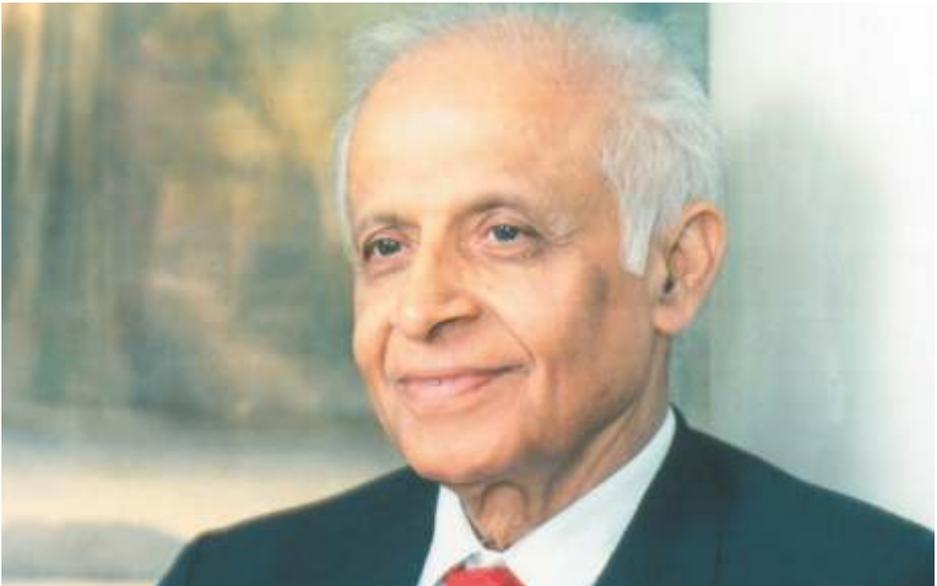


Dr. L. H. Hiranandani

Renowned ENT Surgeon,
Recipient of “PADMA BHUSHAN” award.



A person leaves indelible marks on the paths and ways through which he passes during his lifetime. Some of them remove stones and thorns from the paths and make them secure for others following them. The acts of such people centre around making life easier for others and they never think about their own self. Such people occupy a place of high respect and honour in our society.

One such person, a world renowned personality, and a philanthropist who has left his mark in the medical field is with us today -

Dr. L. H. Hiranandani.

Jawhrani: Welcome Sir! It is said that previously you were known as Lakhoomal Hiranand Kandhari. How did you switch over from Kandhari to Hiranandani?

Dr. L. H. : After the fall of King Dahar, Sindh became part of the Islamic world. Previously, Brahmins were present in great numbers in Sindh and used to dot the landscape. Arabs, being wary of their knowledge and clout, killed all of them and thus literally cleared Sindh of all the Hindus. It is said, that Sindhis then came from outside. We Bhatias, are known to have come from Jaisalmer. Jaisalmer is a barren land and bereft of water. The people living there migrated to areas where they could have access to water and for this simple reason they preferred Sindh and settled near the banks of the river Indus. The people of Jaisalmer were known as Bhati which became Bhatia, once they came to Sindh. Some of them had also gone to Punjab and presently Bhatias live in Sindh as well as Punjab. Bhatias are then divided into various sub castes, such as Assar Pota or Khinara. We belong to the Khinara sub-caste. Sindhis, even in those early days, were quite enterprising, and for business purposes traveled abroad quite often. My great grandfather's several sojourns to Kandhar on regular basis gave our family the name Kandhari .

Jawhrani: And so from Bhatia to Kandhari and from Kandhari to Hiranandani, perhaps from your father's name- 'Hiranand'.

Dr. L. H. : Yes.

Jawhrani: Can we have some more details about your family?

Dr. L. H. : I belonged to an uneducated and poor family. I myself was uneducated in the beginning. The school in Thatta provided education upto fifth standard only. People of Thatta, being poor, had to go to far off places in search of decent earnings. The officers of our city used to wear a hat and a necktie, and I envied them. I, being a poor boy, couldn't afford such apparel and used to wonder when I would be able to do so! I firmly decided to be like those affluent people and for that I needed education. First of all, I had to be a matriculate for which I had to go to the city of Karachi. In a local school we had to pay the tuition fee of one anna, and even that I couldn't afford. I used to bring water from a well and save one anna. You can very well imagine our financial position during those days.

Jawhrani: You belonged to a poor family of Thatta. Any other memory of Thatta?

Dr. L. H. : Most of Thatta's residents were uneducated. Whoever was educated could get government employment. Those people were known as 'Amils'.

Jawhrani: What is the difference between an 'Amil' and a 'Bhaiband'?

Dr. L. H. : They differ quite a lot from each other. When Britishers took over Sindh, the educated people were absorbed in government services. Against that, Bhaibands were mostly uneducated and worked as zamindars or businessmen. A businessman had to travel abroad in order to multiply his holdings like the Hinduja's and Chainrais. Zamindars usually invested all their earnings in fresh acquisition of agricultural lands, 500 acres to 1000 acres, leaving them literally with no cash at all. The educated people were employed as government servants and known as 'Amils'.

Jawhrani: The people in Sindh were quite well to do, financially. They also actively took part in the independence movement. Were they aware that independence would bring Partition and result in uprooting them from their ancestral homes?

Dr. L. H. : Absolutely not. There was no differentiation between Hindus and Muslims. While I was in Thatta or in Karachi, I never experienced any hatred from the other community. We used to take part in Muslim religious festivities, like Eid or Ashoora. They, in turn, participated in our Diwali and other festivals. Our ladies went around freely in the city and no one could dare cast an evil eye on them.

Jawhrani: After attending local school from where did you matriculate?

Dr. L. H. : My mother was an illiterate poor lady. There was not enough food at home. At times, we just had rice and when we went to the kitchen at night because of hunger, we would only see upturned empty vessels. Such was life!

However, it has been a centuries old tradition amongst Sindhis to save and accumulate gold as a hedge against difficult times. So when I requested my mother for Rs. 200/- for my matriculation at Karachi she sold 20 tolas of gold and just about managed the sum.

In Karachi, I didn't have adequate funds to stay in a lodge so I lived in dharamsalas and on the roads and sat under lamp-posts, to study

under the street lights. And in this way, I completed my matriculation in Karachi.

Jawhrani: Was then the realization of your goal a burning desire?

Dr. L. H. : I just wanted to be like others. If others could succeed, why not me? When I came back to Thatta, I was married to a girl from the Karani family of Thatta, who had 4 daughters. They were quite affluent people. Just two or three families could be counted as well-to-do families in Thatta. My wife was very beautiful and just 13 years old. At that time it was very much common to get daughters married at that tender age.

Jawhrani: Even at the age of 13 years?

Dr. L. H. : Yes. Even my sister was married at the age of 11. The Karanis liked me, because I was a matriculate.

Jawhrani: I suppose your wealth was education.

Dr. L. H. : In those days, a matriculate was regarded as a highly educated person. It made matrimonial alliance with an affluent family possible. Had the unsuspecting girl known that, there was shortage of even food in our house she would have probably refused to get married into such a poor family. I requested my father-in-law to be, Shri Jamnadas, to help me with my higher studies, to which he readily agreed. How could I become a doctor? For this I had to go to Bombay. My father-in-law chipped in with fifty rupees a month. After completing the medical degree course, I wanted to be an F.R.C.S. I was in awe of these surgeons, who wore nice clothes, a tie and a hat and drove in large vehicles. I also wanted to be like them and drive an American car.

Jawhrani: Were you not acquainted with very rich and famous people, like Mr. Mohd. Ali Jinnah, in Bombay?

Dr. L. H. : Yes. I had very good relations with Mr. Mohd. Ali Jinnah, as well as Governor of Bombay Presidency, Sir John Kalwin, a Britisher. When I came back to Bombay after completing my F.R.C.S. from England, I was called by Mohd. Ali Jinnah. He was suffering from an ENT problem, which he had discussed with Dr. Charl Putton. He wanted to consult only an F.R.C.S. surgeon and luckily at the time, I was the only F.R.C.S. in Bombay. The partition of India, was not far away. When I examined him, I was very much impressed with his personality. He was not an ordinary man. Once

the Governor of Bombay Presidency, Sir John, also called me and slowly and gradually I became famous throughout the country. Many International political bigwigs used to consult me. Ministers from Burma, China were my regular patients. Shaikh Abdullah of Kashmir too, was a regular visitor. You just go through my autobiography. A boy of 15 years was to be hanged there. I saved his life, pleaded with Shaikh Abdullah, who initially commuted it to life-imprisonment, and later he was acquitted. I arranged for his employment with the government. His name was Rashid and presently he is Inspector General of Police. Recently, he was here after a gap of 24 years and he was asking others, whether Dr. Hiranandani is still alive? This story was reported in the daily 'Afternoon', too.

Jawhrani: People say, you charge hefty fees from well-to-do people. Is this true?

Dr. L. H. : Look, when I was in Nair Hospital, I didn't charge anything. I have served more than any other doctor in Nair Hospital. People will vouch for that. Whenever people from lower strata visit me for treatment, be they constables, peons, clerks, etc. I offer my services free of cost. But after all, I too have to make both ends meet. How can I run my house, if I never charge anybody? Someone has to foot the bill. Once, Shammi Kapoor came to me for an operation of his nose. He asked me about the charges. I told him it would be five thousand rupees. He remarked that it was an exorbitant amount. As this incident is about forty odd years old, you can appreciate that in those days, five thousand rupees was not a meager sum. I replied, yes, but his nose could bear that much expenditure and if it became half its present size, would he look good? He readily agreed but even today whenever he meets me, he reiterates that I had charged him heavily.

Once, Shirley McLaine came to Bombay. Suddenly, she developed a cold and was very much irritated with her ailment. She contacted her Hollywood doctors and wanted to know whom to contact in Bombay.

Jawhrani: I think, Dev Anand had brought her to you....

Dr. L. H. : Yes, he brought her to me. I had to operate on her. I operated on her in the late hours of the day and she flew back the subsequent day. She invited me to visit her in Hollywood, whenever I happened to be there. When I went to Los Angeles in 1969 with

my wife, I contacted her. She sent a chauffer driven car to take us to her house. A chauffer driven car is a rare phenomenon in America. She said that she herself had prepared food for both of us. I praised her dance, which she had performed in the movie Can-Can. She promptly got up and danced before us. Later on, she wrote a letter to me in which she said that she wanted to visit Bombay again to meet me but for that she would probably have to fall ill again!

Jawhrani: Any other such encounters with celebrities or famous personalities in the course of your profession?

Dr. L. H. : H. D. Deve Gowda is my old time friend. I know him for the last forty years. Initially, he was a Congress worker, then became Chief Minister and ultimately, Prime Minister of India. When he was the Prime Minister, he phoned me and said he wanted to meet me. He had been a regular patient of mine. I asked him when he would be coming to Bombay. He said that he had some other work and I better meet him in Delhi. I went to Delhi and met him. He said that he wanted to settle India-Pakistan disputes, once and for all. I asked him what role could I play in it. He said that I was regarded in high esteem in Pakistan and that he had read some six of my articles, titled 'Babus of Pakistan' published in 'Blitz' and he wanted my help.

I enquired, "What can I do?"

He said that, I should meet Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Initially, I was indicated a schedule to meet him in Islamabad. Then it was cancelled, perhaps because of apprehensions about the military wondering about the purpose of my visit. Subsequently, they directed me to see Nawaz Sharif in London. When I went to London, I was met not by Nawaz Sharif, but one of his emissaries whose name I still don't want to disclose. It was decided there that Nawaz Sharif and Deve Gowda would meet and resolve all the issues. A venue, date and time was fixed for their meeting, but alas, it was not to be because in the meantime, Deve Gowda's government fell.

Jawhrani: Doctor, you have been to Sindh, many times. What is the plight of Sindhi Hindus, there?

Dr. L. H. : Sindhi Hindus are not harmed there in any way. It is nothing but a false propaganda that Sindhis are harassed in anyway.

Jawhrani: Do you mean these are just rumours?

Dr. L. H. : Rumours and false rumours. No one has got the right to malign Pakistan. There is a city named Khudadad Circle, near Baluchistan and there is one departmental store owned by a Sindhi Hindu. It's a nice shop. I asked him how could he flourish there? He replied that Hindus had no problems there. I had also been to a medical college at Nawabshah. It is a Girls' Medical College and strangely enough 70% of the students were Hindus. I asked for the reason behind this and was told that Hindu girls were more hardworking and therefore more Hindu girls secured admission to the colleges. I was also informed that in 1982, Muslims had complained about this to the then President of Pakistan, and he had replied that he would not interfere in the admission process.

I shall tell you another interesting tale. There is a Shiva temple in Karachi, where many people go and pay their respects every Sunday. I also went there one Sunday and found many Gujarati Hindu ladies. They worked as sweepers. We call them Harijans. They told me that they were very much content living there. I asked them why they didn't migrate to India, to which they replied that they don't want to starve. On my persistence, they said that they had visited their relatives' at Baroda. Water and electricity were always in short supply in their homes at Baroda, while they had every facility provided at their Karachi homes. My curiosity took me to their homes and I could see for myself that even in those Harijan homes at Ranchhod Lane, every house had fans, T.V. and fridge etc. When I asked them what their salary was they replied it was Rs. 2000/- a month, while an average sweeper in Bombay could not get more than Rs. 300/- a month, in those days.

Jawhrani: So they are very much content in Pakistan?

Dr. L. H. : Very much, indeed!

Jawhrani: What about the Sindhi Hindus who migrated to India at the time of partition. They were promised equal rights but in fact we do not have the same political rights as others. Were our leaders, who professed migration to India as the sole remedy for partition, right or wrong?

Dr. L. H. : There are two schools of thought. One is pro-migration and another anti-migration. I would rather say that migration benefitted us the most.

Jawhrani: In which way have we benefitted?

Dr. L. H. : Migration provided us with enormous growth opportunities. What could our great leaders like Ram Jethmalani, Chainrai and Srichand Hinduja have done in Pakistan? Sindh has got a very small industrial base to boast of and in comparison, Sindhis in India progressed in each and every field. What could Sindhi Hindus have done in Sindh? The influx of Bihari Muslims in Sindh has changed the demographic balance even against the Sindhi Muslims and Sindhi Hindus would have been simply marginalized.

Jawhrani: Although we have progressed on the economic front in India, isn't it a fact that in the process we have lost our rich culture and golden traditions?

Dr. L. H. : Sindhis are entrepreneurs and wherever they may exist, they have prospered. We should not lose heart, because we do speak Sindhi in our homes at least.

Jawhrani: A community is recognized by its language. Presently, Sindhis feel hesitant to acknowledge themselves as Sindhis. How do you feel about this?

Dr. L. H. : It has to happen ultimately, sooner or later. I proposed to Hindus in Karachi that we establish schools for education in Hindi for their children but they declined the offer for the reason that education in Hindi could not provide them employment in Pakistan. The same is the case with Sindhis in India. For better employment opportunities, it is essential to acquire education in the language of the state where you reside.

Jawhrani: You are a trustee of Hyderabad Sind National Collegiate Board, which runs 22 colleges in and around Mumbai. Lakhs of students graduate from these institutions. Have these institutions helped the children of our community?

Dr. L. H. : The strength of the students in these colleges hovers around 40,000, and about 25% are Sindhis

Jawhrani: Do you take specific steps to teach Sindhi there?

Dr. L. H. : The problem is that we don't get adequate number of students who wish to learn Sindhi.

Jawhrani: Our institutions enjoy linguistic minority status and we can retain 50% reservation for Sindhi students. How many students have benefitted?

Dr. L. H. : Unfortunately, in reality, we don't have that many number of Sindhi students. Our board had spent some five million rupees on legal support to get the favourable judgement for 50% reservation for Sindhi students.

Jawhrani: Can we make admission to our institutions conditional, so that those who avail admission are bound to opt for Sindhi subject?

Dr. L. H. : We have been doing a lot for the Sindhi language in these colleges. I, myself have been a Board member since 1954, and this suggestion can certainly be considered. In Mumbai, we are unable to get more than 10% Sindhis. But, we accommodate a large number in our Ulhasnagar institutions.

Jawhrani: Probably because Ulhasnagar houses a large number of Sindhi population.

Dr. L. H. : Our Ulhasnagar colleges accommodate 80% Sindhi students, but I am sorry to say that very few students opt for the Sindhi subject.

Jawhrani: How can we rekindle interest in the Sindhi subject?

Dr. L. H. : I have been trying my best. I have urged my community members to take Sindhi subject in their educational pursuits. I also urge them, whenever someone comes to me for admission purposes. We have to encourage our younger generation to study more. I introduced a proposal and got it passed that within five years every Ulhasnagar youth should become a graduate.

Jawhrani: A nice proposal!

Dr. L. H. : What else can I do, on my own?

Jawhrani: You have created a colossus by way of the Hiranandani empire. To what extent have your children contributed?

Dr. L. H. : It's entirely to their credit. I am a doctor and my elder son also opted for the medical profession. But my younger son, Niranjan, who is presently the President of Hyderabad Sind National Collegiate Board, didn't want to pursue the medical profession. He completed his C.A. course and desired to do business. I told him that I won't be of any help because I was not familiar with any business. He said, in that case it should be left up to him. He opted for the construction business. He worked really hard and created a niche for himself in the construction industry. I was apprehensive at that time, as it was not considered a nice activity then. But presently, builders are very much respected in our society. I just put the condition that he shouldn't cheat anybody and that he should

be honest towards every customer. I am proud to say that he hasn't failed me.

Jawhrani: So parental lineage does play its part.

Dr. L. H. : The entire credit for their progress must be given to them. I have just helped them with my personal contacts. I'll relate one such instance. You obviously know about the Hiranandani Complex at Powai, Mumbai. That land belonged to one Mr. Sharma. Few other builders had also approached him for that property, but he didn't concede to their requests. When Niranjan approached him he quoted Rs.14 crores as its price. Niranjan told him that he needed a payment facility. Mr. Sharma, keeping in mind Niranjan's surname - Hiranandani, asked him whether he knew of Dr. L.H. Hiranandani, the ENT specialist. Niranjan replied that it was the name of his father upon which Sharma said that he didn't mind extending credit facility to Niranjan, for his money was safe. This way, just the name helped my children, but the hard work has been solely put in by themselves. After few days, he took me to the site and showed it to me. I just collapsed, as it was a complete jungle at that time. Now it has metamorphosed into Hiranandani Gardens!

Jawhrani: We would like to continue talking with you but there is restriction of time imposed on us. So one last question, I would like you to tell us more about your desire to immerse your ashes in the river Indus, in Sindh, as declared by you in your autobiography.

Dr. L. H. : Look, I was born in Sindh and I love that part of the world. Once in 1982, I had been to Thatta. I was followed by reporters of the daily 'Dawn', Pakistan's number one English newspaper and they asked me as to how I felt being in Thatta. To which I replied, "Like a Muslim in Mecca". Next day, the paper reported that 'Dr. Hiranandani found Mecca in Thatta'. One of them asked me, if I were to be the Defence Minister of India and I had to bomb Thatta what would be my reaction. I just cried and said, I would rather resign than bomb my motherland!

Jawhrani: We are extremely thankful to you for your interview. You have enlightened us with some of the interesting experiences of your life. We really can't have enough of you, but time restricts us. God willing, we shall meet again.

Dr. L. H. : Sure! Sure!