



Daring to disturb the universe

Khadija Haq says with a smile: 'if these people had been listening to my husband we mightn't be so poor today...'

They say that behind every successful man is a woman, but Khadija Haq is not one of them. She feels that what she shared with her famous husband, the late Dr. Mahbub ul Haq, was a partnership of equals, of mutual respect and a collective ideal which guided their entire lives and career.

A minuscule woman, Khadija - Baani to her friends, embodies grit. Carrying on after a loved one's death is difficult, but she does it with a graceful discipline that is so lacking in today's world of 'express yourself, and do it loudly'.

When I met her in her office, the Human Development Centre (HDC), which she and Dr. Haq set up in November, 1995, she was on her feet sorting through some papers. "My work", she candidly admitted, "is what keeps me sane. That's why I've immersed myself totally in it so that I have no time to think of anything else".

The smile was still a little rueful; the wound is still fresh. Khadija, an economics graduate from the University of Manchester, had been working

at the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) when she first met her future husband. Dr. Haq was then working for the Planning Commission, but devoted his evenings to guiding researchers at the PIDE. "Even then he believed he needed to give something of himself to the country".

She was then doing research on the concentration of wealth among the famous 22 families. The report was released by Dr Haq. The political fallout was of course explosive. After they married, Dr. Haq went to Harvard, where he lectured and conducted research. Over there, Khadija became highly interested in Income Equality, while doing her Harvard Economic Research Project. It was this fascination with the human factor in economics, which guided the vision of both husband and wife in the years to come.

"My husband always said that the country has given so much to us, so we should give something back. And because we had both always looked at economics from the point of view of social justice, we set up the HDC. The concept was that we'd try to

influence the policies of the government by doing research focused on the entire South Asian region. Our annual reports have become important with many governments as the true indicators of the economic situations prevailing in their countries". A pause, and then, "But he passed away after only two reports I am trying to do it alone. And I have many good friends who help me along the way".

But isn't the going tough? I wonder aloud.

'Pakistan is a contact-based country, and since my husband had so much respect worldwide when we first came up with the idea of the HDC, we received help from all over. Now that he is no longer alive, its survival has become a prestige point for these people. Besides, it's only when one starts looking for monetary benefits that people look at you sceptically. We have always had a firm policy of never accepting money from the government so that we maintain an independence of thinking. The entire project started with our own funds and from those donated by philanthropists. And even

though we both gave up very lucrative careers in the United Nations, we decided not to take any remuneration. The least people like me, whose expenses are behind them, can do is volunteer our services for the larger benefit of this country. Even my employees have adopted this spirit. Other than the researchers, many work free of charge. We probably have the most cost-effective NGO in the world".

This year the Centre has completed a profile on poverty. For the first time poverty has been base-lined, introducing different definitions based on such diverse indicators as income, calories, and education. The argument that is being propounded is that it is not enough to just increase someone's caloric count by giving them food, or their intelligence with education. What people need is opportunity to put these energies and skills to use. According to this Poverty Opportunity Index (POPI), two-thirds of the population of Pakistan is poor. With one sweep, the HDC has swiped off the ruling regime's favourite political motto of *atta* and education!

HDC is currently working on a specific three-point agenda.

1.Preparation of the annual Human Development Report on South Asia. The current report focuses on the crisis of government in South Asia.

2.Research on poverty-reduction strategies in Pakistan.

3.Preparation of a volume on the South-Asian challenge in the 21st century.

But it is the development of human resources which Khadija thinks is the need of the hour, the most basic of which is education. Currently, Pakistan has about 10 million school children added every year by the explosive rate of our population growth. Half of them drop out in the first year. But this is the least of Pakistan's problems.

There aren't enough qualified teachers, and girls wishing for an education often don't have any place to go to. Khadija is flabbergasted at the situation, especially when one considers that there are other countries within the region, which in worse economic scenarios have achieved much more. In Bangladesh, for example, they have scholarship programmes for girls as an incentive to make them study till the secondary level. Not only do they receive the obvious benefits of education, but this measure also acts as a deterrent towards early marriage. Their population growth is now 1.2% per year, whereas in Pakistan even the official government figures read

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