

Dr. Kartar Lalwani Ph.D

Director- 'VITABIOTICS' UK
Businessman and Philanthropist



One of the greatest Sindhi poets, Shah Abdul Lateef's 'Rasalo' contains a musical note, "Sur Samundi", which is replete with instances of hard work, intelligence, education and various other qualities of the Sindhis. During times, when traveling a few miles was considered a challenge, Sindhis ventured thousands of miles away from home on trading expeditions to the four corners of the globe and had trade relations with Sumair and Akkad (present day Iraq). That is why one meets Sindhis in all regions of the world. Wherever they settled, besides attaining great success in business, they also earned a great deal of respect on account of their honesty and fair dealing.

Today, we meet one such person, Mr. Kartar Lalwani, who has graced us with his presence, having travelled all the way from the United Kingdom.

Jawhrani: Kartarji, we welcome you warmly from the core of our heart. Let us know to which area of Sindh, you belonged to originally?

Kartar: We belong to Karachi, where I was born in 1931.

Jawhrani: What was your family business there?

Kartar: My grandfather was a railway employee, while my dad had a chemist shop. It was named J. Tirth & Co., and was established in 1920. When our business grew large, we began manufacturing medicines in 1935. I studied in Model High School, Karachi and after partition, when we came to Bombay, I completed my matriculation from Sindhi Premier High School and later on, I joined Jai Hind College, Bombay.

Jawhrani: When did you migrate from Sindh?

Kartar: We came to India in 1947 along with other Sindhis.

Jawhrani: Have you studied Sindhi in the Arabic script?

Kartar: Of course! I can very well read and write Arabic-Sindhi. After completing my studies from Jai Hind College, Bombay, I received my degree in Pharmacy from Ahmedabad and then I proceeded to London for further studies. From there, I went to Bonn, Germany to pursue my doctorate.

Jawhrani: What was the subject for your doctorate?

Kartar: 'Pharmaceutical Chemistry', was the subject of my research.

Jawhrani: The partition and subsequent large scale uprooting of Sindhis effected the lives of all Sindhis to some extent. Was your family also affected?

Kartar: We were certainly impacted, but to a lesser extent. We had to leave all our business and assets behind. The Sikhs were faced with a greater threat, as the Muslims who migrated from the undivided Punjab considered Sikhs their prime targets.

Jawhrani: In which part of India did you initially settle?

Kartar: In Bombay, as my father had earlier transferred some savings and also purchased a flat at Colaba.

Jawhrani: What was the attitude of other Sindhis of India. Did they help you?

Kartar: Morally yes. Nanik Motwani and other Sindhis welcomed every incoming Sindhi. But generally, Sindhis didn't receive any great

assistance inspite of the fact that they sacrificed the maximum at the time of independence.

Jawhrani: Were the promises made by our political leaders actually fulfilled?

Kartar: For namesake only. At that time I was 16 years old and quite active in politics. I kept myself abreast by reading newspapers. We used to travel all the way to Ulhasnagar from Colaba to help the Sindhis to settle down.

Jawhrani: Can you recollect anything about those refugee camps?

Kartar: Sindhis were housed in old military barracks of Ulhasnagar, meant for lower class army personnel. I saw for myself the depressing condition of Sindhis. The most educated and civilized community was struggling for its very survival. At that time, the literacy rate of Sindhis was 95% compared to the average literacy rate of 25% in India. We were the real sufferers. Completely uprooted!

Jawhrani: When did you go to London?

Kartar: Initially, I intended to come back from London after the completion of my studies to join my father in the drug manufacturing business. However, after my doctorate, as I was keen to do further research, I needed some more time and stayed back in Germany. After some time my brother also joined me. My parents followed us after winding up the business in 1962-63.

Jawhrani: Do you have any business interest in India, at present?

Kartar: I was the first Indian to manufacture medicines in the United Kingdom in 1965. We spread our business outside England too and opened another factory in Nigeria in 1970. This process of expansion brought us back to Bombay, where we established a factory in 1980.

Jawhrani: What type of medicines, do you manufacture?

Kartar: We manufacture medicines which are also manufactured by many others, but we were the first to introduce a sugar-free cough syrup in India which even diabetic patients could consume. We also introduced a sugar-free antacid, which earlier contained aluminum compounds, a harmful constituent which harmed the brain and affected libido as well. We also make various vitamin preparations to improve general health and keep ailments at bay. I manufacture fifteen medicines in the UK, six of which are already

number one in that country.

Jawhrani: I have heard that some of the products made by you in India are also marketed in England. Is that true?

Kartar: Yes. There are five products, developed in India and marketed in England. We have another twenty-five products and each one of them is unique. Six of our leading preparations in UK are used by women during pregnancy to take care of calcium deficiency, skin care, hair loss etc. These products are officially recognized as leading medicines by the authorities in the UK. We even received the Queen's Award for Excellence, for these products in England.

Jawhrani: Any other awards conferred on you?

Kartar: I have received several awards, one was for business leadership, another for science from the Ministry of Science. One of our medicine is used for the treatment of HIV. It was tested by a hospital in London and when, after three years trial in a government hospital it was cleared for commercial usage, it made world news in Aids Journal.

Jawhrani: Can it prevent AIDS?

Kartar: It can slow down the ill-effects of AIDS and improve the health of the patient, so that the body can fight back. An amount of 160 million was spent on trials, which was borne by Nestle Foundation, which also had the honour of naming it. Another award 'Asian of the year' was also bestowed on me, two years back. My son is also a scientist at Oxford, the youngest professor of medicine at Oxford and head of T.B. Department. His research in the eradication of T.B. has catapulted him way ahead of me and brought him in world news. He has been interviewed by B.B.C. News T.V. channel several times. The Indian High Commission had also conferred an Award of "Scientist of the Year" on him, just last week. We are both working together, in the field of research.

Jawhrani: How do people outside India look upon Sindhis?

Kartar: With utmost respect. They hold Sindhis in high esteem for their culture, presentation, business acumen, social outlook and professional work. A Sindhi has become head of a medical association in UK. Sindhis enjoy high respect in that country.

Jawhrani: How do NRIs view Indian Sindhis?

Kartar: They love Indian Sindhis. The recent problem of Ulhasnagar

Sindhis, moved them a lot. Everyone was concerned about their fate. We were lucky to have Ram Jethmalani to intercede for the community. He is very popular and respected among Sindhis, a selfless person, a person with a sacrificing nature.

Jawhrani: Have you instituted any organization for progress of Sindhi language and culture in London?

Kartar: Sindhi Association of UK is the leading organization in London and another one is Sindhi Nari Sabha. Both of them have been active since the last twenty five-thirty years.

Jawhrani: What are their main activities - their aims and objects?

Kartar: They promote Sindhi culture among other non-resident Indians. We also invite members of the British Parliament and work earnestly in this respect. People over there consider me to be a Sikh and not a Sindhi, but I emphasize upon my Sindhi lineage and tell them that Sindhis are the most cultured and straight forward people.

Jawhrani: Have you faced problems in matrimonial alliances due to your having settled overseas?

Kartar: Normally, we have alliances in India, specifically in Bombay. However, at times we may opt for Sindhis settled in Dubai, Hong Kong, Japan or wherever Sindhis are settled, but always within our community. Inter-caste marriage would not count for more than five percent.

Jawhrani: Which Sindhi organizations are aided by you and what are their activities?

Kartar: My main activities are confined to the United Kingdom. But I do take interest in International Sindhi Sammelans, which are aimed at raising awareness among the Sindhis of the world. We also participate in our festivals, like Cheti Chand, Diwali in London.

Jawhrani: Generally do you often have get togethers in U.K.?

Kartar: We meet a lot. Sindhis of UK are united and love each other. Sindhis of UK as well as Sindhis in Nigeria and I have quite a good influence on them.

Jawhrani: You, being a Sindhi Sikh, believe in the philosophy of Guru Granth Saheb. What does it teach us?

Kartar: Sikhism besides Punjab, influenced Sindh to a great extent as its

teachings correspond with the nature and culture of Sufis. The philosophy propounded by Guru Granth Saheb and Sufi Saints, like Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai, is quite similar. These similar philosophies help Sindhis to understand Guru Nanik, though we are also influenced by the teachings of other nine gurus and finally Guru Granth Saheb. Shah Latif unfortunately, didn't leave any heir to his seat.

Jawhrani: Do Indian Sindhis lack leadership?

Kartar: It is a matter of great regret that despite being in the forefront in other streams of life, we have not been able to find the right political leadership. Just one Ram Jethmalani who has sacrificed a lot. Though his regular charges are a million rupees a day, he has been helping Sindhis free of cost and he has helped many even without disclosing his identity. I think, every Sindhi should be proud of him.

Jawhrani: Was there a historic movement to unite the Sindhis of the world on a common platform some time back?

Kartar: Towards this Ram Jethmalani has constituted 'Forum for Social and Political Rights of Sindhis'. It is a right step in the right direction. I think you Ram, and Ranjit Butani are also involved with Ram Jethmalani, in this venture.

Jawhrani: Do you think, that the Sindhis of the world would unite under this banner?

Kartar: I am very optimistic. Because, the man behind it is a selfless person. He doesn't have any personal agenda. We needed such a forum, since long. Actually, the time taken for its inception was also due to his shyness and reluctance. We really goaded him during the recent International Sindhi Sammelan in Mumbai to lead us, to make an association, which he agreed, after a lot of persuasion.

Jawhrani: Do you think these Sammelans can help us save our language or do we need to put in more efforts?

Kartar: Sindhis are very charitable. Even the establishment of Ravindra Nath Tagore's Shanti Niketan, was due to many Sindhis, although Sindhis were a minority community and small in number. Even Netaji Subhash Chander Bose was helped by the Sindhis of Singapore, Hong Kong and Afghanistan, morally, as well as

financially. I feel these Sammelans can definitely bring about unity among the Sindhis on a global scale which would benefit the community and go a long way towards saving our language.

Jawhrani: A personal question finally. Tell me about the nature of relations between Princess Diana and your brother Gulu Lalwani?

Kartar: They were very good friends for one and half year. She was involved with Dodi Al Fayed, an Egyptian, only for 6 weeks prior to her demise. Earlier, she used to visit Gulu's home and was very friendly with his children, a fact which was even reported in the English newspapers.

Jawhrani: Isn't your family also friendly with Queen Elizabeth?

Kartar: You are right. The Queen herself, her husband, the Duke of Edinburgh and Prince Charles, too. We are often invited to parties held in their palace. This way we maintain a close relationship with them.

Jawhrani: I offer my gratitude for sharing your views, on Sindhis living overseas.

Kartar: Thank you.