

Dr. Indira Hinduja

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There are some who read history, others who record history and there are a handful who create history. The works of few geniuses - who work selflessly creating a tremendous impact on humanity at large are mentioned in glorious words in the annals of history.

One such Sindhi with us today is Dr. Indira Hinduja who is totally dedicated to her chosen profession and whose accomplishments have not only brought glory to India, but have made Sindhis all over the world, hold their heads with pride.

Jawhrani: Doctor Indiraji, we welcome you from the core of our heart. At the outset let us know about your place of birth in Sindh and about the occupation of your elders.

Dr. Indira: I was born in Shikarpur. Due to business interests my elders visited Karachi often, but mostly we lived in Shikarpur.

Jawhrani: What was your father's business?

Dr. Indira: We were in the textile business. A joint business between my father and uncle. We had one branch at Karachi, but the sudden and untimely Partition ruined it.

Jawhrani: What was the effect of partition?

Dr. Indira: The partition had a tremendous effect on our family. Though I was just one and half years old at that time, whatever I have heard from my elders has filled me with a sense of pride for my family. The way they faced difficulties; their fortitude and courage. When I think about it my respect for them gets greatly enhanced.

Jawhrani: Where were you educated?

Dr. Indira: From Shikarpur we went to Karachi and from there to Bombay. My father had a friend at Kalbadevi, in Bombay. Initially, we lived with them for sometime. Later, my brother and father went abroad for business purposes and rest of the family shifted to Poona and from there to Belgaum. I attended school and college at Belgaum, but later I went to Bombay for my medical education.

Jawhrani: When did you complete your studies?

Dr. Indira: I completed my M.B.B.S. in 1967, and Internship in 1968. Then I did my M.D. in 1973.

Jawhrani: Which hospital have you been associated with?

Dr. Indira: I completed my M.B.B.S. and M.D. from Topiwala National Medical College, attached to Nair Hospital, Bombay. Then, I went to KEM Hospital and G. S. Medical college, Bombay, for higher studies. I did my research work in In-Vitro Fertilization from the Institute of Research & Reproduction, in collaboration with KEM Hospital. This institute is a branch of ICMR.(Indian Council of Medical Research)

Jawhrani: You were the first to successfully complete research on Test Tube Babies. Can you tell us something about it?

Dr. Indira: I was not the first to do so. When I was doing my M.D., research on

Test Tube Baby was already in progress and the first such baby was born in 1978. After I completed my studies, I felt convinced, "We can also do it!" I began collecting all relevant literature and studied about it extensively. It became an obsession with me. I was literally possessed by the idea. I was fortunate to enlist the support of IRR, situated just across KEM Hospital. Our first experiment was a joint effort between KEM and IRR. We did our research at IRR, for which we got co-operation of the patients of KEM Hospital. Our hard work eventually paid off and we were successful. We started our project in 1980-82. We couldn't use human patients initially. We had to work on animals, and it was only after we were successful and obtained permission from Ethics Committee that I could experiment with human beings. We tasted our first success on 6th August 1986, when an infertile woman delivered a healthy baby. Thereafter, more than 4000 babies have been born.

Jawhrani: Are people savouring the fruit of your research or are they still apprehensive?

Dr. Indira: No, it's not like that now. Childless couples are ready to do anything for a child. Women are ready to die for being able to conceive. It was the same in the past and remains the same at present. In the initial stages it was experiment, but now it is well documented and we can do it with confidence. Now-a-days, students take it up as a part of their curriculum for their M.B.B.S. degree and people in general are also quite aware of it. Sometimes, they even offer suggestions.

Jawhrani: Is government supportive of further research in this field?

Dr. Indira: When I used to carry on research, all the expenses were borne by KEM hospital and ICMR, both of them government bodies. Everything was developed locally and with limited resources and I didn't have to go abroad even once. Initially, all was done free of charge, but unfortunately now, government hospitals have stopped doing so. However, efforts are ongoing for further research, somehow or other.

Jawhrani: How much does it cost to have a test tube baby?

Dr. Indira: Presently, it is done by private hospitals and they charge in the vicinity of seventy to eighty thousand rupees, all-inclusive. However pregnancy is not guaranteed.

Jawhrani: What is the success rate?

Dr. Indira: Initially, when we started it was 15 to 20%, but now-a-days it has improved to between 40 to 50%.

Jawhrani: Is the 'GIFT' technique also one of the procedures?

Dr. Indira: In the case of test tube baby, fertilization takes place by the union of the male sperm with the female egg, outside the physical body, on account of the absence of fallopian tubes in the woman. And after fertilization the fertilized egg is re-inserted into the uterus (womb). This is the basic principle but procedures may vary a bit.

The difference in the 'GIFT' technology, that you mentioned, is that the fertilized egg, instead of being re-inserted into the uterus is placed in the fallopian tubes. Just the location changes, and after a duration of about 4 days it moves to the uterus, increasing the possibility of success.

But if the fallopian tube is unhealthy, or too narrow at some point, there are chances of abnormal fertilization, which is difficult to diagnose. So there are pros as well as cons to this technique.

Jawhrani: You have taken birth in the Sindhi community. What are your views on Sindhi culture?

Dr. Indira: I am sorry to say that I know very little about Sindhi culture. It may be due to lack of knowledge or my own ignorance about it.

Jawhrani: Were you educated in the English medium?

Dr. Indira: Yes, for the most part my education was in the English medium. But initially, when I was at Belgaum, I was admitted to a Marathi medium municipal school.

Jawhrani: Was it due to non-availability of good schools or reasons of affordability?

Dr. Indira: We couldn't afford at that time. The Marathi medium school was easily accessible to us and I could go there on foot.

Jawhrani: Can we say your determination and will power was the reason behind your success?

Dr. Indira: I am not ashamed of having been educated in municipal schools. Rather, I am proud of having succeeded, despite being educated in a municipal school. As I have already told you I have never gone abroad to learn and whatever I could do was done by reading and experimenting on my own, and I am proud of it.

Jawhrani: You speak Sindhi very well. If provided with means for learning the script, would you be able to spare some time for that?

Dr. Indira: Definitely, I would certainly try to learn Sindhi script. Sparing time is in ones own hands. It is the desire which must be present. I have this desire so it will not take me too much time to learn.

Jawhrani: Present day generation of Sindhis feel ashamed of calling themselves Sindhis. What is your opinion about this?

Dr. Indira: It is most unfortunate that they feel ashamed. I'm referring to my family - we are Bhaibands, we had buildings there, and whenever a child was born, a new building was constructed. When we left everything in Sindh we didn't have enough for two square meals. But, inspite of that we are now at a stage where we are all well to do. This clearly proves that by the dint of our determination, will power, self reliance and hardwork we Sindhis have reached the present position. How can anyone be ashamed of this community?

Jawhrani: What should be done in this respect? Don't you think that it will have serious repercussions on the fate of our language?

Dr. Indira: It looks like our language is inching towards extinction.

Jawhrani: Do you agree with what some writers predict that Sindhi language will be wiped out within the next twenty five years from India?

Dr. Indira: Everyone is cajoled to learn French, German or English, but no one insists that we learn our own Sindhi or Sanskrit language.

Jawhrani: If Sindhi is lost, our own identity is lost! This is truly sad. Don't you think it is imperative upon our present generation to speak in Sindhi with our children because only this can save our language from extinction in India?

Dr. Indira: Everyone should contribute to whatever extent. We should educate our younger generation about our language and our roots, so that the young generation feels proud of being Sindhi.

Jawhrani: What is the role of Sindhi mothers in this respect?

Dr. Indira: Others would mock at us, if we cannot converse in our mother tongue, while striving to learn alien languages like German, French or English.

Jawhrani: Have you ever gone through Sindhi literature, some which is even translated into English?

Dr. Indira: Unfortunately not. I have not studied Sindhi literature and whatever I know about Sindhi and Sindh has come from my parents.

Jawhrani: Finally a personal question. Why have you remained unmarried?

Dr. Indira: It was my personal choice. Everyone looks at life from his or her own perspective. I thought, I wouldn't be able to play that part satisfactorily. I was more inclined towards my profession and I wanted to achieve something. We were very rich in Sindh, but after migration were living from hand to mouth. Probably, another reason was my parents regarded their three daughters as a huge burden on their shoulders - to settle them and get them married. I wanted to share their burden and had a strong desire to prove myself no different from my brothers. Although, my parents never made me feel that way. I wanted to achieve something, and when I cleared my M.B.B.S., and then M.D., I could very well see a glint of hope and happiness in the eyes of my parents. That spark in their eyes provided me with a high and I was very much content with that. I thought, that I too was somebody and had proven myself.

Jawhrani: Don't you feel nowadays people don't differentiate between a daughter and a son?

Dr. Indira: Even in our days my parents didn't differentiate, but left it entirely into my hands to decide about my future. They didn't interfere in my life, at all.

Jawhrani: Doctor Indiraji, thank you for sparing your time and for sharing your life experiences and achievements, in the medical field with us. Your insights were truly helpful.

Dr. Indira: Thank you.