour to the government. He declined help from many international agencies also.

At home, his daughter Kubra seemed to be in a mood of revolt. She wanted a life of ease and luxury, and put pressure on her parents to change their ways. Edhi's daughters told their parents that at school, other children did not believe they were Edhi's real children, and thought they must have been adopted by him. Sometimes, when Faisal asked his mother if the charity foundation belonged to them, she would reply that they were merely helping the government in its work.



Chapter – 10

Appointed as Minister for Social Welfare

Now, the workers and volunteers of Edhi Foundation had begun to be treated with respect and their work recognized. Whenever people found them doing some social service, some of them would come forward and assist them. This gave Edhi immense happiness, as he wanted to spread this spirit of social service among the general public. All his projects were for the common good; there was no distinction based on religion, caste or creed while extending aid to the needy. On the walls of Meethadhar headquarters, Edhi had such slogans written in Gujarati: ‘Concern for a good cause is a good concern’; ‘Many excuses can be found to put off work’; ‘It is good to copy the good work of others’; ‘People should not worry about heaven and hell; it is not a fit subject for any one to think over.’ Edhi took pride translating these slogans for the benefit of his foreign visitors. He practiced what he preached.

In 1982, General Zia-Ul-Haq declared his intention to form a council of ministers on the model of Islamic ‘Shura’. He offered Edhi the department of social welfare. This position was equivalent to a cabinet minister, but he declined, saying that he did not belong to the ruling class and was content doing the work he had undertaken. Many of his colleagues tried to persuade him to accept the position but Edhi did not agree.

General Zia-Ul-Haq assured Edhi that his advice on the matters of social welfare will be given due consideration and his proposals will be accepted. So, he agreed to become a member of the new cabinet. He was also invited to attend sessions of parliament. Edhi had been curious to see the place where the destiny of the people of Pakistan was decided. He also wanted to see why the condition of people saw no improvement despite so many policy declarations; what were the hurdles in the implementation of these policies? How did the people who were responsible for governance of the country do their work?

Edhi paid his own fare for the journey to Islamabad to attend the parliament session and stayed overnight at a third-class hotel before going to parliament building by bus the next day. As he approached the door of parliament building, smartly dressed military officers came rushing to him. “Edhi Sahib, where have you been? We have been looking for you all through the night; your accommodation has been arranged; you can use the flag car; all this is part of your perks as a minister; it is free”, they said.

You think it is free, but some one is paying for all this, thought Edhi, and refused to avail of these facilities. The parliament hall was an awesome sight for Edhi. The high ceiling and the walls were decorated by designs; there were thick carpets on the floor. The seating space in front of the dais was partitioned into two, one for the ruling party and the other for the opposition. Both had chairs and tables for the members.

Edhi was dressed in everyday clothes. He had rubber slippers on his feet and a canvas bag on his shoulder. He was

clad in coarse grey kurta-pyjama, the latter more worn out than the former. The day passed off in oath-taking by members, at the end of which General Zia gave a speech. He recounted past achievements of his government and its plans for the future. In the speech, he also thanked Edhi for accepting his offer of joining the government.

Edhi knew that the real reason for the General to offer him a berth in the government was to give it a modicum of legitimacy. But in Edhi's opinion, it did not make much of a difference, as the General did not know from where to start the social reform, and had only a superficial knowledge about it.

Coming out of the hall, Edhi got hold of the Finance Minister. He told the minister that tax evasion being as large as the tax collection, the tax policy needed drastic reforms. In the West, people pay taxes willingly as they knew the money will be spent for their own welfare. People pay taxes for their own sake and not for anything else. If they knew some one else will spend the money for his own enjoyment, they will naturally be unwilling to pay taxes.

Edhi was assigned a secretary to assist him in his work, but he declined to accept his services. He also let it be known that he had no wish to be invited to government functions, parties and ribbon-cutting ceremonies, as he thought them a waste of time.

The problem of drug addiction in Pakistan had assumed serious proportions. Large scale smuggling of heroin took place from Afghanistan, the main producer of this narcotic. The arms smuggling across the border was intimately connected with illegal trade in narcotics. Many people had become heroin addicts and could not do without it. It got into

their blood and bones, and even if some of them succeeded in giving it up willingly or under pressure, they would resume it within a short time. In countries, such as Malaysia, Saudi Arabia and Singapore, drug smugglers were punished with death. But Edhi set up a number of de-addiction and rehabilitation centres, where drug-edicts were kept under observation and enabled to get rid of their drug-addiction, to give them a new lease of life.

Edhi was so absorbed in his work that he had no time for even essential social occasions concerning his family. Bilquis's aunt's daughter's marriage was arranged by her own brothers. On the day of wedding, Edhi hung his canvas bag and as usual went about his work. Bilquis observed him going out and was pained at his behaviour, but did not try to stop him. When Edhi returned home, the wedding had already taken place and the house was quiet.

Edhi's own daughter Kubra had been engaged to marry her aunt's son and the marriage was to take place after three years. Kubra was unhappy with the match, but her mother thought that in time, she would come to accept it.

In 1982, Indonesian President, General Suharto came to Pakistan on a state visit. Edhi was also invited to airport to welcome him. Route from the airport to the state guest house had been decorated with flags. Dignitaries had reached the airport well before Suharto's arrival. Every one of them was clad in suit and tie, with gleaming shoes. Edhi was standing among them clad in his usual kurta-pyjama, with the ubiquitous canvas bag hanging from his shoulder. A government official came to him and requested him to change to a more formal dress for the occasion. Edhi asked him if he did not already know

about his dress habits before inviting him. The official went away but presently came back with his superior, who told Edhi that government functions had a dress code which everyone had to adhere to. But Edhi gave the same answer and sent him away. After this function, Edhi came to the conclusion that it was a waste of his time to attend such functions, and that the time could be better spent on his work. He asked to be excused from such functions in future.

The war in Lebanon had caused large scale destruction of life and property in that country. Edhi wanted to go there and see what he could do to help the people there. He got the necessary visa, but after going to the airport, he found that his air ticket had not been confirmed. He was asked to wait by the officials at the airport. Edhi sat on a bench outside their office. Then a peon recognized him and offered to take him directly to the officer concerned, but Edhi did not want to use his official position to gain undue favour from airport officials and declined the offer. The peon went and brought the officer to Edhi's presence. The official asked his pardon. Then Edhi remembered that he had once gone to the same visa officer to obtain visa for France and he had asked him for bank statement. Upon his refusal to do so, the visa officer had made him wait for hours in his office. Edhi decided to go to Lebanon by road.

But there had been no bus service to Beirut for the past four decades. Edhi joined hands with some other passengers and they hired a taxi for the journey. At the Israeli-Palestinian border check post, their passports and papers were checked. The officials looked at Edhi's dress and baggage and asked for his identity card, but he did not have any. They asked him

to sit on the floor and wait, permitting other passengers to go on their way. Edhi did not want to reveal his identity. He wanted to see for himself what difficulties the ordinary people faced on such journeys. The officials released him after 36 hours. He went to the city of Beirut.

Beirut had been badly ruined by war. Many hotels and buildings lay shattered. A man at a large cemetery told him the way to the Pakistani Consulate. Officials at the consulate did not at first believe him when he told them that he was a member of the Shura. They said the members of parliament toured only Europe or America. Why would one of them come to this wretched place? When at last, he was able to convince them of his identity, they began to discuss possible ways to give aid to the relief work going on in that country. Edhi made arrangements to distribute \$ 200-300 per family to those who needed aid, and after offering Red-Cross further help from his own government, he came back to Pakistan.



Chapter – 11

Resignation from Cabinet

On returning from Lebanon, Edhi resumed his work, but soon, he had to go to Islamabad for the next session of Shura. He believed politics was work for the idle, but it was ironic that the idle who had no work, treated it as a great work. In his view, politics was meaningless if it did not concern itself with the welfare of masses. After getting down from the bus when he walked through the great galleries of Parliament building, he speculated that perhaps it will be his last visit to this seat of power, because it did nothing for the poor masses. Perhaps the change could only be brought about from bottom upwards rather than the other way round. Politicians at the top, worked for their own benefit, and had no time to work for the common good. The taxes the people paid were not spent on their own welfare but on other futile things.

During the last session of Parliament, on 12 July 1984, when Edhi got up to speak, General Zia and other leaders looked at him hopefully and thought that perhaps he would recount hardships of his own life for the past 30 years, or use the time to thank the government, but Edhi began: “At last, we are in the hands of a patriot; at last, we have had an opportunity to serve the country; at last, the truth has triumphed over evil; but I believe none of it has happened.” These words penetrated the walls of the Parliament hall and the people sitting there were stunned with shock, but Edhi continued,

“You claim to have set up this Shura according to Islamic principles, but Hazrat Ali had eaten dry bread; he never had a full night’s sleep; you have used this Arabic word “Shura” to mean the government, where as its meaning is totally different. Would any one who knew the meaning of this word, apply it to a government where there are no human rights, no rule of law, no facilities of health care and education, no social security for domestic servants and peasants?” the listeners were amazed at what he was saying but Edhi went on relentlessly, “If you are looking for Islamic principles, I would ask you to take a cue from the West which has adopted these principles in their true spirit. To donate money for charity is voluntary in Islam and those who donate are honoured. Here, you are pushing people to the wall. It is therefore, natural for them to reject you. Martial Law is akin to extremism, it gives rise to militant activities .”

Some one shouted, “Traitor! Traitor!”, but the others shut him up. The hall was filled with silence. Edhi sat down; the silence oppressed him as much as it did the others. When the name of next speaker did not get announced for quite sometime, Edhi got up and walked out of the hall. He was done with the parliament. He felt, he had said what he had to say and had nothing more to do with it.

Later, he heard that a foreigner had remarked in a meeting where the General was present that Edhi was emotional and naive and did not fully understand and appreciate conditions that prevailed in the country, due to his limited vision and low intelligence. He said he did not consider Edhi's inability to speak English a serious draw back. His work was practical work. He knew the symptoms and remedies for social evils. Before he had

a Hillman Van, he used to transport bodies using horse-drawn wagons. Now he used ambulances for the purpose. In his work, it was like acquiring a PhD degree.

After some days, an official sent by the President met Edhi at Meethadhar and told him that the president had been greatly perturbed by his speech. He thinks something has badly hurt your feelings and would like to know what it is. Edhi replied that whenever the political system is misused, it hurts his feelings; the power in Pakistan is being used for personal benefits. The official said, he would convey Edhi's feelings to the president; perhaps Pakistan can be turned into a welfare state.

The official left Edhi. Edhi thought the man was very cunning. He told Bilquis what had taken place. She became very concerned. She told Edhi that the General and his men had not spared even Bhutto. He should not have criticized martial law. It might endanger his life. Edhi said the lives of only those who lead people in protest on the streets could be in danger. The rulers treat people like him as demented and largely ignore them. One man had said about Edhi that he could do nothing more than burying dead bodies. What could he do in this country of twelve crore people?

Protests and demonstrations began to take place in the Sindh Province, demanding the restoration of democracy. The people had not yet forgotten Bhutto. Many got killed; others got jailed; the repression was severe. Edhi's men would pick up dead bodies and bury them, and get the wounded medically treated. Another problem made the situation worse. People made associations based on caste and language. These associations carried out propaganda against each other and

spread hatred among people. Edhi feared it will polarize society and create problems for the unity and integrity of Pakistan. He wrote to sponsors of these associations and warned them against this danger, but they paid scant attention. Edhi felt that divisions among people on lines of caste and language will divert their minds from joint action towards economic development and social welfare.

In Sindh villages, a number of people acquired arms from Afghan refugees and started robbing people at gun point. Armed bands of robbers roamed the countryside. Edhi's detractors spread rumours in Karachi that he smuggled arms and distributed them to robbers, using his vans for this purpose. Edhi did not deign to reply to such lies; but he cried in anguish and said if government could not protect its citizens from robbers, it should indeed allow them to procure arms so that they could protect themselves.

There were many armed fights between natives of Sindh and those who had come from outside to disrupt peace. Many got killed during these fights. Edhi's men would advance to pick up the dead and the injured amid cries from both sides warning them to leave the battle ground. But Edhi and his men would hang round the place till the firing stopped. Then they would go and do their work.

Then other accusations began to be hurled against him. People asked why he did not give statements in the media against activities of robbers. Edhi would ask them in anguish, "Am I a robber baron?"

In the month of Ramadan, one evening, while returning home, Edhi found some armed men hiding behind a car, which was being fired upon by number of other men from

the roof of a jewelry shop. Edhi stopped his van to see what was happening. The men behind the car told him to flee the place, lest he should get killed in the cross-firing. The men at the rooftop also told him to leave the place. One of the men hiding behind the car gave a violent push to Edhi and he fell down flat. But the man got hit by bullet and fell on top of his body. The firing continued and five men got killed. Some of the fighters fled the scene, and a couple of them got caught with stolen jewels in their pockets. Edhi first took the dead bodies to the hospital and then brought them to Meethadhar for burial. On arrival home, Bilquis got frightened seeing Edhi's bloodstained clothes, but he quietly went for a bath as if nothing unusual had happened and later asked Bilquis for food to break his fast. Later, he told her what had happened. The robbers had started erecting road blocks across roads in the countryside. But whenever they saw Edhi's vans, they would let them go after a cursory look. Many friends advised Edhi to employ bodyguards but he did not think it necessary.

A number of dacoits had become quite notorious in the region. One of them was Kashmira Daku. One day, his men came to Edhi with his severed leg. Edhi got it buried and gave them an artificial leg for Kashmira to use. Another notorious dacoit Ghatani got killed by police, who brought his dead body to Edhi for burial. Seeing the dead body, some one commented that Ghatani was an evil incarnate. Upon this, Bilquis retorted that Ghatani's mother had not given birth to an evil child, and what Ghatani became later was due to the influence of the society, he lived in. Edhi wanted to provide home to city beggars as he felt that they polluted the social atmosphere, but the beggars declined his hospitality. 🌸

Chapter – 12
Study of “The Root Cause”
of Social Problems

Many people counselled Edhi to have more interaction with media to win public support for his projects, but he said, “Many great works of charity and social welfare have got ruined in the race for cheap popularity.” He told journalists that popularity gives rise to egotism and this egotism is like a demon which overcomes the goodness in a person.

Edhi went on an eight-day tour of Ethiopia and Somalia to study conditions there and offer aid. He found that these countries were poorer than even Pakistan, but no non-governmental organization was allowed to do any social welfare work there. He saw that despite utter poverty there was large scale wastage of public money and resources. He found large stocks of food-grain rotting at the ports. Petty officials got rich, cornering money and resources meant for the public. He found a marriage party passing on a road, which consisted of a caravan of expensive cars led by the bridegroom on a richly decorated horse. Outside a hotel in Addis Ababa, seeing him alone, two ruffians tried to rob him, but he gave the duo a thorough thrashing and they ran away. Edhi gave a grant of ten lakh rupees for social welfare schemes in that country and came back. But the condition of people there continued to greatly perturb him for many days.

Some Afghan Mujahidins came to the office of Edhi Foundation seeking monetary aid for going on Haj pilgrimage,

but had to go empty handed. The staff members told them they had come to the wrong place to beg money, because Edhi believed in self-help. That was the reason, he gave nursing training to poor and helpless women at his centre, so that they could become self dependent. Some of these women had opened their own clinics and their services were in great demand in the communities where they lived. People called them to their homes to care for the sick and also at child births. Whenever a male child was born in a home where they were called for help, they would be rewarded with money and other gifts; but the behaviour would be totally different if a girl child took birth. Edhi would often ponder over such matters. Many girls who had run away from their homes came to centres of the Foundation. In only two per cent of such cases, the parents of these girls would file a report with the police, while the rest kept quiet due to fear of public scandal. Edhi would counsel both, the girls and their parents in such cases and try to bring about rapprochement.

Many small girls, under six-year age, came to his centres to find protection from parents who beat them mercilessly and kept them hungry. This made Edhi think about the root cause of such social aberrations. Apparently, society was responsible. One day while talking to a high court judge, Edhi asked him why should the hands of a person who steals a hen should be cut off when his stomach was empty.

Many destitute children came to the Edhi Foundation. They were trained in such things as cooking, cleaning and washing. Beside these, they were taught other practical skills such as carpentry, tailoring and repair of electrical appliances, so that they could work for their own living and become self

dependent. Before they left the Foundation they were also taught about social behaviour and also about how to become useful citizens.

Edhi Foundation helped to rehabilitate thousands of poor girls and women. Many of the girls got married with the help from the Foundation. Edhi would also counsel the girls' parents that it was due to their overeagerness to get their daughters married that they often ruined their lives by marrying them to men already having wives. But he knew that the root cause of all these social evils was overdependence of children upon their parents. He often cited the position in Western countries where adult children were economically independent of their parents and responsible for their own lives. As a result, there were fewer social problems there.

During those days, the Hadud Ordinance had come into force in Pakistan, which could send an allegedly adulterous wife into two years imprisonment. Edhi felt that the upper class people were often able to evade such laws. Society was badly prejudiced against women. Many women came to the Foundation who had been raped but the perpetrators had escaped the net of justice. Women with children who had been thrown out of their houses by their husbands, also came to the Foundation for help.

Some people suggested that one or two children of such women should be offered for adoption by other people. But Bilquis was firmly against this. "How could mothers give part of their own flesh and bone to other people?" she asked. Edhi too did not like the idea. Many childless couples would come to the offices of the Foundation to ask for children but Edhi wouldn't agree.

Many women undergoing prison sentences had to keep

their children with them. These children would grow up in jail and not know about life outside. Edhi expressed to the home secretary his willingness to take over the upbringing of such children at his Foundation, but the attachment of mothers to their children was so great that they did not agree to this proposal.

There were severe floods in Bangladesh in 1986, which caused wholesale destruction of life and property. Edhi went to Dhaka with his volunteers and set up large number of relief camps. His ambulances went round the affected areas and were instrumental in saving many lives. Those days Palestinian terrorists had highjacked a Pan American passenger airliner and had it flown to Karachi Airport. Pakistan government faced a crisis. Only the Edhi Foundation was allowed by the government to go to the airport and render humanitarian aid. Some twenty persons lost their lives in this incident, including an Indian girl Neerja who had helped save many lives. When Neerja's father came to Karachi airport for her body, Bilquis embraced him and wept, sharing his grief. Later, she would recount the tale of Neerja's bravery to other people, praising her courage.

Later, the same year, an ammunition dump caught fire and exploded at Anjri camp in Islamabad; it took a large toll of life. Edhi Foundation had the injured treated in hospitals, and also picked up dead bodies from the site and handed over to their relatives. Edhi observed that many prominent leaders, including an ex-Prime Minister and members of parliament had come there, delivered set peace speeches and left. But he stayed at the site for many days and got many a dead and injured extracted from the debris. He wondered at the fact that when prominent persons died, people came to deliver speeches in their praise, but the ordinary people were buried quietly.

Kubra was not happy with her husband Altaf, though she kept quiet and did not complain. Altaf worked at a bank. After his working hours, he often went to weddings and made video films till late at night. One day, Kubra left her husband and came to her parents home. But her mother and aunt successfully persuaded her to go back to her husband's house. Altaf met the American Ambassador and told him about his difficulty of getting visa for the USA. Upon getting the visa, after a few days, he and Kubra left for New York.

One day, while coming back home from office, Edhi found a large crowd gathered near a gutter. He was told that a child had fallen in the gutter and was untraceable. Edhi measured ten paces from the spot where the child had fallen towards the direction the water was flowing and asked his volunteers to dig the place to uncover the gutter beneath. And sure enough, the child was found trapped there, and was rescued. The people started shouting slogans declaring that Edhi was a saint and was possessed of divine power. Edhi assured them that no divine power was involved in this and he had been able to make a correct estimate of the child's position, based only on his experience and common sense.



Chapter – 13

Magsaysay Award

In 1986, the Philippine Government selected Abdul Sattar Edhi for the award of the prestigious Magsaysay Award. But Edhi was not in favour of travelling to Philippine to get the award in person, as he felt that the journey to Philippine and back would waste precious time, and to become famous or getting into headlines was not his purpose in life. To use the time for welfare work was a better use in his opinion. He told his wife that publicity accompanying the award may open the chances of getting more such awards, and this award getting would become a work in itself and distract them from their real work. But Bilquis did not agree with him and persuaded him to go for the award ceremony.

For journey to Philippines, he and Bilquis packed their ordinary clothes, Edhi taking his sandals and coarse clothes he wore every day. Bilquis carried her usual rubber basket in hand inspite of entreaties of well-wishers not to do so.

At Manila Airport the representatives of the Philippine Government received them with fanfare; while coming out of the airport, they were accompanied by a band. They were taken to a five star hotel, in beautiful surroundings. The hotel room was gleaming, with polished furniture and milk white scented bed sheets. Bilquis was ecstatic and expressed her appreciation for the welcome and hospitality shown by Philippine Government. She contrasted it with the apathy and

indifference shown by Pakistan Government toward his work. But Edhi's mission was service. Awards and honours, he had never craved for; the happiness which his work gave him, he did not find elsewhere.

The hotel room was luxurious indeed. It had a well stocked mini bar with expensive drinks. The refrigerator was full of cold drinks and fruit delicacies. The bathroom floor was so shiny and polished that one could see one's face in it. Watching Bilquis taking excessive delight in these luxuries, Edhi warned her not to be over-impressed by these trinkets, but she answered that she only wanted to enjoy these luxuries while they lasted and knew she could not take them home when they left the hotel. Bilquis slept in the bed while Edhi spread a carpet on the floor to spend the night.

Next day, they washed their clothes in the bathroom and hung them for drying on the pegs meant for towels. When the hotel workers saw the clothes they said that the hotel had a laundry service and they could hand over their clothes to them for laundering. But the couple declined to avail of the offer.

That day, they had to attend a rehearsal for the award ceremony. The award winners which included doctors, professors and persons connected with other professions, had to line up behind a young lady, waiting for their turn to go on the stage to get the award. After the national anthem of the country to which the award-winner belonged was played, he or she would step on the stage to get the award. The ceremony took place in an imposing hall.

The food at the hotel was delicious. While enjoying various delicacies, Bilquis asked Edhi if they could take some

samples home so that the girls could learn how to make them. Edhi told her not to talk foolishly.

During the actual award ceremony, there was first a gun-salute, after which the national anthem of Philippines was played. When the Pakistan national anthem was played and Edhi and Bilquis stepped on stage, there were tears in their eyes. They were given a gold medal and a cheque for \$ 20000, and Edhi was asked to speak. Edhi gave a moving speech on the need for social security for the poor of all countries, and the ways and means for achieving this aim. When he finished his speech there was loud applause, which continued till he came off the stage.

Next day, the Philippine Prime Minister Aquino gave a banquet in honour of the award winners. The splendour of the banquet hall was a novelty for Bilquis. Lights decorating the ceiling looked as if they hung from the sky. Bilquis's eyes were wide with wonder, while her husband kept looking at her anxiously. When the Philippine Prime Minister was introduced to them, he kept glancing at Bilquis's rubber basket while talking to Edhi. But instead of being embarrassed by the intent look which the PM gave to this pathetic item, Edhi felt his wife only represented how the majority of world's poor lived.

On the return journey, they stopped over in Thailand, where the King hosted a banquet in Edhi's honour. They were given red-carpet welcome at the Airport in Bangladesh, which Edhi thought was a vain attempt to hide her poverty. His Foundation had been active throughout the year in Bangladesh to provide relief during droughts, floods and famine.

On arrival in Pakistan, Edhi thought that the time he had

wasted on the award ceremony, will now have to be made up with double the work he had been doing before.

Edhi Foundation had played big role in providing relief during a big earthquake in the Armenian region of Soviet Union. For this, the Soviet Union gave him the peace award.

Kubra gave birth to her first son. Edhi was concerned about lack of domestic harmony between her and her husband, though Altaf was trying his best to improve their financial status.

During the period of General Zia-Ul-Haq's rule, many non-government organizations had come into existence, but their work was largely superficial. Some of them had offices in five star hotels and paid princely salaries to their staff. Many of their representatives would come to Edhi and offer financial aid, but he would tell them that social welfare work and luxurious living did not go together. He believed in depending upon his own resources and using them wisely to get optimum output in the form of welfare work. He knew that when something is done merely for show off, it loses its real aim. Edhi found that the heads of such organizations sat in their air-conditioned offices and held lengthy meetings, but achieved very little; all this was not a part of Edhi's mission, in which there was no place for ostentation and publicity. He drove his volunteers hard, allowing them little rest. When, at times, his workers came and showed him newspaper cuttings extolling the Foundation's work, he would discourage them with the comment that as long as social welfare work remained a mere drawing room talk, no real progress could be made. Until the majority of people were provided social security, they had no cause for celebration. The politics and

religion should both be devoted to social welfare. There were few social welfare institutions which did not depend on government aid.

Sponsors of many institutions sought publicity by donating little sums of money. Many approached Edhi with the ostensible purpose of sharing his work. They would urge him to delegate part of his work to their institutions, but Edhi knew their real purpose was not to share his work but to grind their own axe.

Many people accused him of being an agent of Hindus and Jews because while working for social welfare, Edhi made no distinction between Muslims and others. People made up imaginary stories about his relationship with people of other faiths to denigrate his work.

During one function, a rich businessman stood up and declared that Edhi Foundation worked like a commercial establishment, and was not a welfare institution at all. The people threw shoes at him and forced him to leave the function. At another function, a business tycoon said Edhi had no right to work independently and ought to work under some experienced businessman as a boss.

Edhi wanted the political system to be oriented to welfare work but opposition and criticism against him was ever on the increase. He told his companions that labourer, peasant, dacoit and taxi driver all respected him because he appealed to their inner conscience. They understood what he felt for them.

Edhi believed people should change with the times. Once a child went missing, but his parents did not have any photograph of the child to aid in the search. Edhi lamented that people knew about such things as cigarettes but not about photographs.

Edhi once went to a television centre with a request to telecast news of a missing dumb child. He gave details of the child to officials at the television centre, where he also had a chance meeting with a well known social worker who happened to be present there. He kept waiting for the telecast throughout the evening but there wasn't any telecast about the missing child. Edhi gave statement in the press regarding indifference shown by the authorities at the television station and criticized them for their attitude. This statement had a salutary effect and the news of the missing child was at last telecast. Within half an hour of the telecast, the missing child was found. The social worker who had met Edhi at the television station, went to the officials at the station and told them to hand over the child to him because it had been registered with his institution. Edhi now knew the reason for delay in the telecast.

Edhi launched a big programme for the care of mental patients. While studying the phenomena of mental sickness, Edhi came to the conclusion that the greatest single cause of mental sickness was social and political harassment meted out to a person. Family atmosphere and neglect by parents also contributed to mental sickness. Mistreatment of recalcitrant children later led to mental imbalance in these youngsters. Instead of handling these sensitive children with love and understanding, they were often punished to make them behave in an acceptable manner, just as we treat cats and dogs. Edhi felt this neglected section of society needed love and care. He resolved to do something for them.



Chapter – 14

Religion is Based on Humanity

Until now, Edhi used to send mental patients in his care, to the Civil Hospital or the Jinnah Hospital for treatment, but he had found that facilities at these hospitals for treatment of mental illness were far from satisfactory. He, therefore, bought a sixty five acre piece of land on the Karachi Highway and set up a centre for the mental patients' accommodation and medical treatment. It had separate sections for male and female patients and was equipped with state-of-the-art facilities for treatment of mental disease. After Friday prayer, Edhi visited the centre every week and personally supervised bathing of mentally ill children. The children would eagerly await his arrival and called him 'Edhi Abbu'.

Edhi had seen mental hospitals in America and Europe, which were virtual prisons, with all fresh air and sunlight cut off from the inmates. At Edhi's hospital, there was a staff of 25 for every 50 patients. Bilquis regularly went to the centre and personally supervised the patients' care and medical treatment. She would sit and talk to them and share their thoughts and feelings. The women patient usually were obsessed with strange thoughts and ideas. One woman was convinced she was going to marry the King of Saudi Arabia and asked her to write a letter to the king on her behalf. Another instructed her to deduct 500 rupees from her (imaginary) salary every month and send it to her child-which she had never had-for his education. One

woman said, she was a film actress and had got an award for her acting. Another woman said, she was pregnant every time she came back from an outside visit.

Many people said unkind things about these helpless women, which Edhi did not feel the necessity of replying. He said, these women had been ill-used by society and had become insane as a consequence. A couple of religious scholars wrote to Edhi that it seemed to them that he was not a true Muslim. Edhi replied, he had found no religion that told him he should close his eyes to the plight of these unfortunate people and leave them to their fate, or that only Muslims deserved help.

One of Edhi's rivals, a Memmon businessman, who had been one of his bitterest critics, felt remorse when his own wife got afflicted with cancer, and called Edhi to him and asked his pardon for unjustly criticizing him. Another Memmon businessman called Edhi to his home and said: Edhi Sahib, you are doing commendable work; here is one lakh and twenty five thousand rupee donation for your institution. But Edhi declined to accept this amount.

Karachi's Bori Bazaar was rocked by three bomb blasts, one after another. People were so frightened that no one dared to go there. But Edhi Foundation volunteers went to the bazaar and picked up the wounded. They also collected lumps of flesh scattered on the streets and had them buried. Many people had fled their shops and abandoned their businesses in the bazaar. Anti-social elements looted goods from the abandoned shops and demonstrated the level of meanness to which human mind could stoop.

In 1988, General Zia-ul-Haq got killed in an airplane

crash and Gulam Ishaq Hussain, the senate chairman, took over as interim president. In the elections which ensued, Mr. Bhutto's daughter, Benazir Bhutto, won majority of seats in parliament and became Prime Minister of Pakistan.

During elections, a female correspondent of the Washington Post came to interview Edhi. She had been told that office of the Edhi Foundation worked 24 hours and the emergency telephone was invariably answered on the second ring. When she tested the veracity of this report she, in fact, found it to be true. She remarked that even the emergency telephone, No. 911, in America was usually answered on the 4th or 5th ring.

People had high hopes of the new government but Edhi said the real change for the better could only be brought about by a spirit of public service and a sense of self sacrifice; he said, he could find no sign of such a change in the new political set up.

Edhi extended the network of his Foundation to village after village and to district after district, providing relief to those afflicted with poverty and disease. The number of poor was really staggering. They lived in mud and thatch huts; the weak and the elderly languished; thousands upon thousands were hungry, barefoot and scantily clothed; they lived a barren and hopeless existence. The coloured shirt which Edhi usually wore was in stark contrast to the poverty and squalour all around him.

Edhi's crusade was a silent crusade; it was without loud slogans; his crusade was for economic empowerment of the poor. Booths of Edhi Foundation were located at intervals of 25 km. Edhi collected donations, fed beggars, buried dead, and

instructed his workers not to indulge in any political debate, as it could only harm the foundation's work. In a period of six months, he extended his work to the cities of Hyderabad, Sukur and Moro. The Foundation bought land and set up centres at Multan, Rahimabad, Lahore, Faisalabad, Gujranwala and Peshawar. Every centre was given an ambulance van.

One day, a delegation from Thatta area came to Edhi and requested him to set up a project in their region. Though, he had planned of setting up the project one year later, he agreed to their request. Before daybreak one morning, as his ambulance traversed a vast arid plain, Edhi pondered on the phenomena of nature that enabled the light to slowly master the darkness of night with the dawn, but in its turn was again conquered by the darkness at night, and between the two, human beings lived all their bright and dark moments.

In one of the villages where he went, there was a large pond of stagnant water which gave out poisonous vapours and provided sanctuary to vast hordes of mosquitoes, which were ubiquitous. Malaria was rampant in that village and had already claimed a number of lives. The villagers said, they had given a number of complaints to government authorities, but so far nothing had been done about the pond. Edhi chided them for looking to the government for everything and declared they had to help themselves, and not expect others to clean their filth. He called upon them to help him clean the pond, and they came out with shovels and set upon the task of cleaning. When the pond was freed of mud, the villagers were amazed at their own ability to help themselves. Encouraged by this success, they undertook many other projects and brought them to successful completion. Edhi saw

new possibilities of social empowerment by helping people to help themselves.

Edhi, next, embarked upon a programme of extending the work of his Foundation to Balochistan. One colleague warned him that Balochistan had a feudal society and he should be careful about overtaking a vehicle if it carried any feudal chief. Others tried to discourage him by saying that unless he sought local partnership, it would not be possible to open any centre in Balochistan. But Edhi said, he believed he lived in his own and not a foreign country, and had nothing to fear. But after few days, when one of his ambulances got stolen, he had to approach a local chief for assistance. The chief was in a good mood and let it be known to the local populace that if the stolen vehicle was not returned by the next morning, he will levy an additional tax on them and buy a new ambulance with that money. The ambulance was surrendered before the next morning.

A local Parsee donated a house to the Foundation and the centre started functioning from this house. The workers gradually overcame their fear.

Quetta was surrounded by tall mountains. The majority of people were poor and lived in huts. A hut dweller, one day, murdered his wife and leaving her body with his infant son, fled the hut after closing the door. The body was found on the third day and was picked up by the Foundation workers. The infant found shelter in the Foundation Centre. Such tragic incidents took place every other day in this region.

While addressing students at the Bahau Din Zakaria University in Multan, Edhi challenged that if his critics could convince him that no human rights were permitted in Islam, he

would stop his work. He explained that all religions were based on humanitarian ideals and differed very little from social and humanitarian policies of capitalist countries. They had a lot in common, as both laid stress on humanitarian work. Capitalist countries of the West had been able to stem the tide of communism only by adopting social security and welfare policies. Democracy was workable only if stomachs were full.

Edhi made arrangements at many of his centres for treatment of sick and injured animals. One day, he found a sick horse pulling a Tonga overloaded with luggage and passengers. He stopped his van and asked the passengers to get down; and made them realize the cruelty they were inflicting on the poor animal. His animal centres were also getting popular.

Donations to the Foundation ranged from rupees five to lakhs. The money was usually spent on projects in the area from where the money was collected. Edhi also started an air ambulance service. The American ambassador had gifted a helicopter to the Foundation for this purpose, which Edhi accepted, as there were no strings attached to the gift.

Edhi also made arrangements for the disposal of dead bodies of non-Muslims that he picked up, according to the rites of their religions. The fundamentalists criticized him on this ground also, but Edhi said when he picked up the injured for treatment, he did not ask for a certificate of their religion.

In 1989, he was awarded the Nishan-e-Imtiaz, which he accepted.

There was no rain in the Thar Desert for five consecutive years, due to which a famine spread there. Edhi took his volunteers there and set up 35 relief camps in the region. He

remained there for a week making the necessary arrangements. Many people had left the area and migrated to Mirpur Khas. Edhi chided them for leaving their homes and said that instead of running away, they should have faced the difficulties with courage and fortitude. He not only dispensed free rations, but also free advice.



Chapter – 15

Allegations

Edhi's daughter Kubra was not able to get along with her husband, who she said was not as ambitious as she wanted him to be. She wanted to see him become rich and famous. She left him and came back to her parents. Though Edhi was not told much about household and family matters, his daughter's unhappiness made him sad.

Then unfounded allegations began to be made against Edhi that he smuggled human bones and internal organs abroad. Edhi did not deign to reply to such baseless allegations, as he considered it a waste of his time. He continued his work with even more vigour. One day, some miscreants highjacked one of his ambulances at gunpoint. A number of press reporters came to him and suggested that he should seek help from political leaders to recover his ambulance. But Edhi was loath to approach politicians for help and did not do so.

Riots in Sindh and particularly in Karachi City had become quite common those days, and every other day some tragic incident took place. Edhi's volunteers would pick up the dead and arrange hospital treatment for the injured. Though, it involved great risk to their own lives, they took their vans and went to the sites of riots and appealed to the rioters to stop shooting. Usually the rioters escaped before the police appeared on the scene. Even when some of them got

caught and charged, they would get acquitted for lack of evidence. Due to flaws in the legal system, the cases dragged on for years and those charged would come out from jails and resume their misdeeds. Sometimes, the police would shoot innocent people and declare they were killed in encounters. Hospitals did not have adequate facilities, and the wounded who got admitted there could not get proper medical treatment. Edhi was greatly anguished by the government's failure to protect its citizens and provide adequate facilities at hospitals. He would severely criticize the government for neglect of its duties. Whenever he met any political leader, he would raise these issues with him. He would ask if he and his colleagues had no sense of shame asking rich countries to give Pakistan economic aid, when they themselves did nothing to help their own countrymen. Did it not bother their conscience when he did the work they should have been doing? But he saw such criticism did not make an iota of difference to the existing system, or to the people who worked in it. Edhi wanted to offer his charity work as a model for the third world countries.

One night, while sitting on a bench with a colleague at the Meethadhar Centre, two men approached Edhi and said that a man had died of heart attack and they did not have money even to buy a burial cloth to bury him. Edhi took the burial cloth and started immediately in his van, accompanied by the two men and his friend. The strangers behaved as if they had lost the way and took the van to many different areas. At last, they asked Edhi to stop the van and wait, while they presumably went to inquire about the route. Edhi got suspicious at their behaviour and switched on the van head

lights. He asked his friend to nab one of them when they returned, while he would tackle the other. As planned, Edhi pounced on one man, caught and twisted his arms behind his back, while his friend gripped the other, shouting for help. But before other people came, both men slipped from their grip and fled. When he told Bilquis about the incident she said that the men might have been sent by Edhi's enemies to harm him, but Edhi took the incident as a part of his daily life and forgot about it. By now, he had dealt with countless human beings and had become shrewd enough to evaluate their motives from the manner of their speech, the clothes they wore, and the way they behaved, and more often than not he proved to be right. Many people came to him to extract money by telling lies, but Edhi had become adept at recognizing such people for what they really were. He would cleverly offer them the alternative of work and accommodation at his centres, at which they would go away. Once a burqa-clad woman came to him and said she had six children and no work, and that they would all die if Edhi did not help her. Edhi asked her to write an application so that she could be given a sewing machine. At this, she went away. Another woman came to him, saying that her husband had died and she had no money to bury his body. Edhi offered to accompany her to her home to arrange for her husband's burial, but she declined and disappeared. A young boy came to Edhi and said his sister had died and he needed help, but when Edhi told him to sit in the van so that they could go to his home, the boy ran away. Many such people came to Edhi every now and then, thinking they would be able to cheat him and get money. Instead, Edhi would offer them work and shelter at his centres. One man

came and offered to marry one of the homeless young girls living at his centre. Instead, Edhi gave him a piece of his mind and he went back shamefacedly. Edhi felt that the social and economic structure in the country had made people lethargic and unwilling to work. As a result, they looked for easy money and resorted to all sorts of lies and cunning tricks to get it. They would make up imaginary stories and try to cheat generous minded people of their money.

Some of Edhi's acquaintances approached him to use his influence to get work done at government departments. They would tell him that a mere telephone call from him to the concerned official will suffice. But Edhi would flatly refuse, saying, it was not his field of work; they should approach people who spent huge sums of money to organize political functions for prominent political leaders and then made money many times over what they had spent, by obtaining favours from them. He believed in keeping his distance from politicians.

By 1990, the Edhi Foundation had about 2000 volunteers working at various centres throughout the country. The main qualification sought in a volunteer was his loyalty and willingness to work. About 70000 homeless persons lived at various homes built by the Foundation; they had no other support except the Edhi Foundation. But the policy followed by the Foundation was that people should be given not only food and shelter but should also be enabled to stand on their own feet. For this purpose, suitable skills and crafts were taught at the centres. These included mechanical repairs, electrical work, painting and plumbing etc.

Edhi's son Faisal had finished his 11th grade at Orlando

School and had also passed the test for admission to Habib School, a famous convent, charging huge fees. For admission to this school, a donation of rupees five thousand was required to be paid, which Edhi refused to pay. Kubra gave birth to her second child, a son, whom they named Bilal. One day, a young man, Javed, whom Edhi had once rescued from a collapsed building, came to his office. He was now working in a bank. He told Edhi that he had proposed to his younger daughter Almas, and that she had accepted. Edhi agreed to the match. He was in England at the time the marriage took place. Many joked with Edhi that he must have known that one day Javed will become his son-in-law when he rescued him.

One day, there was a collision between a passenger and a goods train near Sangi Railway Station, which destroyed 11 coaches and killed 330 persons. Many got crippled for life. Twenty six seriously injured persons were brought to Karachi by air ambulances of the Edhi Foundation.

Mian Munshi, a prominent social worker of Punjab, put forward an offer to Edhi that his Foundation take over charitable hospitals run by him. But Edhi declined, saying that if he wished, he could hand over his hospitals to the government, which needed them so badly to provide social security to its citizens.



Chapter – 16

Attachment with Bilal

That year they got news that there were a number of people trapped in Balochistan desert and if they were not rescued they would all die. When Edhi Foundation volunteers asked the military commander of that area about it, he said, he had heard nothing about it, and asked how and from where they had got this information. But the information was correct, and when they went to the area to help, their jeep got bogged down in the sand. They somehow pulled out the jeep with help of camels and went to the site. The scene was horrible. They found twenty two dead bodies there of Bihari immigrants, men, women and children.

In Karachi and other nearby cities and towns, young girls from Bangladesh were smuggled in across the Rajasthan border, were sold to brothels and forced into prostitution. Those who escaped prostitution, were either sent to prison, or found shelter with Edhi Foundation.

Edhi often thought over the plight of those hapless people who, in their thousands, were compelled to sleep on footpaths and roadsides in big industrial cities like Karachi, Dhaka and Mumbai. Whenever he tried to share such thoughts with Bilquis, she would say she merely wanted enough food to eat and did not need discourses on the philosophy of Marx and Engels.

Edhi's offices and centres were excellent models of human equality and egalitarianism. There were neither officers, nor peons;

every one was a worker. Edhi told people that his system was an ideal model to be adopted by third world countries.

Popularity of Edhi Foundation had become quite great by now. Before, people used to hesitate donating even ten rupees to this charity, but now they willingly donated lakhs of rupees.

About government jobs, Edhi often said people wanted them, but not to work. The reason was: they could only be suspended and not dismissed, if found wanting. He was strongly in favour of dismissal of erring government servants; they could go to courts if they thought their dismissal was unjustified; but tardy work should not be tolerated at all.

Traffic rules, which existed in 1935 were still in force in Pakistan, though they had been formulated keeping in mind the low volume of traffic of that period. The few vehicles, that then existed, had belonged mostly to the foreign rulers and the rules had been formulated for their benefit. The changes required in social laws after independence were long overdue. The workers' unions had been politicized and in addition to looking after their members' interests, they had also to obey their political bosses.

The punishment was no longer regarded as a means of reformation and correction. Earlier, during the pre-independence period, people complained they were not given equal rights with the British, but now that they were enjoying equal rights, had Pakistan become another Britain? The British rule had merely been replaced by a government of capitalist politicians. In parliament, though they called each other kafirs and traitors and other names, they were all partners in exploiting the people. The parliament had become more like a commercial establishment than a genuine law making body. The rulers and law-makers were not interested in people's welfare.

Many accidents took place at sea, and most of them concerned sailors and fishermen. These accidents were very frequent and a lot of sailors and fishermen lost their lives and livelihoods. Edhi Foundation had number of divers trained for rescue work and also made arrangements to rescue them by air. The fishermen held Edhi in great esteem and were grateful to him for his concern for their welfare.

Edhi was called to speak at a seminar on the topic of Fishermen's rescue. At the seminar, he saw that the majority of speakers took part in it merely as a matter of formality. They spoke in English, a language scarcely understood by those about whose welfare they spoke. When Edhi spoke, he drew their attention to this fact, but he saw that though he spoke in all seriousness, most of the listeners were talking and laughing among themselves. He was disgusted and thought these functions were futile and a waste of money and resources.

Edhi hated insincerity and slipshod work. He found that some of the drivers of his Foundation did not do their work with sincerity and also indulged in corrupt practices. He never hesitated to dismiss such workers; but he would also reward those who did their work diligently, by enhancing their salaries. In order to reduce corruption among his workers, he had his centres and ambulance vans connected to the control room by wireless. Though the ambulances were running at a loss, Edhi continued to deploy them as he considered it an essential social service. This same spirit of social service Edhi always tried to instill in his workers.

Edhi benefited from other people's experience to improve his organization. He listened to all but did only what was good for the Foundation. He never held fast to an opinion or

a course of action if he found that it did not serve the best interests of his organization; he never hesitated to modify or change his opinion if he found that it harmed his Foundation, and never made it a question of his prestige. He would unhesitatingly adopt others suggestions if he found they made his work better or more efficient.

Whenever Edhi went on a long journey, he would not stop to rest for hours, nor eat anything. Many of his workers for this reason tried to avoid accompanying him on such journeys if they could find some excuse. On one occasion, a father and son got murdered in Karachi and their dead bodies had to be taken to Sukkur- a long journey. Two girls, whose father was in Sukkur Jail, wanted to go there to meet him. Edhi started on this journey in his van with the two bodies, accompanied by the girls and another woman. He drove the van non-stop for five hours and only stopped for a while, near Dadu, to drink water from a tube-well, while the others had to remain in the van. Then he resumed the journey and reached Larkana at 3 a.m. The next day, he handed over the bodies to the hospital and then hired a room and told the girls and the woman to sleep inside, while he himself lay outside to spend the night. In the morning, he took the girls to the Sukkur Jail to meet their father. A Police Havildar recognized Edhi and offered him tea, which he declined but the girls gratefully accepted the refreshment. After the girls met their father, they started on the return journey and reached Karachi at 2:30 a.m. the next day. The girls and the woman later complained to his wife that he had neither taken any rest or refreshment himself, nor had he allowed them to do so. This was the reason his workers

avoided accompanying him on long journeys if they could help it. On the above journey, Edhi had taken only a glass of water in thirty three hours.

A cholera epidemic spread in the Thatta area. Edhi immediately sent his volunteers with vans and medicines. They set up medical camps, where people brought their sick relatives for treatment. Edhi Foundation provided them clothes, medicines and soap. Soon the epidemic was brought under control.

Edhi found a marked change in Kubra's behaviour. She had become solitary and introvert. Bilquis took her to various centres to give her opportunity to talk and listen to the women who had come there to find aid and shelter. She began to help Edhi in his work and besides helping in day to day chores, she took over management of the centre at Clifton. Edhi began to hear that Kubra was a good worker as well as a capable manager.

Bilal had by now learnt to walk and talk. Edhi loved to talk to his grand-son and began to take him with him when he went out. He became so attached to Edhi that the child insisted on going with him where ever he went. A strong bond of love formed between the two. If Edhi did not see him for a few moments, he would start asking, "Where is Bilal?" and whenever Bilal did not see Edhi, he would started asking, "Where is Nana?"

Edhi would carry him about on his shoulder. At night, Bilal slept in his grand-father's arms, after they had talked about for hours. Edhi would tell him about his childhood days in Bantva and Bilal would ask many questions to which Edhi had no answers. The two could not live without each other. Edhi thought Bilal was a God's gift to him.



Chapter – 17

Social Security as the Duty of Government

Many friends of the Edhi family would give him suggestions about future careers of his two sons, Qutub and Faisal, who were studying in America. Both were intelligent and hardworking, and had got admitted to schools in the USA on their own merit. After school time, they worked at a grocery store to earn money to pay for their studies; sometimes, they worked up sixteen hours a day; they also worked on Sundays and holidays. They had rented a flat with three other boys and did all their work themselves including cleaning, washing and cooking. Some friends suggested that Edhi should help them to obtain green cards and settle in America, but he would reject such suggestions. A few friends suggested that he should take management of New York Branch of Edhi Foundation into his own hands, but Edhi did not believe in establishing dynastic control over the Foundation. He told his friends to refrain from tempting the boys by putting such ideas into their heads. He wanted his sons to first become worthy of shouldering responsibility, and only later, if he found them suitable, he would recruit them to work for the Foundation, as he did with others. In this, his sons were in full accord with him. He once went and stayed with his sons for a number of days and observing their style of living and working, he became assured that they were not lazy or lacking in drive and would become self-dependent and good human beings.

Lack of welfare schemes and government's indifference in this regard caused him anguish. He would cite the example of Belgium, which had launched social welfare schemes about 150 years ago and had achieved remarkable success in their implementation on socialistic principles. It later became a model for other European countries, which adopted these schemes; it became the basis of social security plans in these nations.

Though these welfare schemes were run by the governments, people gave them whole-hearted support, as they knew they were for their own benefit.

Qutub sent home \$300 from the money he had saved, which gave Edhi great delight as it assured him that Qutub had not only learnt to work hard but also to save money, which according to their Memmon ancestry was a part of their heritage. He urged his sons to marry poor girls and associate themselves with missions that did charity work. Speaking among friends, he would say that the Islam was kind and liberal in its policy regarding women. He often complained to Islamic clerics that they had diverted people's minds from the really important issues and subjected the women to arbitrary restrictions which had no religious validity. He held the view that economic empowerment of women was one of the goals of Islamic religion. Housing loans, free health care and educational facilities would enable them to break the shackles of slavery which had kept them dependent on others. He felt, there was much in society that could be reformed by correctly interpreting religious teachings; that could be of much benefit and productive to society.

Everyday and every week brought new and strange

situations which had not been encountered before. One day, a woman's son who had been studying at Quetta, died. She wished his body to be brought to Karachi for burial. Edhi bought a coffin from a church and left in his van with the woman and his own wife. He completed the long journey driving the van himself. While giving the boy's body a bath before putting it into the coffin, Bilquis was shocked to see maggots swarming in the eyes. She asked Edhi about it and he assured her that it often happened when the dead body had become a few days old. His handling of dead bodies had given him knowledge which other people often lacked. A fakir used to beg at the Kala Pul and had a number of disciples. When he died, his followers buried his body at the spot where he used to lie down at the Kala Pul. The place being a commercial hub and a busy thoroughfare, the police requested Edhi Baba to excavate the body, and in what so ever condition it might be, have it reburied at a more convenient spot. The body was exhumed after sixty days of the death and it was found that it had neither started to decay, nor had any bad smell coming from it. This may have been an extraordinary thing for the ignorant people but Edhi had observed such phenomena before.

There was a similar case at Mianwali where a fakir lived at the edge of a muddy pond. He had lived a contented and carefree life and ate whatever people handed him. One day, he disappeared and it became a topic of talk for the locals, some of whom said, he had had miraculous powers. But after two days, his body was found buried in the mud and was taken out. It was found to be well preserved. But his followers did not allow any post mortem of the body.

There was an old woman who was always found sitting

on her prayer-mat. She would sit praying the whole day and had never seen to leave her prayer-mat. One day, a very bad stench was found to coming out of her home and the neighbours gathered there to investigate. They found her dead body inside the house. In fact, she had died three days before, but her daughter-in-law, to evade blame, said, she had seen her only a day before, sitting on her prayer-mat. In his day to day work, Edhi observed many such events and knew that their extraordinary interpretation was the result of people's social and economic backwardness.

One day, Bilquis said to him that he must have seen many horrible things in his life and asked him what was the most horrible of them all. Edhi sat pondering over her question for sometime and then answered that the most horrible thing for him was: when a helpless and frightened person looked to him for help and he was not in a position to give him any help. The eyes of a helpless person were to him the most frightening thing to see.

The most painful thing in the family life for Edhi was to see loneliness and despair in the eyes of his daughter Kubra. Though she did the management work with dedication, she ate little and hardly slept at all. Edhi often took her son Bilal to different centres, perched on his shoulder. It was now twenty four years since he had married Bilquis, but her habit of lavish spending of money had not changed a bit. She demanded ever larger sums of money to spend, which Edhi always demurred in giving her, futilely hoping to reform her spending habits.

Edhi expanded the scope of his work further by establishing charity services for Pakistanis living abroad. His charity organization had by now won international fame and

people trusted it. Edhi opened a number of branches of the foundation in foreign countries. The organization had become so big that it seemed like a large department of the government itself. Some friends jokingly asked Edhi what he would do if the government decided to nationalize his charity foundation and took over its control. Edhi replied that he demanded nothing better if the government did its own long overdue work, which at present was being done by his foundation. He said he and Bilquis had nothing to worry about; they would beg people to donate money and will start a new foundation, so that they could continue working for public welfare.

Talking among the staff and his friends, Edhi would point out that the root cause of most social evils was idle minds. In poor countries, where time and work should be valued, they had very little value, if any at all. Corruption, like cancer, had spread its tentacles to all sections of society and was eating into its vitals. People had become crazy for money and material things and did not mind getting them by any means, fair or foul. They had no concern for the pain and suffering of their fellow human beings. The government was also delinquent in its duty to its citizens in not providing them any social security or healthcare.

Edhi said if the black money hoarded by people was allowed to come out, it could provide government with much needed revenue to undertake social welfare schemes. He suggested that like Saudi Arabia and UAE, Pakistan too should allow people to declare their black money, and after paying the necessary taxes, they should allow them to keep it as white money. He also advocated the idea of making it compulsory to make all large payments by

cheque, which would to a great extent obviate the problem of black money.

Edhi suggested to the government that it should take over manufacture of drugs and medicines and sell them through government owned drug stores at reasonable rates to the public. This would provide great relief to the people who had, at present, to buy them at exorbitant prices from private drug stores.

When Edhi went to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in 1950, he saw that an excessive number of mosques were being built there. Edhi told his friends that carrying any thing to its extreme was harmful. Religion was meant to guide people to live a life of virtue, and should not become an end in itself. Welfare work should be given priority over everything else. Edhi had held such views on religion from the beginning of his life, but many religious fanatics had now begun to criticize him for his unorthodox views. Some called him an Aga Khani, some a Qadiani, while others said he was an atheist. But Edhi replied to such criticism saying, he was a true Muslim and obeyed not the letter but the spirit of true Islam. The criticism did not affect his work.

Those days, two boys ran off from one of his centres and went to the Foundation Centre at Multan. Later, they left the Multan Centre and went to a municipal councillor, who was a severe critic of the Edhi Foundation.

The councillor approached the Human Rights Commission, and through it, had a statement submitted in the High Court on behalf of the boys, which stated that women and children were subjected to cruel treatment at Edhi Foundation Centres. It said that women inmates had their hair forcible shorn at the

centres, while children were given electric shocks as punishment. One press reporter wrote that the children were crying to be liberated from these centres. The High Court sent a team of investigators to find out the truth regarding these allegations, which found nothing wrong at the centres. Edhi said in irritation that whoever wanted these children could take them. The team members all ended up donating money to the Foundation after this incident.



Chapter – 18

Death of Bilal

Amina came to the office of the Foundation one day and requested for a job. In fact, her dream of marrying a rich man and enjoying life ever afterwards had gone sour. The rich man she had married, had given her nothing save a life of misery and then died leaving her as destitute as before. This was a very bad period of Amina's life and though she used to hate Edhi and Bilquis, seeing them enjoying happy married life, they now shared her grief and suffering and helped her all they could. While talking to Amina, Bilquis said that though married to Edhi for twenty five years, he had not been able to provide much material comfort to her and had only been successful in gathering pain and suffering around their lives, but she was still happy in sharing his life and work with him, and felt a deep satisfaction and happiness in her mind.

In 1991, the then president of Pakistan, Gulam Ishaq Khan, dismissed Benazir Bhutto's government for being inefficient and corrupt and declared fresh elections. The people were happy to get rid of the Bhutto government in the hope that the new government would bring them all round prosperity and happiness. The Muslim League won a resounding victory in the election and its leader Mian Nawaz Sharif became the country's new Prime Minister. The people were so enthusiastic that, in a burst of patriotic zeal, thousands of them went to Kashmir border to cross over and take forcible

possession of the Indian portion of Kashmir. The situation became critical. The Pakistan army got prepared to stop this uncalled for invasion of a neighbouring country. In desperation, the government requested the Edhi Foundation to persuade people to desist from this venture and maintain peace. The role of the Foundation on this occasion was like that of the Red Cross. Edhi went to the Kashmir border with his volunteers and succeeded in persuading the aggressors to withdraw from there. Thus, the situation was brought under control and the Pakistan army was saved from firing upon its own countrymen.

Then Bilal got burnt. They had a dull-witted servant girl called Noor Mahal, who, peeved at Kubra as she often scolded her for sloppy work, was one day bathing Bilal with hot water. Bilal kept crying as the water was too hot, but she paid no attention to his cries and continued to pour hot water on his body. Bilal had to be taken to hospital and was found to have 75% burns. Edhi loved his grand-son dearly and was shocked at his injuries. He had to face the painful possibility that Bilal may not survive his injuries. It was too horrible for him to contemplate the boy's death. Kubra was in a state of shock and could not even speak. This tragedy had taken place at a turning point in her life when her materialistic thinking had almost ceased and she had begun to find complete contentment in charity work of the Foundation. It was beyond what she could bear, to watch her son's pain when his bandages, stuck to his wounds, were peeled off to be replaced with the fresh ones. She would run away from the room and miss the tears of anguish Edhi shed when he watched the boy's suffering. Kubra almost became insane with grief when she watched the oxygen pumped into her son's lungs. It was most distressing for Edhi to see the pain of his grand-son

and the grief of his daughter. After two months of constant treatment, there was some hope that Bilal might live. Whenever he found time, Edhi would go to the hospital to be near his grand-son. Bilal would hold his hand and ask him many questions, which Edhi would try his best to answer. But when he tried to get up to leave, Bilal would hold his hand more firmly and appeal to him to stay longer, “Nana, don’t go so soon, please stay for some more time.” It became difficult for Edhi to hide his tears from his grand-son and he would come out of the room with tears in his eyes. About the impending tragedy neither he nor Kubra had any inkling.

At 3 a.m., on 9 July 1992, Edhi's telephone rang and he got news that a passenger train on its way to Rawalpindi had collided with a goods train near the Ghotki Railway Station. Hundreds of passengers had got killed and many more had been injured. The staff at the Edhi Headquarters forgot about their sleep and got ready to go to the scene of accident. Edhi too, got ready to go but his legs felt weak and seemed unwilling to take him away from home that day. His whole being seemed reluctant to leave the house. Bilquis had never seen such a look of doubt and indecision on his face before and asked him if he was alright. Even when sick, Edhi had never hesitated to go on such missions before. He did not understand the feeling of anxiety which filled his mind on this day.

Edhi dispatched a caravan of ambulances with their quota of medicines, bandages and medical equipment, and doctors and nurses, and then boarded the Foundation helicopter to get to the accident site. Shortly before approaching Ghotki, the pilot received a message on his radio and asked him in loud voice above the sound of rotors, “Maulana, is your grand-son admitted

in hospital.” Edhi's heart sank as he nodded his head in affirmative. The pilot informed him that his grand-son had died a short while ago. All in the helicopter raised their hands in prayer. The pilot asked him if he wanted to go back, but Edhi shook his head and said it was now too late to do anything for the one who was dead; the living needed him more; there was much work for them to do. But Edhi's pain was intense and its memory was never to be erased from his mind in later life. He had seen the others pain and grief, but it was the first occasion that he had experienced it himself.

Edhi reflected on his life so far and saw that for the past forty five years, he had kept himself always on the go, alert and prepared to help other people. It was as if he had been keeping awake throughout all that time. His work had filled his life. Bilal had come into his life when he had a clear aim in life. He now remembered little things about his grand-son: how they had always been looking for each other; how he had asked him seemingly innocent questions to which he had no answers; he would show him his new clothes and say he will wear them tomorrow and also tell him about the ones he will wear the day after that. When on one occasion, Edhi pointed out to him there were children who had no clothes to wear, Bilal replied they may not have any, but he had plenty. Bilal would also proudly show him his new boots. Such were the thoughts of his grand-son that filled Edhi's mind as they neared the scene of accident.

The scene at the site of accident was terrible. There were dead bodies and severed limbs scattered everywhere and cries of the injured were heart-rending. Edhi tucked up his pajamas and waded through pools of blood to reach the injured. His

first priority was to send the injured to hospitals. A huge crowd had gathered at the site; there were frantic cries for help. People were greatly reassured by his arrival and said since he had come, there was more hope now for the injured to survive.

But the scene was still chaotic. Fathers and mothers were frantically looking for their children; children were looking for their parents among the dead and injured. One mother shouted that if her child was not taken to hospital immediately, he will die, while another pleaded with the volunteers to save her child. Edhi and his volunteers ran about everywhere, trying to help as many as they could.

Many of the injured were taken to nearby hospitals; seventy-three of the seriously injured were sent by air ambulance to hospitals in Karachi. Even in these tragic circumstances, Edhi remembered Bilal and the memories of his pranks such as during his playing hide and seek with him kept flooding back to his mind. Even while watching a pile of dead bodies, memories of his grand-son never left his mind.

The heat that day was so great that it seemed that the nature too had conspired to make the lives of victims and rescuers as miserable as possible. The rescue work continued till evening. The President, the Prime Minister and other national leaders expressed their condolences on radio and television and announced compensations to be paid to the injured and the next of kin of those who had died.

Instances of human greed and insensitivity could be seen even during such tragic circumstances. In an attempt to claim the relief money announced by the government, a man said about a dead body that it was one of his relatives, in his greed

to claim the compensation. But when relief workers took the body to his village, the man's family refused to accept it, saying that it did not belong to them. The person made himself scarce and hid himself from the relief workers; the body had to be brought back to the site of accident.

Edhi arrived back at the Karachi Airport in the evening. He left the others and went to the cemetery by ambulance. All he saw there, was a pile of earth where his grand-son lay buried. After staying there for a while, Edhi came home and sat with the other mourners. It was intensely agonizing for him and his heart was heavy with grief, but he somehow maintained an outward calm. When the others departed he and Bilquis were left alone. They took out Bilal's tiny garments and boots and stared at them with glazed eyes, imagining that perhaps he will come back and wear them and walk about.



Chapter – 19

Kubra’s Sufferings

Whenever Edhi had a few moments to himself, he would sit on bench outside his small dispensary in Meethadhar and look about at the tall buildings around it. These buildings were now teeming with people, had become overcrowded, with many people overflowing the tiny rooms in them. The narrow street in which the dispensary lay had also become crowded, with large number of horse-drawn carts, tongas, trolleys and scooters trying to beat one another in a race to get ahead of others. People jostled and abused each other, blew horns and made sundry noises. Sometimes, there were terrific traffic jams.

The eight-foot dispensary, he had bought in 1950 had now become a three storied building. The network of his Foundation had now become nation-wide, with hardly a city or town it had not reached. By 1990, one crore people had been served by the Foundation in one way or another. They now had 450 vans and had set a target to increase their number to 800 by 1997, so that more efficient and prompt services could be provided. They had also lent 50 vans to different government and non-government organizations to supplement their efforts in providing welfare services. By 1987, the Foundation had procured two airplanes and one helicopter, and had plans to buy 5 more helicopters by 1997. Its pilots had been trained by the Pakistan Air Force; the civil aviation department had given it exemption from license fee and other taxes.

The Foundation has so far rehabilitated three lakh children. It had helped 80,000 mental patients and drug/alcohol addicts. The addicts are helped to give up their addiction and turn a new leaf in their lives. They are taught useful skills to help them find suitable employment. The Foundation has fifteen homes in various towns of Pakistan, including Karachi, Hyderabad, Multan, Lahore, Peshawar and Quetta to provide accommodation to homeless persons, mental patients and abandoned children. These are called “Apna Ghar” (our home) and have facilities for accommodation, medical treatment, and nourishment and education of children. Over one lakh children have been born in Edhi Maternity Homes. Over twenty thousand abandoned children have been brought up under the Cradle Home Scheme. Though, when Edhi had assumed the care of these children, there had been much criticism of his action, he had ignored it and continued the work. The Foundation has been giving them all the care and guidance and bearing responsibility for them as parents do.

Edhi Foundation runs six Nursing Schools, which have already trained over forty thousand nurses. This has enhanced medical services in the rural areas where they are serving. A large number of women have been trained in different skills and crafts, which has made them economically independent. Beside such works, the Foundation also undertakes programmes concerning education, medical facilities, hygiene and safe drinking water. It has been running adult education programmes in regions which have not been reached even by the government till now.

The Foundation has eight hospitals in the four provinces

of Pakistan, which have special facilities for treatment of such serious diseases as cancer and kidney malfunction. This vast network of facilities spread over the whole country is centrally controlled from a headquarters which is known as the “Tower”. One six storied hospital has 200 beds and separate wings for various categories of diseases. By now, over two lakh riot victims have been provided aid in some form. The Foundation workers are ever active in fostering love and understanding between people of different faiths and communities.

In North Karachi, the Foundation has a complex containing 252 rooms and 8 large halls for accommodation of 2000 mentally ill women. About one lakh physically handicapped persons have been given wheel-chairs and crutches. The Foundation also runs free medical service on a permanent basis to provide relief to mentally ill people incarcerated in jails, by providing doctors who go to jails to examine and give them medical treatment. Free gifts such as stationery material, television sets and blankets are distributed among jail inmates.

The Foundation has come to the rescue of victims and provided relief during many natural and man-made calamities such as the 1991 Iraq War, Iran earthquake and relief of refugees in Romania in 1993-94. It has carried out relief work on different occasions in countries such as Somalia, Croatia, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Kurdistan, Burma, Nepal and Bosnia.

Sometimes, while sitting on sea shore with Bilquis, Edhi would regret that human life being of such limited time span, he would not be able to do what needs to be done in his life time. He would look to the far horizon and remark that the work

of relief was as vast as the sea itself; it does not recognize borders or other human hurdles. He told Bilquis that had his time been his own, he would have spent it all watching waves on the sea shore, enjoying mountain landscapes and enchanting water falls. But alas! he had no time to spare for his own leisure. Bilquis would point out that even the American President was able to find time to enjoy a holiday once in a while. Edhi replied that he was in a hurry, his time was precious, and he wanted to use it before it ran out. The American President could rest easy as his people were happy and prosperous, with adequate social security. At times, he would become emotional and say he was striving to bring about a society in which no children would die of hunger if their fathers died; they would have social security and able to live secure lives.

Kubra was looking after the management of Clifton Centre, which had a home for the disabled children, a nursing school and a primary school for young children. She had still not forgotten Bilal, but found satisfaction in looking after children of his age, but she was not happy. She had known much pain and suffering in her life, most of it the result of her own conduct in the past and regretted it deeply. She had now completely given up the hankering after material things of life and wanted to make up her quarrel with her husband Altaf. She wanted to go back to America and resume her life with him. She felt that Altaf, being Bilal's father, was the best person to understand and share her pain at the loss of their son; so she had made up her mind to go back to him. Edhi and Bilquis felt happy at her decision to resume her married life. But alas! that was not to be.

By now Altaf had met another girl and had decided to

marry her. His mother, sister Zeenat and Bilquis's mother all tried to persuade him against it; they knew it will break Kubra's heart. But Altaf was resolved to divorce Kubra and marry his new girl friend. He went ahead with the marriage, disregarding the advice of his family. It was painful for Edhi to see his son-in-law marry another woman. He felt his daughter's unhappiness intensely, but what could be done?

Kubra was again lost in her loneliness. Then, the photographs of the newly-weds arrived home. Her aunt tried to hide them from Kubra but she somehow managed to see them one day, which caused her further pain.

One evening, while Edhi sat and watched the Meethadhar Building where 45 years ago, he had started his dispensary, he received information that Bilquis had an attack of giddiness; she had collapsed and had been taken to hospital. At the hospital, he was informed, after various tests had been carried out, that Bilquis had a serious heart attack. It caused him great anxiety. Bilquis had always shared his work and stood as a rock in his support. She was a soul mate to him. Edhi Foundation, which had now become such a huge and important institution, could not have been what it was without her help and moral support. Edhi could not imagine a life without Bilquis; what if anything happened to her, he thought.

But Bilquis had only to remain in intensive care unit for two days and came home fully recovered.



Chapter - 20

Break up of Soviet Union

The work of Edhi Foundation has been divided into sixteen different sections, and each of them has its own administration and funds. The surplus money is deposited in term deposit accounts to earn interest for the Foundation. A roaster of people wishing to avail of self-help programme is maintained. They are given small loans to buy goats or cows ,or for setting up cottage industries. Time-tested methods of controlling corruption and wasteful expenditure are employed. The idle and lazy individuals are identified. Edhi's aim was to set up a model system capable of providing adequate social security in the country, which would also be independent and self-sustaining.

Edhi also set up old-age homes for the elderly as he found that there existed no government or private organization to help these people. Their problems were unique, as they did not like to leave their families and live separately. But they had many elements missing from their lives that make a person truly happy. At Edhi Homes, they are given a homely atmosphere. The number of old age persons who seek sanctuary in these homes is overwhelming.

Edhi had studied the working of institutions such the Rockefeller and the Ford Foundation, which were funded by super-rich individuals and gave grants of money for research projects. He had also read about Alfred Noble, the founder of the Noble Prizes, who had invested his money and waited for 40 years

for it to grow enough to enable the interest earned from this amount to pay for the prizes. But his Foundation was entirely dependent on donation money and its aim was different. He wanted his system of social security work to become a model for the third world countries. He wanted a system of social security in which no individual found himself insecure.

Edhi often criticized politicians when he spoke at public functions and which the organizers naturally disliked. They would often urge him to desist from doing so but, true to form, Edhi could not restrain himself from speaking his mind. If the organizers demurred, he would point out that they knew his past record, and if they objected to his speaking the truth, they should not have invited him to the function. At home, Bilquis would often say that his criticism of politicians may some day land him in trouble. Edhi would laugh it off and tell her that the politicians knew, he was addressing beggars who had nothing to give him; the issues on which he spoke were not a part of the agenda for these people.

In 1991, after 70 years of eventful existence, the Soviet Union broke apart. It seemed like the death of an ideal, a dream of an egalitarian society, a workers paradise, which was deeply mourned by those who had had firm belief in its success. This dream of the establishment of a classless society had given new hope to the poor and down-trodden of this world but, with the demise of the Soviet Union, that dream had lost its foundation. Human nature being what it is, ensured that vested interests and greed for power and wealth will ever triumph over noble ideals and dreams. The experiment of a socialist state had failed; and its first protagonists had given it up as unworkable. What was an ideal good for if it was not workable, Edhi would ask his

gloomy friends. In fact the decline of Soviet Union had begun twenty years ago; Edhi's friends who had returned from there had often predicted its downfall.

It was not that Edhi did not regret the break up of Soviet Union. He had high hopes about the success of this socialist experiment and was now deeply disappointed at its failure. He believed that it was mainly due to rivalry of America and the West that Soviet Union had been forced to waste her precious resources on development of weapons, instead of using them for the welfare of its citizens. So much so, that in spite of being the largest country in the world, it had to import wheat from outside. The people had to lose faith in a government when it spent per capita more on weapons than it did on its people. Edhi's communist friends were sad. Edhi said if the capitalist system was still running, it did not mean it was the right system for the world; if it continued to exploit peasants and workers as it was now doing, it would in time be overthrown by some other and more equitable system. He believed the final test for the suitability or otherwise of any system of government was its capacity to work for human welfare.

Edhi told his friends that he found great similarity between the principles of socialism and the social security work in capitalist societies. The religion in these societies too laid stress on socialist and humanitarian principles. There was nothing new or original in the thinking of the protagonists of modern socialism. Egalitarianism and social welfare work advocated by them had long been practiced successfully by ancient avatars and prophets. The western countries had come to realize that democracy cannot succeed without adequate social welfare services. The

developed countries have constantly been enhancing their social welfare services. The feeling of social security engendered greater faith in the people's minds about their system of government. We may wonder at popular support for governments in western capitalist countries, but it is quite natural considering the basic need of people to have social security. Edhi wanted to show the people that such social security was also possible to be provided for the citizens of third world countries. He would tell his colleagues that he had made just a beginning in this direction and had a comprehensive programme of social work to be undertaken in future. In developing countries, politics had become a plaything of the rich people, in which a lot of money went down the drain. Edhi believed in supplementing the government's work by providing social security through non-governmental organisations.

In 1992, there was severe earthquake in Egypt. Many buildings turned to rubble; a large number of people got killed and injured. Edhi Foundation was requested by the Egyptian Government for help in rescue and relief work. The workers of the Foundation were well versed in rescue work; while taking out dead bodies and the injured, they took great care to see that no further damage was done to them in the process. Edhi had life long experience in handling the injured and he now guided his rescue workers in person and helped rescue many more people than would otherwise have been possible. His work was greatly admired by the Egyptians.

Still, many people were busy in denigrating his work and trying to spoil his reputation. But Edhi completely ignored them and did not waste time in refuting their allegations. One day, he received a letter from an unknown person alleging that an

amount of two lakh rupees had disappeared from the Multan Centre of the Foundation. Edhi threw the letter in dustbin, as he knew that the Centre did never even have that much money; how then, could it have been stolen? He knew this was just an attempt to distract him. Sometimes, the media people would sing his praises and say he was a great man. Some people would advise him to seek patronage of powerful politicians. But Edhi had always distrusted politicians and had kept his distance from them. He knew politicians were adept in the art of using other people as tools to serve their own ends.

In 1993, Pakistan President Gulam Ishaq Khan dismissed the government of Mian Nawaz Sharif and declared fresh elections. The people again became hopeful of a change for the better. Benazir Bhutto won the election and formed a new government. The people who had earlier opposed her, now became her allies. But the society continued the same way as before.

Rabia Ma fell seriously ill. Bilquis got news of her mother's illness when she was attending a marriage ceremony. She returned home to her mother and was playing with Almas's son Ahmed and trying to make him laugh, when Almas and Zeenat came weeping and said that Rabia Ma had died. The news spread everywhere. Rabia Ma had been living at her present house since 1947 and was greatly respected by everyone. Her courage and foresight were source of inspiration for other people. She had been the helper and confidant of many. Edhi remembered his own mother as they were taking her body to the cemetery. After funeral, he and Bilquis kept talking about this good and kind soul throughout the night. In the morning, Bilquis went to attend her duties and Edhi too went out for work as he had done after the death of his own mother.



Chapter - 21

Prime Minister's Visit to the Foundation

Edhi Foundation by now had assets worth rupee 100 crore. Edhi wanted that the surplus money of the Foundation should be invested in saving schemes, which would double it in 10 years. Some people suggested, he should invest this money abroad, but he rejected this suggestion, saying that not only the money belonged to Pakistan, it was meant for running welfare schemes for the people of Pakistan. All he wanted was that the Foundation should become self-sustaining; it should not have to ask for donations from people any more. Though his main focus was on providing health services to poor people, he wanted to undertake work concerning education and other social services also. He said if ten lakh persons donated even ten rupees each in life, it will be sufficient to sustain any welfare scheme. It was his aim that in the next 30 years, 99% of the population should get social welfare services at their door. He said that temporary relief work and free kitchens in front of religious places by feudal lords and rich contractors was no solution to social problems. Edhi believed in enabling people to be self dependent. Whenever allegations of corruption were made against him, he said that beginning 1950, when the first person donated ten rupees to his charity, until today, he could account for every penny; he had the account audited every year. It was in Edhi's mind that in due course, he would hand over the work of the Foundation into some capable hands and retire.

For the first time, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto expressed a desire to visit the Edhi Foundation. This was first visit of any Prime Minister to this Foundation. The day before she was to come, Edhi spent 300 rupees to have the gutters in the locality cleaned. Had he wanted he could have asked government officials to have them cleaned on the pretext of the Prime Minister's visit, and have it done on a regular basis thereafter, but he felt it was no solution to the problem. If the rest of his countrymen could live with such maladministration, why couldn't he? In connection with the Prime Minister's visit, a journalist asked him whether, if the Prime Minister asked him to come and meet her in the capital, he would oblige. Edhi replied that if the visit served some useful purpose, he would certainly go; he had never refused to go anywhere if it served any useful purpose; but he certainly did not believe in wasting time on a mere formality, he said.

Benazir Bhutto showed her appreciation for the work, the Foundation had done and was doing, and said she wanted to help in enlarging its scope of work further. But whether she would indeed be able to do what she said, was the important question. Edhi told Mrs. Bhutto that making women economically independent should be a part of the overall economic development of the nation. He apprised her of the work done by the Foundation in this regard by rehabilitating forty thousand women so far. The Prime Minister showed, she was really impressed by the Foundation's achievements and announced a plan to rehabilitate another fifty thousand women. She also promised to give a 25-seater aircraft to the Foundation.

While talking to the Prime Minister about economic

conditions in the country, Edhi told her that the greatest single cause of inflation in the country was the people's unwillingness to work and the consequent fall in production. People wanted that others should work while they themselves should enjoy its fruit. With the overall fall in production, the inflation goes up and the economic condition of the people worsens.

To stem corruption in the Karachi Municipal Corporation, Mrs. Bhutto offered the control of its administration to Edhi, but he declined. He suggested the name of his colleague Fahim Ajman, who was sitting with them at that time. Mrs. Bhutto agreed to the suggestion and appointed Mr. Fahim Ajman as the Corporation Chairman. The Prime Minister also offered a senate seat for Bilquis but Edhi politely declined this offer as well.

Fahim's appointment as head of Karachi Municipal Corporation gave fresh ammunition to Edhi's detractors. They started saying that he had used his influence with Mrs. Bhutto to get Fahim this post. It was wrong to make him head of the corporation without any election, they said. But there were many who wanted plots or licenses from the Corporation through the back door. They would try to ingratiate themselves with Edhi in order to use his influence to fulfil their designs. But they could not hide their real motives from Edhi, who would tell them to go directly to Fahim for whatever they wanted. They would get peeved at this failure to manipulate Edhi and start criticizing him with renewed bitterness. Those who came as sheep to seek favours would become lions in attacking him, once thwarted in their plans. Edhi replied to this criticism by retorting: "Why don't you go to Bhutto and ask her."

There was another reason why they accused Edhi of

cultivating this friendship with the Prime Minister. It was: he had given the Foundation helicopter for the use of Mrs. Bhutto. Edhi was outside the country when it had happened; what was more, Mrs. Bhutto was sick at the time, and had paid for the service. Mrs. Bhutto's father, at the time he was the Prime Minister of Pakistan, had at one time done a favour to Edhi by sending him the government aeroplane when Edhi was lying injured in hospital. Even then, Edhi had paid for the service. The helicopter was often rented to people going to far flung areas such as Balochistan.

Those days, the then Prime Minister of India, Narsimha Rao, had given a statement that the government should adopt a system of social security in India. Edhi showed this statement to Bilquis and expressed a hope that perhaps the Government of India will indeed do so. A gutter cleaned by an individual does not make the whole city clean, said Edhi, stressing the role, the government could play in providing social security to its people on regular basis. Many people suggested to Edhi he should join active politics but he would, to the contrary, express his disgust with politicians, saying the country's parliament and provincial assemblies were full of politicians who were all big industrialists, feudal chiefs, rich landowners or smugglers, and for them the politics had become a hereditary profession. They claim to fight for people's welfare but were in fact fighting to grab and retain power in their own hands. How it is that the country was getting poorer while the politicians were getting richer, he asked.

Among other allegations against Edhi, one was that he was secretly carrying out illegal trade in arms. Some people even demanded that he should be exiled from the country. For

this reason he had asked Qutub and Faisal that they should continue to reside in America. But he had also told them to treat the country where they lived as their own. He had it in his mind to use their services for the Foundation when the time came.

A mosque had been built in America at a cost of 45 lakh dollars. Edhi said, what was the need to build another mosque at such huge cost, when there already was a mosque within a kilometer of the spot. Was it not better to spend that money for a more worthy cause, he asked. He urged people to realize their duties and responsibilities while demanding their rights. Edhi admired Sufi Saints and their teachings because they laid stress on universal brotherhood and welfare of all humanity, disregarding all distinction based on caste, creed or religion. They treated all human beings as equal, be they Muslim, Hindu, Christian or Sikh.

In 1994, an exercise was carried out in the presence of international experts, to see the number passengers that could be rescued in the unfortunate event of a jumbo-jet aircraft crash. Ambulance vans of Edhi Foundation also took part in the exercise. Starting from various centres of the Foundation they were able to reach the scene of supposed accident within 7-11 minutes, depending upon the distance. Forty five vans were able to reach the Jindah Hospital within half an hour, starting from the site of exercise. The foreign experts were immensely impressed with their performance.

Along with its regular work, Edhi Foundation was, at times, requested to help in unusual situations, which its workers tackled in innovative ways. Some of them were as follows: there was a mental patient in Japan whose address was unknown. He could only tell that he was from Attock. After much enquiry, the Japanese authorities learnt that Attock

was a place in Pakistan. The Japanese Government requested Pakistan Government to trace the man's address, After two months of cursory enquiries, the Pakistan Government replied that Attock was a large district and it had not been possible to trace the man's address. The Japanese Government then approached the Edhi Foundation Centre in Japan for help. The Centre gave this information to the Foundation Centre at Attock. The Attock Centre made loud speaker announcement throughout the district, and within six hours of the announcement, the man's father appeared at the Centre and gave his address. The information was immediately conveyed to the Japanese Government.

A man from Punjab had met with an accident in New York and had to remain in a hospital there for three years. The Foundation Centre in New York was approached for assistance. It made the necessary arrangements and was able to send the man back to Pakistan within three days of the request. A Pakistani national died in New Jersey state of USA. His brother requested help from Edhi Foundation to transport his body to Pakistan. The Foundation made arrangements and the body was sent to Pakistan.

Such problems and difficulties are often faced by foreigners living abroad in different countries. Edhi Foundation finds practical solutions to help these people, especially the Pakistanis. For this reason, police in countries like America, Canada, Japan and U.K. etc. maintains liaison with the centres of Edhi Foundation in their countries.



Chapter – 22

Suspecting his Murder

Kubra was in deep depression. She did not talk much and mostly kept to herself. Though she kept herself absorbed in work at the Clifton Centre, her inner gloom deepened further. She had Bilal's photographs enlarged and put on the walls of her room but would constantly change their positions. She had fully pardoned the dull witted girl, who had unwittingly burned Bilal by bathing him with hot water and had become the cause of his death. One day, Almas left her one and a half year old son Ali with Bilquis when she had to go to hospital to meet some one. While Bilquis was busy talking to someone, Ali went to bathroom and fell into a bucket filled with soap water. Then Asif came in from outside and saw Ali trapped in the bucket. He raised an alarm. Ali seemed dead. There was panic in the house. Asif ran outside to get some vehicle to take Ali to hospital, while Bilquis began to massage Ali's body to revive him. She also applied pressure on his chest to eject the water that had gone into his lungs. But all her attempts to revive Ali seemed futile. Without waiting for Asif, Bilquis picked up Ali in her arms and rushed out on the road. She got lift on a passing scooter and reached Meethadhar in a few minutes. She punched the child's body in the hope that he would start crying, but to no avail. From Meethadhar, she took the child to hospital in the van. Edhi took out his anger on the women, blaming them for neglecting

the child, while they spent time in chit-chatting. After Bilal's death, Edhi had not loved another child as much as he had loved Bilal. Fortunately, the boy survived.

At midnight, on 5 December 1994, Edhi was busy in his work. A map showing the network of his Foundation in Pakistan hung on the wall behind him. A pile of cheques lay in front of him, which he was signing one by one. Recently, a Belgium television company had made a film on the Edhi Foundation. Now that the work of shooting the film had got completed, Bilquis wanted to go for a visit to the Dargah at Ajmer Sharif in India. Edhi kept reading and signing one paper after another till it was 2.30 a.m. Then, he switched off office lights and went upstairs to wake up his son. The son thought it may be some emergency; and he got up with a start. Edhi increased Faisal's surprise when he told him to drive him to the airport; he said, he was leaving for England that same night. He also instructed Faisal not to tell anyone that Edhi had left for England. Though Faisal was greatly surprised, he knew his father and got ready to go to the airport at once. At the airport, Edhi told him, he should not inform the London Centre until the noon that day that Edhi was going there, nor should he tell anyone else. He finished immigration and security checks and embarked the aeroplane. There was still plenty of time before the flight was due for departure. He looked at the other passengers and sat on his seat. He tried to sleep, though it was by then already daylight.

When the flight had travelled far from Pakistan, Edhi tilted his seat back and tried to sleep. But sleep evaded him as he closed his eyes, and memories of the past flooded his mind. He remembered the time when, with his family, he had come to

Karachi from the distant Kathiawar. Karachi was the country's capital then. Punjabis, Gujaratis, Biharis and other people had come in large numbers and settled in the city,

Later, Field Marshal Ayub Khan had changed the capital to Islamabad but the population of Karachi had kept on swelling. Many incidents of violence had taken place in the city due to clashes between different communities. The lack of employment had raised further problems. He remembered that Shaikh Mujibur-Rehman, who then worked as an advocate at Karachi's Bombay Bazaar, had raked up the issue of language, and some disgruntled Urdu-speaking groups had taken up the cause of this language, which had led to ethnic clashes, and the resulting violence had continued in Karachi for a whole year.

Then, his memory went back to an incident, when some armed miscreants had broken the lock of his office compound and had stolen an ambulance, which was later found in Balochistan. In another incident, masked robbers had looted money from Foundation van drivers and threatened that if they did not give up their jobs at the Foundation, they will have to face serious consequences. But when later, the robbers were nabbed by police, they turned out to be former ambulance drivers who had been dismissed by Edhi for stealing petrol and for other misconduct; some of them had kidnapped a helpless woman whom they had been sent to help. They were Urdu-speaking and claimed to be members of the M.Q.M. Later they had shot one of the drivers. Those days shootings and killings used to take place on a large scale. People were shot even inside the mosques. It was given out that this violence was the result of a foreign conspiracy, which only confused the public. Miscreants would be arrested and later released on bail. Murders and other crimes

became common and took place every other day. Edhi would tell authorities that the law and order had gone badly wrong. When one gang of criminals was caught, another would appear in its place in no time. Edhi said, it was the system that nourished criminals.

All this passed through Edhi's mind like a film as he now tried to sleep on the aeroplane. There was grave danger to his life. That was why he had fled Pakistan in secret. He suspected that a conspiracy was being hatched to murder him.

This suspicion had a firm basis. About one and a half month before, a Brigadier had come to Edhi's office, and after expressing his admiration for the work being done by the Foundation, had said that it was time that the politics of the country should be in the hands of people like Edhi. He had also said that the people wanted that Edhi should raise his voice for the unity and integrity of Pakistan. Edhi had not shown much enthusiasm for what the man proposed; he said he was not interested in politics, but the officer said he would come again to meet him. Edhi was to go to Japan on 14 August. The man again came to Edhi and repeated what he had said on his previous visit. He had also invited Edhi to a function which was to take place that day and had requested him to attend it and speak about the unity and integrity of Pakistan. He had also talked about support promised by others and said, it was vital for Edhi to attend the function, as it was for the good of the people of Pakistan. He said he would give him a written speech to read at the function, or if he so desired, he could give him hints to prepare his own speech using them. Edhi had not liked what he suggested and said he would speak what his mind said; even dictators had not been able to frighten him, he had added.

While delivering his speech at the function, Edhi said if the founder of Pakistan, Jinnah Sahib, were alive to day, he would have been horrified to see the results of his crusade to create Pakistan. While he was speaking in this vein, an officer got up and whispered in his ear that he should restrain himself. This further inflamed Edhi; he said they knew his mind well and if they did not want him to speak his mind at the function, what was the need to invite him? While coming back from the function, Edhi thought they would now leave him alone.

After a few days, Imran Khan, a former captain of Pakistani cricket team, had come to meet Edhi. While bemoaning the conditions in Pakistan and blaming the government for them, he proposed to have a cancer hospital built in the country and had asked for financial support from Edhi for the purpose. Edhi felt Imran had the capacity to change things for the better and praising his efforts to build the hospital, had given him 1.25 lakh rupees in aid. But he had counselled Imran Khan to give up the idea of bringing about reforms in the political system of Pakistan and confine his work to the field of social welfare.

Edhi had helped and encouraged Imran Khan, as he believed that by sharing in the work of social welfare, he was lightening the work of Edhi Foundation; in short, he was helping him. But Imran had kept harping on the desirability of their joining hands to end corruption in Pakistan. Edhi had the benefit of long experience and based on it, he had advised him to stay away from such ideas.

After a few days, Edhi had a talk with a retired general, Hamid Gul. He too, urged Edhi to do something about the deteriorating political situation in the country. Edhi told the general

that his work concerned social welfare and he had no desire to involve himself in politics. The General requested Edhi to meet him later. After a few days, when the General-sent him a message to meet him, Edhi said he was busy and could not find time to do so. One Friday, the Brigadier spoke to a gathering of school children, where Edhi was present, and later, while talking to Edhi, the brigadier repeated what he had said during the previous two meetings. Edhi got irritated and told him that he thought that the present government of Pakistan should be allowed to complete its full term.

His suspicion that a plot was afoot to have him killed and then blame his murder on some militant outfit, strengthened as the days passed. The Brigadier again came to his office one Friday and this time had a civilian with him. While introducing him, he said the man was also a retired Brigadier, but to Edhi his young age and his high military rank did not seem to agree.

Though Edhi's work was based on philanthropic ideas and had no taint of religion, language, or creed, yet his stature as a public figure could have been exploited in the ongoing struggle for power between different political factions. He said during his speeches, and also while talking to friends, that a religion was better understood and followed when it provided practical guidance in dealing with life and its problems. People should depend less on religious and political factions and lay more stress on humanitarian principles.

The Libyan President Gaddafi had made an offer of aid to Muslim nations. Edhi commented that Gaddafi, being a Muslim, should help the poor of all countries, and not only the Muslim ones. Edhi was much concerned about the

deteriorating law and order situation in Karachi, where murders took place every day. Though the work of his Foundation to stop violence, picking up dead bodies and treatment of the wounded continued as before, Edhi knew his dream of a society in which every one lived a safe and secure life could not be realized if the situation remained as grim as now. He said that philosophers and professors should study his system of social security, so that it could be applied more effectively for the welfare of the people. He said that the disputes among people of this world will only cease if the world leaders will promote humanitarian understanding among people they led. But considering the fragile and potentially dangerous situation in Karachi at the time, he considered it prudent to leave the country for the time being.



Chapter 23

Back in Karachi

A few days after his departure for London, conjectures regarding reasons of his leaving the country so suddenly began to be published in newspapers. Some said, he was a coward; the others said, he had gone abroad on some secret mission. Pakistani High Commissioner in London came to him and said that the parliament of Pakistan had passed a resolution and President Leghari had made an appeal requesting him to return to Pakistan. Edhi believed that his leaving Pakistan at the time had been the correct decision considering situation at the time and though it temporarily handicapped the Foundation's work, that could be remedied. But if he had remained in the country amid uncertainty, it could have led to his death, a permanent loss for Pakistan.

Appeals from public, entreaties of colleagues, and pressure from home at last persuaded Edhi to return and he decided to fly back to Karachi on 8 January. But he told his family that his return to the country should not be publicized; and only his immediate family should come to the airport to receive him. On the return flight, Edhi again reflected on the situation in Karachi and how it could be improved. He concluded that to forgive and forget was the best solution. In his opinion, if the people were allowed to play more active role in controlling law and order, the situation could be improved. Young men from the area where the police was to be

deployed should be recruited to help the police, so that their knowledge of the local conditions could be used. He realized that the mafia which operated in Karachi was different in nature, as it exploited factionalism, tribal animosities and religious differences among the people. He pondered over the reason the people wanted a change of government every two years. It was because the government failed to provide security to the people, he concluded; the law and order machinery had many serious flaws in it. He remembered that in the areas of Jora Bazaar, Kharadar and Meethadhar, the cases of armed robbery had been turned by the police into theft cases. This showed weakness in the administration. On arrival at Karachi Airport, the customs, security and immigration officials all gave him a warm and emotional welcome. He came out beaming; the members of his family embraced him. Kubra and Almas were crying; Bilquis looked tired; Faisal made a show of receiving him warmly.

Edhi wanted to avoid the press, but somehow, they had managed to get information of the date and time of his arrival, and were already waiting in strength for his arrival outside the airport. They surrounded him and asked many questions about the reason of his leaving the country. But Edhi said, he will hold a press conference after two days, and promised to give answers to all their questions.

Later, he came to know that the day he had left Karachi, there had been 24 murders in the city. Three days after his departure, the share prices had fallen steeply. Many people had bemoaned his having to leave the country. Then there had been a lull for few days, but again the situation had become bad. Many people had telephoned his family and inquired about the reasons for his leaving the country. Some

feared that he will never come back. One old man had said that the day he had heard on radio the news of Qaid-e-Azam's death, he had lost all hope; he had the same feeling when Edhi left the country, he said. Many people had been filled with anxiety at his going; many had wept; they had thought that perhaps he will never come back to Pakistan. On the other hand, his rivals had never ceased to hurl allegations against him. Some said he was an agent of outside powers; others said he was a smuggler of human organs. His old rivals, the Memmon business tycoons had availed this opportunity to accuse him of many false crimes. They had fabricated many stories and had them published in the press to defame him. Edhi believed that though his departure from the country had given his enemies a chance to berate him, his decision to leave had been the right one under the circumstances. But he was not in favour of replying to allegations and waste his time in the process, the time which could find better use.

After a few days, Edhi called a press conference to answer questions regarding his leaving the country. The conference was attended by representatives of 35 newspapers. The most repeated question at the press conference was, "Edhi Sahib, what was the need for you to flee the country? You knew it would create a very bad impression." Edhi replied: "Every man has an aim in life and his own way of realizing it. My aim is certainly not to get killed and become a martyr; I thought my staying alive was better for the society than my dying." Many journalists said his leaving the country had harmed his reputation. Edhi replied that his reputation was hard earned and could not be lost so easily; only when the standard of service he gave the people came down, his reputation will come down; but that had not happened so far, he said.

Edhi knew well that the press wanted sensational news; the news that could sell. The press reporters harried him with questions to make him give some unguarded remark which they could then twist and make into a headline. Some of them pointed out that Imran Khan had collected 12 crore rupees in donations for his charity work and was now far ahead of Edhi in reputation. One of Edhi's colleagues said there was no need for him to respond to such irrelevant remarks, but Edhi said he will reply. He said, "I am no hero; I am like a father to my people; I am a fakir; I love people like a mother loves her children; I love them unconditionally; and I can not change my purpose." But then some of them said that Imran was his rival; Edhi said he did not think it this way.

He said, he believed that whoever came to the field of social work would respect him, and Imran only lightened his work by sharing it. He added that he had been hearing such comments for the last 45 years.

Edhi told his friends that by leaving the country for a while, he had not only saved his own life, but had also prevented the Foundation from being exploited for wrong purposes. He remarked that factional fights had also come down now. But the criticism of Edhi went on. Many said he was a coward; why didn't he face the bullet? Some called him a supporter of the People's Party. Edhi said, he had always stood in favour of a government completing its full term.

The murders continued unabated in Karachi; the Foundation continued its work with undiminished zeal. Edhi continued to avoid the press as he believed that talking to press was a waste of time. He came to Multan on a visit one day. While coming out of the airport he saw a large crowd

gathered there to welcome Murtaza Bhutto, son of the slain Prime Minister Zulfiqar Bhutto. When the press people saw Edhi, they came to him and began asking questions about Imran Khan. Edhi retorted that Imran was a famous *khiladi* (player), while he was just an *anari* (rustic). He said he was only a lowly gutter-sweeper; and why had they to ask him about his work? Couldn't they see it before their eyes? He knew that the press was looking for headlines. His colleagues asked him what harm could have come to him if he had stayed in the country, to which he replied that by staying he would have become an unwilling martyr. The conspirators would then have been able to use his network to serve their own ends. They would have later tried to pacify the people, saying it was the working of fate. And with this sterile statement all his work might have been undone. He did not want that the money donated by people for welfare work should be spent elsewhere.

Faisal was now reluctant to go back to America as he felt that his father had now grown old and his enemies had got stronger; and they might do him harm. He wanted to remain with his father and help him in his work. Bilquis was against his remaining in Pakistan, but Edhi respected Faisal's views and enrolled him as a volunteer worker in the Foundation. He wanted to see his son doing useful work for the Foundation and was happy to see that Faisal tried his best to measure up to his expectations. One day, Faisal removed corpse of a donkey lying in a narrow alley with the help of his van driver, with no one of the bystanders coming to their help. Edhi tried to console his disappointed wife saying that if their son wished to help humanity, it was a noble decision on his part. 

Chapter – 24

Response to Allegations

Bilquis resented Edhi's willingness to allow Faisal to stay in Pakistan. She earnestly desired that her son should go back to America as she did not want to see his life in danger, danger which lurked every where in Pakistan. She would occasionally get angry at Faisal, who was firm in his resolve to work for the Foundation. Faisal would remark to his mother that she remained quite even-tempered while working outside the house dealing with different people, and asked why couldn't she control her temper at home? He teased that it was not good for her blood pressure. Faisal now worked for the Foundation with increasing dedication.

In his speeches, Edhi reiterated what he had said to the previous governments: that they could not afford to neglect social welfare work. There was only one way for any government to succeed, and that was to work for social welfare. He criticized the government for neglecting the aspirations of its people. The world peace could come about only when all nations adopted the system of social security. While talking to media, he said that the social welfare would very likely be the new ideology of the 21st century and if neglected or delayed in implementation, it could lead to revolution. This ideology formed the basis of every religion; it was the only means of establishing world peace.

Many different allegations had been made against him

from time to time, and people had given him many nicknames. One day, while joking with Bilquis he said, when he lived in Bantva, people had called him *shaikh-chilli* (dreamer) because he dreamed of big things. Then at different times, they had honoured him with such names: fool, communist, fraud, smuggler of human organs, agent of Israel, agent of India, among others. Bilquis teased that in fact he was nothing but the biggest *kanjoos* (miser) who saved every penny.

Communal clashes and factional fights caused him great pain. In anguish, he would cry out that these so called ‘*peers*’ (sages), fakirs and fanatic religious leaders will never allow people to see the true glory of God. He believed that lack of social consciousness among people was largely responsible for this; the greatest single cause of communal clashes was people’s ignorance and lack of understanding about religion. Edhi said that 80 per cent of Muslims went to *mazars* (tombs of saints) and other religious places whenever they faced some serious crisis. They went there to ask for the impossible and, because of this naivety, were exploited by the unscrupulous and seemingly pious individuals. But contrary to their expectations, their troubles usually increased instead of decreasing.

Whenever she found him talking in this vein among his colleagues, Bilquis would become worried. She would tell him to refrain from such talk as they already had enough enemies as it was, and the conditions were such that any thing could happen. But Edhi could not control his emotions and would continue speaking his mind aloud. He would say that lack of knowledge was the root cause of the poor and ignorant people’s exploitation. The exploiters knew this fact and wanted to keep them ignorant, so that they could continue fleecing them. Bilquis would try to

calm his passion but Edhi found it very difficult to hide his true feelings.

When the Babri Masjid got demolished in India, many Hindu temples in Pakistan were razed to the ground as a reaction, and many Hindus murdered in cold blood. Edhi spoke up against this madness, as he believed that killing of innocent people could not be justified on any ground. He wondered why the 800 years of Muslim rule in India had not able to build up respect for Islam among its people.

Edhi condemned this senseless violence in strongest terms. Some religious leaders, reacting to Edhi's criticism, said he had no Islamic credentials; that he had not even read the Koran. Edhi said with all humility that the Koran lived in his heart, where it truly mattered. He did not listen to any thing but the voice of his heart; all his actions were dictated by his conscience, he said.

General Hamid came back from Afghanistan and in a statement to the press, said that he admired Edhi's work; but he also challenged him to a public debate. He said, he could raise such potent points that Edhi would have no answers to them. But Edhi ignored what he said, treating it as a casual comment on his part. After few days, Hamid again gave a similar statement to the press, and Edhi understood that it may be a hint that the general thought he knew some secrets about Edhi, which, if revealed in public, would embarrass him. He responded by saying that nothing could embarrass him save lies people told about him. When pressed by press reporters, Edhi said, the educated elite should not lower their dignity by engaging in a war of words with an unlettered and fakir-like person like him.

But the allegations and conspiracies against him continued. An editor of a newspaper was murdered. Some people went to the editor's house and asked his family members to sign papers, which alleged that Edhi was the Editor Slahudin's murderer. In fact, Slahudin had, some days ago, written an article levelling allegations against Edhi, which he had later regretted and had asked Edhi's pardon. Edhi wondered at the intensity of opposition against him, when all he did was social welfare work. He did not wish ill to anyone but people still continued to hatch conspiracies against him and even plotted to kill him. All his work was transparent. When he had resigned from the government, General Zia had someone else appointed to take his place: but men can be replaced; not their work.

Edhi built a cancer hospital at Tarak Road in 1994, where any one could get free treatment. The Jinah Hospital gave it the work of radiation therapy. In an interview to the editor of the Times magazine, Edhi said that once he had almost abandoned this 40 crore rupee project but had then thought better of it and had it completed. He knew that the majority of poor people do not know that they have this dreaded disease and go to *Vaids* and *Hakeems* for treatment. They only come to hospitals in the third or fourth stage of the disease when it is far advanced. His hospital was so well equipped that a well known hospital in England had made an arrangement with it for treatment of its patients. The Times magazine wrote about it that they had rarely seen such well managed hospital anywhere else.

Meanwhile, the situation in Karachi remained as bad as ever. Fifteen to thirty people were getting killed every day. No one was safe. People got murdered in homes, restaurants, shops, and even mosques. One day, two employees of the

American Consulate got killed while going to office. The governments of America and Western countries condemned these killings in strong terms. The Pakistan government was at last jolted into action. Edhi commented that the lives of two foreign nationals had proved to be more valuable than the lives of innumerable Pakistani citizens who got killed every day on the streets of Karachi, because they got international attention.

Edhi had instructed his drivers that their job was to do their work briskly, without getting into argument with any one, and that it was not for them to give suggestions or comments about any thing. In this dangerous situation, Edhi's men went to places where even the police hesitated to go. People warned Edhi that his work was not liked by the mafia and they might do him harm, but he had no time even to listen to such advice.

Edhi's name continued to be associated with illegal trade in human organs. Edhi saw that many illiterate and naive people were also taken in by this propaganda, so he thought it necessary to dispel false notions about this issue. He explained that to export human organs, a clearance from many agencies such as the National Airlines, the Export Promotion Board and the State Bank of Pakistan was necessary. Did people believe that he has been carrying out this trade with the government's permission? Has he been deploying ambulances for this trade in India and Pakistan for the last 45 years, he asked. According to medical science, these human organs can be transplanted from the dead body to a living person only within a couple of hours after death; expert doctors were needed for this operation, Edhi clarified. Those

who had levelled these allegations against him, had no reply to these questions.

But this was just one allegation amongst many. Another allegation was that he also picked up dead bodies of Hindus and Christians. Edhi would get peeved at such silly complaints and reply in exasperation that even his ambulances were better Muslims than they. He said it was his duty to help all and if they were so particular, they could procure their own ambulances and take over this work.



Chapter - 25

Allah! Grant me time to do Your Work

Some of suggestions and comments about Edhi's work were really ludicrous. One was: why did he continue to use Suzuki Vans instead of the Toyota which were now available in the market. Edhi would wonder about these people's sanity; they showed no concern about why the 12 crore people of Pakistan could not be provided with basic facilities; but they had time for such trivial comments. The vans of his Foundation were able to meet the needs of the poor sections of the population, and he was fully satisfied with their performance. This was all that really mattered to him.

Many foreign governments had offered Edhi honorary citizenship, which confirmed Edhi's view that the basic problems of human beings everywhere were the same. The Goethe Institute of Germany had broadcast the Foundation's work on television, which so impressed the people in Germany that the German Chancellor expressed desire to see the Foundation's work in person in the coming spring. Bilquis and Edhi's colleagues commented that his work was admired by foreigners, while in his own country people had only criticism for his work.

His family and friends received repeated threats to their lives. Bilquis still feared for Faisal's life and urged Edhi again to send him abroad. Edhi tried to make her understand that Faisal was now fully grown up and had made an independent decision to support and defend his father. He took full interest in the Foundation work

and was a great asset to the organisation. Edhi told Bilquis to stop treating Faisal like a child. Faisal suggested that Foundation workers should be supplied with uniforms to make them easily identifiable; he showed his father some samples of the suggested uniform. Edhi accepted his suggestion and made arrangements for a wholesale purchase of the required stock of cloth. He got the uniforms stitched by women workers of the Foundation to save money. One day, the Aga Khan Foundation gave a full page advertisement in an English daily about a newly built cancer hospital and the services and facilities it provided. In a foot note, it also referred to the work of the Edhi Foundation. Edhi's colleagues expressed resentment about such scant attention given to the work of their Foundation. But Edhi gave a phlegmatic reply saying that the work they did, was for all to see and did not need any publicity.

Edhi went to the centre for mental patients every day to supervise the bathing of children living there. The children always eagerly awaited his arrival and as soon as they saw him, they would shout in their tiny voices: "Edhi Abbu has come; Edhi Abbu has come"; many of them would embrace and kiss him. Edhi would pray: "Allah! grant me time so that I could do Your work; May Your hand protect those whom the government cannot protect."

One day, he took Bilquis to his mother's house. They sat there, while Edhi reminisced about the days they had all lived together—his mother, father, brothers and sisters. Then, he started cleaning the house. He wiped the floor clean with a wet rag. He remembered the words of his mother, who had put him on the path of social work. They spent time sitting in the small house, reflecting on their lives. Edhi looked back

on the past and speculated about the future. He now had diabetes and got tired easily. He told Bilquis that he wished, he could give the Foundation work into some capable hands and gracefully retire from work.

Then he asked Bilquis what he would do after he retired from work; and then himself gave the answer that he will spend his days praying to Allah. Bilquis said, she did not believe he will be able to bring himself to retire from work till he went to his grave. But Edhi knew there was still much to be done. His work was not yet finished; perhaps it never will be. He was among those who believed one should continue to do one's work till the end of life. It was futile to think what will happen in future. He visited different centres to see if there were any shortcomings and suggested improvements. He had no fixed working hours; he kept himself ready to meet the call of duty at any hour of the day.

Now, he embarked upon a programme of adult education in the rural areas of Pakistan and opened hundreds of centres for this purpose. He recruited local staffs to do this work and supplied them with carpets, black boards, chalk pieces and other material required for teaching. Volunteers were paid honorarium for their work. He also gave loans to the rural unemployed so that they could start their own works or businesses and have permanent source of income.

One day, he reached his office at 7 a.m., but found that none of the other employees came on time. They came trickling in till 10 a.m. He called them all to his office and told them in grim tone that their work was the work of social welfare and they ought to be role models for the other people; they were servants, not masters.

Edhi hated unpunctuality and casual approach to work. He apprised his zonal heads of the kind of work culture that he wished to inculcate in his Foundation workers. He said he did not want his colleagues to turn into local bosses after his death; that he will maintain strict discipline among his Foundation employees. Edhi said, he had started his life with a mission: and that was to serve mankind. He had never bothered about becoming a great leader or a celebrity.

Edhi recruited fresh young men with new ideas and asked them to check on and prepare reports about the past expenditure of the Foundation. Edhi's colleagues resented this move and took it as a slur on their work and reacted strongly. They built up strong resentment against him in their minds and avoided any contact with him. Some of them openly told him: Edhi Sahib, this is not the right time to introduce new procedures into the Foundation work. Edhi's enemies were waiting in the wings and supported them with propaganda against him. But Edhi said: I have always lived a life of danger; if you think I will succumb to pressure, you are sadly mistaken. Except Allah, I am not afraid of anyone else in the world.

Edhi feared that ineptitude and negligence of work which were creeping into his Foundation, if allowed to flourish unchecked, could destroy decades of his hard work, and the hopes of a better life which his cherished Foundation had awakened in the minds of the homeless, the disabled, the orphans, the widows, and the chronically ill, could be dashed to earth. This, he could not bear to see. He wanted to present his Foundation as a model of social security to the third world countries. Lethargy and inefficiency, if allowed to take root in the organization, could destroy his life long dream.

Edhi knew that his opponents will calm down in time, as had happened so many times before. There had never been a time when he did not have opponents. He told his friends, if they continued squabbling among themselves, the mafia will exploit the situation and do harm to the Foundation. He said that the Foundation was like a family, and sometimes, the head of the family had to exert his authority to correct other members if he found something wrong. He knew his colleagues loved the Foundation and had faith in their leader, said Edhi, while expressing his full faith in his employees.

Edhi told his family that they should not nourish any dreams of running the Foundation themselves, after he was no more. He told them that he knew his wife did not have the strength or the ability to run the Foundation, and his sons did even less. He was its founder; he could fight. At this, Bilquis said, she had no wish to take over responsibility of managing the Foundation, if and when Edhi died. She said, she knew people accepted her only because she was Edhi's wife.

A thought flashed through Edhi's mind: "How would one of us live, if the other went? No one was complete in oneself." But he tossed the thought firmly out of his mind. And now, awareness about and appreciation of his Foundation's work is increasing day by day. His ambulances run day and night throughout the length and breadth of his country and his volunteers are well respected. How can the lakhs of helpless people whom he has given new lives, ever wish ill to the Foundation? They ever pray to Allah to grant a long life and good health to its founder. He is often lost in thoughts of planning a system of social security for all human beings and to make it possible for them to enjoy peaceful and prosperous lives, enjoying all the human rights. 

