



javed-chaudhry: Amjad Siddiqi, You Are Great!

Two weeks ago, someone from Lahore sent me his book. The title and name of the book both seemed quite emotional. Therefore, without reading or even looking at it, I set it aside. A few days ago, when I began sorting through books to find something to read, this one accidentally ended up in my hands. With a half-hearted attitude, I started turning the pages. Suddenly, I forgot everything else and just kept reading. This book was not just a book; it was a lesson about life that 99% of us completely forget. I finished the 400-page book in just two days. After that, I called the author and stood up to salute his greatness, courage, and perseverance. Without a doubt, this man did not just write

a book; he penned the book of life and this book should be read by every single person who is losing hope in life, anyone who does not appreciate the value of life, or those who get easily overwhelmed by life's problems. I have now developed a bond of deep devotion and studentship with the author. I claim that if you read this book, you will also be bound by this same connection. This book (Unyielding Spirit) is the life story of Amjad Siddiqi, an ordinary young man from the town of Phularwan, and he wrote it himself. If he were in Europe or America, ten or twenty movies would have been made about him by now. In India, a movie is at least being made about him. Regardless, he has already received dozens of international awards. Who is Amjad Siddiqi, and what extraordinary feat did he accomplish that managed to shock a highly practical person like me? Amjad Siddiqi's father ran a clothing business while also serving as a newspaper distributor and correspondent. During his childhood, Amjad Siddiqi used to toss newspapers into people's homes. In 1979, he moved to Saudi Arabia for employment. With great difficulty, he managed to secure a job as a typist in a bank. In Punjab back in those days, if a boy went to Saudi Arabia and secured a job, a long list of marriage proposals would follow. The same thing happened to Amjad Siddiqi. His mother got him engaged to a beautiful girl. Because of this, the family was happy and satisfied, and everything was running perfectly according to their wishes. However, he then went to

Madinah Munawwarah for pilgrimage and prayers. On his way back, he met with a car accident, and the entire course of his life changed. After an accident, the injured are supposed to be extracted under medical supervision, often by cutting the vehicle.

This is because victims are usually not as severely harmed by the crash itself as they are by the careless process of pulling them out of the wreckage. Local people pulled Amjad Siddiqi out of the car by force. Consequently, his spine broke. His body was paralyzed from the chest down. He could only move his arms and neck. Below that, his body had no movement and no sensation. He could not even feel hot or cold. If his body were cut with a knife, he would not even notice it. This was a terrifying situation. Yet, an even more frightening and alarming situation lay ahead: he completely lost control over his bladder and bowels. They would pass continuously, and he wouldn't even realize it. To cut a long story short, Amjad Siddiqi refused to give up hope even in this condition. He decided to live a successful life that he could be proud of. His family, close relatives, friends, and society wanted to turn him into a beggar. However, this man spent his entire life fighting his disability and society. His family and relatives abandoned him. His engagement broke off. People were not even willing to shake hands with him. His entire family wanted to bring him back to Pakistan and confine him to a single room.

But this man did not lose heart. Amjad Siddiqi made both of his arms so strong that they began lifting his 90% paralyzed body. He got onto a wheelchair and conquered the entire world. Amjad Siddiqi's autobiography, *Unyielding Spirit*, is the story of a disabled yet highly successful and prosperous man who refused to let any societal obstacle block his path. How he reached the hospital, how he got out of bed, how he made the wheelchair his support system, how he learned to drive, how he changed car tires while sitting in a wheelchair, and how he learned to navigate his wheelchair down stairs completely alone—this is a truly astonishing tale. He used to wheel himself 15 kilometers by hand just to reach his office. How? How did he enter the business world, how did he earn millions of rupees, how did he travel to 60 countries despite his severe disability, and how did he finally get married and what is he doing now? This is an unbelievable story. Every single person in the country, especially every disabled person, must read it. If it were up to me, I would make this book a part of the school curriculum. The kinds of hardships Amjad Siddiqi had to face just to live and move forward are beyond description. For instance, let me share a few details so you can gauge the level of this man's struggle. During the era when Siddiqi ended up in a wheelchair, even completely able-bodied individuals could not find jobs. Since he was 90% paralyzed, how was he supposed to secure employment? No one had an answer to this. Yet, Amjad Siddiqi

crossed this hurdle as well. He continuously visited his former bank and finally convinced them by saying: "Keep me as an unpaid employee for three months if I meet your requirements, give me the job. Otherwise, I will leave." The bank agreed. After that, this man traveled 15 kilometers to the bank every single day by pushing his wheelchair by hand. For this commute, he would wake up at 3:00 AM, get ready, and wheel himself across that 15-kilometer journey. He would arrive an hour before the bank even opened, and there was never a single day of disruption in this routine. Why did he endure so much pain? It was because, in those days, buses and taxis had no accommodation or space for wheelchairs. Mr. Siddiqi increased his typing speed in the office far beyond that of normal people. As a result, he did the work of four people combined at the bank. No matter how much work he was given, he never refused, completing his tasks before heading home. The bank management was so deeply impressed by his discipline and performance that they paid him a salary in his very first month. Furthermore, in Saudi Arabia at that time, no one would rent a house to a disabled person. The struggle Amjad Siddiqi went through just to secure housing is an eye-opening, mind-boggling story on its own. Amjad Siddiqi wrote in great detail about the massive issues wheelchair-bound individuals face when trying to enter buildings and houses. For example, the municipal committee once dug a ditch right in front of his house and left. He returned home late at

night to find the trench right before his door. Since he lived completely alone, he fell into the ditch along with his wheelchair. He spent the entire night struggling, trying to drag himself and his wheelchair out of it.

I actually wept while reading this specific portion of the book. In those days, disabled people were not permitted to drive cars. Amjad Siddiqi obtained that permission, bought a car, and kept driving it. The section describing how he would bring his wheelchair close to the car, use the strength of his arms to bounce himself onto the driver's seat, pull the wheelchair from the road to fold it, and adjust it onto the passenger seat is completely unbelievable. Once, his car tire got punctured on the highway. Amjad Siddiqi sat in his wheelchair for hours waiting for help. When no car stopped, the heart-wrenching story of how he managed to change the tire himself while sitting in his wheelchair is deeply moving. He also documents how he was treated on airplanes, how airlines would refuse him service, how he was dragged to be placed into and lifted out of seats, how fellow passengers avoided him, how his wheelchair was broken while being packed, how he would exit airports, how he was fired from his job, and how he eventually started a business on a wheelchair with towels draped over his shoulders to become a highly successful businessman. The book also reveals how he controlled his bladder and bowels during long flights, what happened to him if an emergency arose

during travel, how he eventually got married, and how Almighty Allah blessed him with children. It is an astonishing tale that compels the reader to cry.

Amjad Siddiqi is truly a hero of Pakistan. He deserves the highest award for bravery in Pakistan, and his book *Unyielding Spirit* should be read by everyone. I claim that after reading this book, no hardship in life will feel like a hardship to you anymore. You will fall in love with all of life's challenges, and you will tell yourself every single day: "If Amjad Siddiqi can do it, why can't I?" Secondly, you will be compelled to thank Allah, who made you whole and gave you the ability to take care of your own body and your own daily needs. You will realize just how merciful and kind Allah is to you only after reading this book. In the end, you too will be compelled to say, just like me: "Amjad Siddiqi Sahib, you are great!" and you will raise both hands to salute his sheer greatness.

Courtesy of Javed Chaudhry, Daily Express News