



## The Challenge of Gift-Giving, by Nitin Paranjape

I am afflicted with a trait which I suppose is common, yet I feel peculiar. Even though I like receiving gifts, I find myself feeling awkward giving them. I suppose at the core is an assumption that the process of gift-giving will raise good feelings about me in the receiver's heart and mind. I tried to evaluate this reason and found that there may be some shades of truth in it, but it is not so straight and simple.

Giving involves thinking about the other person, understanding their universe and their wishes. It shifts our focus from 'us' to 'them', and as it does, it unwittingly bridges the gap between the two with naturalness and warmth. Gifting is that precious means by which entry into other's soul is possible.

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But in today's consumer-driven life, gifts too have become 'plastic-coated'; we have become dependent on the market to fulfil our wish of giving. And the wide range of available products dazzles us to temporarily forget the reasons for giving. The focus shifts to the product rather than the person. Â In the end, the receiver is inundated with "gifts," which have no relation to his/her needs at that moment. The market has also unconsciously slipped in the notion of "price tag." The value of how much it costs has replaced the value of feelings associated with the act of giving. A costly tag means the gift is valuable. I have had both kinds of experiences -- receiving gifts which do not mean anything and choosing ones to complete the formality.

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In the face of this artificiality, my family and the organisations that I was working with tried something different. We decided to make things with our own hands instead of buying them from the market. This made a lot of difference. The act of creating immediately connects us to our inner world and, at the same time, links us to whom we are making the gift for. Creating something with our own hands requires time, which challenges the market's desire to make us passive consumers. Though my output wasn't a grand design, it involved my complete attention, and I reckoned it would please the receiver, a colleague in the office. It definitely did, and I felt elated.

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--Nitin Paranjape