

Mass involvement must for knowledge society

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Ahmedabad: *Anil Gupta, a professor at IIM, Ahmedabad, is a torchbearer of the rediscovery of the essence of traditional wisdom and innovation. His movement to find, record and disseminate knowledge and carrying out Shodh Yatras has won him international recognition.*

In this age of knowledge economy, there is a widespread belief that India is marching ahead to become a 'knowledge society'. Dr APJ Abdul Kalam gave a call to make India a knowledge society and so has the Planning Commission. But few people who can guide society are engaged in spreading knowledge at the grassroots level.

I will give you an example of a few who I have met in the last 20 to 30 years, who have not only taught me personally, but have also guided me in the philosophy of the Honey Bee Network, and I think that the encounters with these minds on marching will essentially help us all understand what constitutes the knowledge of the society. I met this interesting person, a coolie, way back in 1971 when I was a student. It was the time of the Bangladesh War and I had gone for a debate to Kankay, a place near Bhagalpur. While returning, a friend suggested we visit the Bangladesh border. There, we met an army officer who gave us some war mementos -- spent bullets and other similar things. On our way back, we were late and missed the train. Those were my student days, and hence I did not have enough money to buy another ticket, and the thought of travelling ticket-less from Kolkata to Delhi was appalling. A coolie noticed my condition and asked me what the problem was. I explained my predicament to him and he said: "Don't worry. I will make you sit in the train." However, when I told him that travelling ticket-less was not a very appealing idea to me, he said, "I'll buy you a ticket."

Taken by surprise at his generosity, I thanked him profusely and asked for his address so that I could repay him once I was back home. Stunned by my stand, the coolie snubbed my offer with his statement: "If you ask me once more for the address, I'll not buy the ticket for you." Needless to say, I was stumped! I touched his feet and said: "Please kindly explain to me what prevents you from giving me your address." His reply was fascinating. "I am buying a ticket for you and will in return also buy a worry from you if I give you the address. Because if I give you my address and you fail to send the money, I'll feel bad. But, if I don't give the address, I save myself from this bad bargain."

I can assure you that that extraordinary experience of generosity was permanently etched in my memory. It was a lesson that only life's laboratory can teach. I remember his face, his feet and the station; but it was this kindness that makes this mission worth remembering. The reason I am narrating this incident is also to convey that today when there is a crisis in society. Who is helping whom becomes crucial for people who have to go through this process; a large number of workers have been laid off because of the recession; and children have been withdrawn from schools. When I look at the generosity of people, I wonder whether if this is an isolated case. Are there not millions in our country like that coolie?