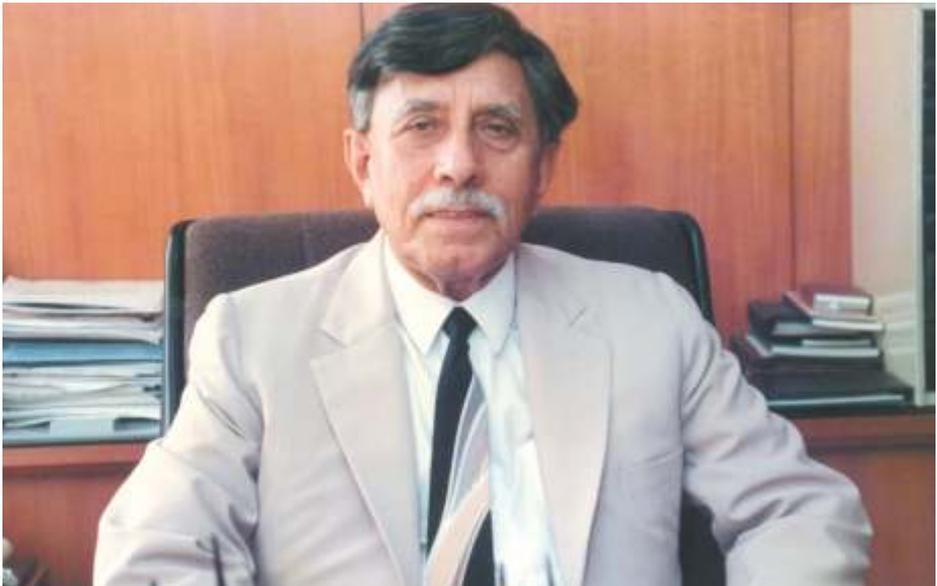


Murij Manghnani

Group Chairman - International Traders (Middle East) Ltd.
Businessman and Philanthropist



Sindh is symbolic of the ancientness of human civilization. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru wrote in his book 'Discovery of India' that he was proud to have taken birth in the land which had given the foremost civilization and culture to the world. Thousands of years back, when people all over the world clothed themselves with leaves and hides, Sindh produced the finest cotton cloth. Around 5000 years back, Sindh not only grew cotton and produced cloth, but even exported it to Sumer and Akkad (present day Iraq). Even today, no country is left untouched by a Sindhi entrepreneur.

We have in our midst one such person, Mr. Muriymal Manghnani who has come all the way from Dubai to share with us his valuable thoughts and experiences.

Jawhrani: Dada, we welcome you. To begin with, can you tell us which area of Sindh, do you hail from?

Murij: I was born in Tando Adam, Dist. Nawabshah, in the year 1927.

Jawhrani: Tando Adam was known as Kashi of Sindh. What were your activities there?

Murij: Our family was engaged in the textile business, manufacturing as well as marketing, from ginning and pressing to its sale.

Jawhrani: What about your academic qualifications?

Murij: As schools in Tando Adam taught only upto the 5th standard, I could only complete my primary education there. We had our own sales office in Karachi and I obtained further education in the city of Karachi.

Jawhrani: What did you do after completing your studies?

Murij: I got married, as soon as I completed my studies. And then our country was divided and we had to leave Sindh.

Jawhrani: How old were you, when you got married?

Murij: I am a victim of child-marriage! I recall when I was just eighteen years old, I had gone to Tando Adam to celebrate Diwali with my family. One day, I overheard my father consulting someone about my marriage and I requested him to desist from such thoughts as I intended to study further. He became furious and scolded me saying that I had no manners and should not be talking back to elders. I told him that I just didn't want to marry at that time, and that there was nothing disrespectful in my saying so. I decided to go back immediately and packed my bags for Karachi. My mother wanted me to celebrate Diwali with all the members of our family. Later on, my father also exhorted the values of celebrating Diwali with parents, to which I replied that when parents had no love for their children, what was the use of staying back.

In Karachi, we had our office on one floor of the building and our house on another floor. One day, when I came back from school, our 'Munim' asked me to feed him sweets. I asked him "Why? Am I engaged or what?" He replied in the affirmative. I asked, 'Which family?' He said, "with the daughter of Bherumal of the Rai Saheb Jumanmal family from Tando Jam". The engagement was followed by marriage. I was married at the age of eighteen and my wife was just fourteen years old. I should be thankful to the British government for having put some restrictions on child marriage.

My father had married at the age of twelve when my mother was ten and I was born when he was only sixteen years old. Possibly that is why people had many children during those days -which I, for one, did not approve.

Jawhrani: So even in those days you thought about family planning?

Murij: I got married in 1945. My first child was born in 1947 and the second in 1949. I realized that if I continue this way I will create a cricket team within few years. So, you can say that I thought about family planning even before Chacha Nehru.

Jawhrani: Did your elders participate in the freedom movement?

Murij: Mr. Ghanshyam Manghnani from our family took part in the freedom movement and even went to jail. I myself was active in the students' union. In 1942, when Mahatma Gandhi initiated 'Quit India' movement, a non-political organization 'Charkha Sangh' came into existence. Those 'Charkha Sangh' people called for a meeting of students, and informed us that all their activists were behind bars; the press was gagged due to censorship; and an ordinary Indian remained ignorant about the freedom movement. They said that they would commence printing bulletins, and we students would have to help them in circulating these. They used to hand these to us early in the morning, and four to seven students would distribute them, house to house.

Jawhrani: Did you ever anticipate that independence would bring about partition during the freedom movement?

Murij: Not at all, never even in my dreams.

Jawhrani: What was your reaction when you heard about the partition?

Murij: We felt betrayed as Gandhiji himself had said that partition could only happen over his dead body. We were dead sure that partition would never take place.

Jawhrani: Is it right to say that our leaders betrayed us and left us in the lurch, ensconcing themselves in safe havens, while we went through the hell of Partition?

Murij: Very much so. Our leaders, if nothing else, like in the case of Punjab and Bengal, could have staked claim to some portion of Sindh - Tharparkar and adjoining two, three districts. Jinnah's Muslim League, at that time, was very anxious to see the emergence of Pakistan and would have readily agreed to such a compromise. Unfortunately, no such efforts were made by our leaders.

Jawhrani: Where in India did you initially settle?

Murij: We arrived in Pushkar, Rajasthan. Then, we headed towards Ulhasnagar, which was called 'Kalyan Camp' in those days.

Jawhrani: One shudders, recollecting the conditions prevailing in refugee camps during those times, one literally starts shivering. Any such unfortunate experience?

Murij: When Rajgopal Acharya inaugurated Ulhasnagar, we were in Pushkar. We went there in 1953, by which time it had become quite habitable. Fortunately, we didn't have to stay in barracks but in C-Block, comprising of one bedroom hall dwellings. It was not such a bad accommodation, considering the circumstances.

Jawhrani: Did you start some business or take up a job?

Murij: I got employment in Bombay.

Jawhrani: What took you to Dubai?

Murij: Our company used to finance Dubai businessmen and once received news that one of them was bankrupt and there were possibilities of more insolvencies. These businessmen owed us a lot and my company sent me to Dubai to settle and recover as much as possible. This resulted in my staying for about five - six months in Dubai. In the meanwhile, K. J. Chotirmal of Bombay had opened an office in Dubai and their accountant needed an assistant, and they offered me this post. I asked my employers in Bombay for their consent which they readily granted saying they wanted to shut their Bombay office in any case and were only concerned about me. So they wished me good luck and that's how I joined K. J. Chotirmal. After about four-five months, satisfied with my work, I was promoted to the post of the manager, who was in turn transferred to their Ghana office. And since 1954, I have been in Dubai.

Jawhrani: Wasn't Dubai at that time a desert?

Murij: The population of Dubai at that time was around twenty - twenty five thousand. There was no hotel and one could only get tea and biscuits at restaurants. We had to cook ourselves or starve. There were no messes, no electricity, no water, no roads and no telephones.

Jawhrani: When did you get electric connections?

Murij: It happened after many years, in 1960.

Jawhrani: Presently, Dubai is considered a developed country. Do you feel like an alien there?

Murij: No. We are very much connected with India. It takes just two and half hours to fly to India. Previously, there was no airport in Dubai and it was awful as we had to sail from Dubai to India and that took a lot of time.

Jawhrani: Do people socialize on a regular basis as they do in Pakistan and India?

Murij: Very much. We have a very good social life.

Jawhrani: Have you established any organization to propagate the message of Sindhyat?

Murij: Earlier, the authorities of Dubai didn't permit the establishment of non-government organizations, though unofficially a few did exist. These organizations held various festivals, like Cheti chand, Diwali etc. on a regular basis. Then we established an organization jointly with Muslim Sindhis, which confers Shah Abdul Latif Award, consisting of a gold medal and a purse of ten thousand, alternately, to an Indian and Pakistani. I used to bear the entire expense for Indian awardees, which included their travel, lodging, boarding etc. Hundraj Dukhayal, Gobind Malhi and Popati Hiranandani, were some of the awardees amongst many others.

Jawhrani: Have you established any school in Dubai?

Murij: Yes, the Indian High School, Dubai, which imparts education to some 8500 students. The land for it was given free, by the Shaikh of Dubai. I am one of its founders and have also been its Chairman for two terms.

Jawhrani: Recently, when you held the marriage ceremony of your granddaughter, you invited many writers and artists along with other big shots, isn't it?

Murij: While preparing the list of invitees I had specifically instructed my son Chander, to ensure that no Sindhi writer or artist was missed out from the invitee list. We would not be able to ever face them again. If a businessman was missed out, we could always offer him our apologies.

Jawhrani: Dada, what else is being done in Dubai to promote the Sindhi language?

Murij: We celebrate Cheti Chand and other festivals with gaiety and national fervour. We invite Sindhi artists from India as well as

Sindh, hold their programmes regularly and on an average three to four such functions are held annually. Ram Buxani, Nari Sawlani, Mohan Gehani and Asha Chand also hold Sindhi programmes on a regular basis.

Jawhrani: Can Dubai play the role of a bridge between Sindhis of India and Sindhis of Pakistan?

Murij: Such a proposal had come from Suresh Keswani around four-five years back, but the environment of Dubai was not conducive those days. However, now as Dubai is getting more liberal, we can certainly work on it. We can have a joint cultural programme in Dubai with artists from both countries.

Jawhrani: Along with artists, shouldn't the writers of both countries also get such opportunities to interact with each other?

Murij: Certainly!

Jawhrani: Physically, you live in Dubai but your spirit is known to be in India. With which organizations, that promote Sindhi language and culture, are you associated in India ?

Murij: Since 1982, I have been associated with Akhil Bharat Sindhi Boli Ain Sahit Sabha. I have also instituted one award for the promotion of Sindhi language and I leave the decision to them on whom to confer. I don't interfere personally. I am also associated with Sindhu Youth Circle of Ulhasnagar. They have got their own premises, but many more such organizations do not have such facility. Sindhu Youth Circle has constructed a grand building that cost six to seven million rupees. Likewise, Indian Institute of Sindhology is also working in Adipur. They have got a good school, a plot to construct the main building for the institute, and they also propose to establish a university. Presently, I hold the post of its Chairman.

Jawhrani: Bhai Partap had a dream of building a new Sindh at Adipur. To what extent has this been realized in the last fifty five years?

Murij: Actually, Bhai Partap's hopes were belied initially as in those days the main issue for Sindhis was to earn their livelihood and Adipur being a barren land could attract just a few Sindhis. But later, when the Kandla Port and free trade zone came into existence, Sindhis got many opportunities for business and employment, and it also attracted other communities. Even now, Sindhis are still in majority in Adipur.

Jawhrani: What is the population of Adipur?

Murij: I think it must be two to three hundred thousand. It is a cosmopolitan city, comprising of Punjabis, South Indians, Maharashtrians and Gujaratis along with Sindhis, but Sindhis are in majority.

Jawhrani: Does the Sindhi community benefit from the many schools established there?

Murij: When Bhai Partap began this work, he entrusted the educational facilities to Dada Hundraj Dukhayal. He established Gandhidham Maitri Mandal, which he personally headed until his last days and after that it was entrusted to Dada Dukhayal. They established some schools and Sindhi was taught in Devanagri script. Presently, the demand is for English medium schools and Gandhidham is no exception.

Jawhrani: Is Sindhi subject compulsory in these English medium schools?

Murij: The schools run by Christians do not provide for teaching Sindhi language but Nirmala Gajwani, who is the chairperson of Sindhi Resettlement Corporation, is working hard for the benefit of Sindhis. She has established a good school where Sindhi language is a compulsory subject. Indian Institute of Sindhology has also established one school, where initially Sindhi was compulsory for all the students, but later sensing practical difficulties, they made it compulsory for Sindhi students only, as other students already felt burdened under the three language formula and it was felt impractical to burden them with an additional language.

Jawhrani: What measures do you suggest for the preservation of Sindhi language, literature, tradition and culture under the prevailing circumstances?

Murij: The present trend favours English medium schools. Even in smaller towns, parents prefer sending their children to such schools. We can't reverse this, but we can work to preserve our vocal culture at least. If we look to the future, say the coming thirty years, we can take it for granted that the reading and writing of Sindhi will become extinct.

Jawhrani: Can we pass on Sindhi tradition and culture to our children in Sindhi language by using the Roman Script?

Murij: Already, we have created problems for our children with the introduction of Devanagari script and if another script is added, it

would only make matters worse. It is better that we support Devanagari script now; as children even otherwise, learn it, being our national language. However in this case, the entire printed Sindhi literature would have to be transliterated in the Devanagari script. I can cite the example of my friend's wife who could speak Sindhi and used to say that she had read something in the 'Hindustan' newspaper. When I asked her how was that possible as she could not read Arabic-Sindhi, she replied that she had been through the last page of 'Hindustan' which contained news in Devanagari Sindhi. This way Devanagari Sindhi can come to our rescue.

Jawhrani: Can we make use of our electronic media to propagate vocal culture?

Murij: Of course! We can persuade our cable operators to make provision for KTN, a Sindhi TV channel. These KTN people have been receiving Sindhi software from India via Dubai.

Jawhrani: Dada, how is it that you are so close with so many active and thought provoking writers and artists?

Murij: When we were busy with earning our livelihood, these were the people who sacrificed everything for the preservation of our language, literature, culture and tradition. There were organizations like that of Gobind Malhi who with Bhagwanti Navani traversed the length and breadth of India to awaken our love and duty towards our culture through various message-oriented cultural programmes. We can never forget the struggle of these organizations and we must recognize their services and encourage them for their sacrifices and dedication.

Jawhrani: Can we presume that litterateurs can always count on you and you will always be there to help them?

Murij: Absolutely. Be they playwrights, musicians or writers, we must encourage them, and I will keep doing so even in future.

Jawhrani: Any reminisces about Dada 'Dukhayal'?

Murij: When I came back from Dubai to India for the first time in 1957, I learnt that my in-laws had shifted to Gandhidham. Dada Dukhayal also lived there. I specifically took one tape recorder with me and recorded some poems of Dada Dukhayal during my conversation with him. Slowly and gradually, we became close to each other.

- Jawhrani:* What about your relationship with Ram Panjwani?
- Murij:* We celebrated his 70th birthday lavishly at Jai Hind College in Bombay and we planned to celebrate his 75th birthday in Dubai. When I went to his house to hand over the visas for Dubai, I was told he was not at home. When I returned later in the evening I was informed that Dada Panjwani was no more!
- Jawhrani:* Where do you plan to stay in India after returning from Dubai?
- Murij:* I have constructed a house in Gandhidham and I shall go there.
- Jawhrani:* You are very fond of reading. Have you ever tried your hand at writing?
- Murij:* Never ever. My interest is limited upto reading only.
- Jawhrani:* An academic question. Suppose we get back our Sindh, do you think Sindhis will go back?
- Murij:* Very few would opt for that, because migration is not an easy option; rarely does any person like to rock his boat. Everyone is well settled and the generation which has taken birth in India would not have the same feelings towards Sindh compared to people of my generation, which is now in the throes of extinction.
- Jawhrani:* Our younger generation feels inferior calling themselves Sindhi. What can be done in this respect?
- Murij:* I think we have crossed that hurdle. Sindhis have excelled in every field in India as well as abroad. Now everyone holds us in high esteem and so why should we have any inferiority complex? But yes, we have to save our basic Sindhi values and for that we should heed the pleas of Dada Jashan Vaswani. He exhorts that Sindhis should not forget their mother tongue and that we must speak Sindhi, at least in our homes. Other Sindhi saints can also impress upon the Sindhi populace to talk in Sindhi and in this way we shall certainly be able to preserve our spoken Sindhi.
- Jawrhani:* Dada, I conclude by thanking you for the tremendous work you have done for the Sindhi community in India and Dubai.
- Murij:* Thanks.