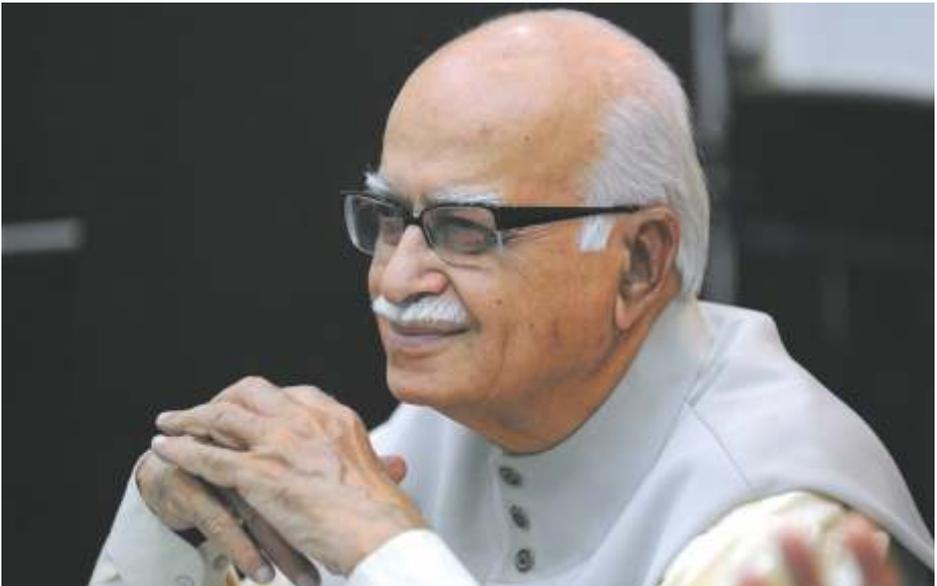


L. K. Advani

Former President, Bhartiya Janta Party
Former Deputy Prime Minister of India
Leader of Opposition (Lok-Sabha)



It is often believed that one takes birth with a pre-determined number of breaths and bids adieu to the world after undergoing the karmic cycles. Some lives are however, special because they touch many others, thus reserving a place for themselves in the annals of history.

Sindhis are the descendents of the great Sufi saints. Revered saints like Shah, Sachal and Sami believed that along with devotion to the Lord, one should also do full justice to one's duties and obligations towards family, society, and country. Sindhis, keeping this in mind have always performed their Karma and carried out their duties faithfully. No one knows which specific duty or Karma carried out at a particular time will become a moment of truth.

Shri L. K. Advani joined the Sangh along with his friend Murli Mukhi in 1942 and that has become a part of contemporary Indian history. No one could have visualized that this young teenager of 14 would get so passionately involved with the RSS and one day become the front runner of its activities. Dedication to the ideology of RSS, inspiring principles, strong determination, lasting faith, and passion for serving the nation, has made him a favourite of the masses. The beginning of the 21st century brought untold happiness to the entire Sindhi community when their dearest and endearing Sindhi brother L. K. Advani became the Deputy Prime Minister of the largest democracy in the world. Today we meet this august personality who has contributed many golden pages to history, whose capabilities and competence has made all Sindhis proud

Shri L. K. Advani.

Jawhrani: First of all let me begin by asking you about your ancestors. Which part of Sindh do your ancestors come from?

L. K. Advani: We lived in Hyderabad Sindh. Amils, as you would know mostly resided in Hyderabad, Sindh.

Jawhrani: What was their occupation there?

L. K. Advani: My grandfather Dharamdas was the Head Master of a school and also a Sanskrit scholar. My father and one of my uncles were in business in Karachi and Hyderabad, Sindh. My eldest uncle Gobindram, was in the Civil Service. He was the Deputy Collector of Hyderabad. The second uncle, Parasram, was a lawyer. And my third uncle, Gopaldas, was a professor of science. In all they were five brothers.

Jawhrani: Where were you educated?

L. K. Advani: I studied at St. Patrick's High School in Karachi. Later I completed Inter Science at D. G. National College Hyderabad, from where I went to the Bombay University to pursue a degree in Law.

Jawhrani: Do you have any memories of your school and college days?

L. K. Advani: I was very much attached to my school, which laid the foundation for my future. After partition, I visited Pakistan twice, once in 1978 and more recently in 2005. When the High Commissioner in Pakistan enquired about the places I would like to visit there, there was no doubt in my mind that one of these would certainly be St. Patrick's High School in Karachi.

Most of the students in my school were Christians, besides a few Jews. Decades later when I went to Israel for the first time, I inquired about my classmates, and luckily I could locate one! We were able to connect with each other over phone and talking with him was going down memory lane. It was a great feeling to be able to connect with a childhood friend after almost half a century!

Another instance that I recollect relates to my visit to Pakistan in 1978, when the Government of Pakistan tried to locate my principal and the teachers who taught me. It was indeed a memorable day when my principal Fr. Modestine and six teachers came to meet me. In fact, a big function was organized to facilitate the meeting. When I visited Pakistan again in 2005, unfortunately none of them were alive. I also got the opportunity to visit my ancestral home which is now occupied by its current residents.

What gave me happiness was that they have still preserved a bed that we used in those days.

When General Musharaf visited Delhi in 2005, he brought a photostat copy of the school register along with a photograph of the school. He presented an album to me which carried the scanned impression from the register of the school that mentioned against my name "Admitted in 1936."

Jawhrani: How did you feel visiting Sindh after such a long time?

L. K. Advani: Of course I felt very good. It is obvious that visiting one's ancestral home where one was brought up is always a matter of immense joy and pleasure.

Jawhrani: How did your involvement with the Sangh begin and who were your companions then?

L. K. Advani: This happened in 1942, when I was 14 years old. I had passed my matriculation and just joined college. The classes had not yet begun, but we used to play on the tennis court of that college. Among those who used to play with me, was a youth by the name Murli Mukhi. Once, while the game was still on, he abruptly said that he was leaving. I asked him where he was headed in such a hurry and he replied that he had joined the Shakha and he had to reach on time. He asked me to join him. I declined, but insisted that he at least complete the game before he went. He did not relent and left the tennis court in a hurry. For the next three days he kept on persuading me to go along with him and ultimately, I gave in. This was the beginning of my connection with the Sangh.

Jawhrani: What was the main issue that attracted you to the RSS?

L. K. Advani: In the early days of Buddhism in Sindh, it was believed that we should reciprocate by offering something to the society that gave us everything. Since the country was not independent, it was expected of the people to strive for its independence. People had reason to believe that just by passing resolutions nothing would happen. An organization of youth, who were ready to sacrifice everything for this cause, was thus formed. It was expected that those who joined the organization were inspired by patriotic feelings, were highly disciplined and of high moral character. All these characteristics had a great impact on me. I was attracted to this RSS ideology of nationalism and inspired by its emphasis on this aspect.

Jawhrani: Were there any restrictions in those days?

L. K. Advani: Yes, there were restrictions on holding meetings in the open grounds. Martial law was enforced in Sindh during those days. A person named Ram Kripalani, had a large terrace in his house, and all Shakha activities used to be conducted there.

Jawhrani: Did the RSS ideology differ from the Congress ideology then, or were they similar?

L. K. Advani: Gandhiji had visited Sindh and praised Sindhi leaders immensely. Congress leaders like Jairamdas Doulatram, Prof. N. R. Malkani and Prof. Ghanshyam were active Congress workers. Today people will find it strange that during pre-partition days, Congress leaders didn't despise the RSS. Each party or group made its contribution towards achieving independence for the country.

Jawhrani: Was it because the ideology of Congress and RSS weren't any different?

L. K. Advani: Yes, it was not the same; but both were very patriotic, both wanted that the country be set free from the British yoke. The RSS however felt that the path chosen by the Congress would not succeed in achieving independence. At the same time, the RSS also felt that devout nationalists like Bhagat Singh, who had chosen the path of violence, would also not be successful.

I still recollect the Quit India Movement in 1942, when Gandhiji was arrested. Many from the RSS would participate daily in the movement, and some were also imprisoned. Unfortunately today, the relationship between the Congress and the BJP or RSS is very different when compared to the pre-independence era. Let me share an interesting fact, Prof. N. R. Malkani who was a senior Congress leader in Sindh, and also the Congress leader in the Sindh Assembly, had told his younger brother Kewal Malkani that RSS was a good organization and he could join it. Malkani not only joined the RSS, but also became the editor of the party's journal and a great leader of the BJP. He was also a member of the Rajya Sabha and later became the Governor of Pondicherry.

Jawhrani: So can we say with pride that Sindhis did participate in the freedom struggle via the RSS and the Congress?

L. K. Advani: Yes of course, there are no two opinions about it.

Jawhrani: Both Mahatma Gandhi and Subhash Chandra Bose participated in the freedom movement, but adopted different paths. Which, according to you, was more appropriate?

L. K. Advani: I feel that both of them, along with other erstwhile leaders are all now a part of history and although people do compare and make statements about them today, is fine but fact remain that they all deserve utmost respect.

Jawhrani: Were you imprisoned at any time during the freedom movement in Sindh?

L. K. Advani: Not in Sindh. When I was fourteen, I joined the RSS, and for the next six years I dedicated myself completely to the RSS. After independence I was imprisoned several times. Immediately after partition, the RSS organization was banned. That was the first time I was sent to jail.

Jawhrani: Was the thought of Partition mooted after independence or was it pre-planned?

L. K. Advani: It was planned before. You can say independence and partition occurred simultaneously.

Jawhrani: Who, in your view, were really responsible for the partition?

L. K. Advani: It was mainly the Muslim League that wanted partition.

Jawhrani: It is believed that the resolution regarding partition was not passed in the Sindh Assembly.

L. K. Advani: It was not the question of Sindh. The Muslim league and the British both decided on this issue. Congress was also against partition. All the Hindus in Pakistan were against partition, but then violence and other factors combined together and led to partition.

Jawhrani: Was violence the main factor that lead to the division of the country?

L. K. Advani: No it was not so. But because of the violence, the Congress surrendered. But it is believed that the British had already decided that before they left the country they would divide the nation.

Jawhrani: But then what about RSS?

L. K. Advani: Sadly, RSS in 1947 was not strong enough to prevent the tragedy of Partition.

Jawhrani: That means partition was inevitable. But some Sindhis do believe that if our leaders wanted they could have avoided the partition.

L. K. Advani: Had the leaders been keen then at least Tharparkar could have been saved. In those days, Tharparkar had a Hindu majority and could have easily been made part of India. But nothing happened.

Jawhrani: Do you believe that injustice has been done to the Sindhi community?

L. K. Advani: No. It cannot be said that injustice was done to the Sindhi community.

Jawhrani: Was not the Sindhi community promised that it would get similar rights and privileges in India?

L. K. Advani: No one had promised any rights or privileges to Sindhis in India. On the contrary Gandhiji had told Sindhis not to leave Sindh. But that was simply impossible.

Jawhrani: Where in India, did you land after partition?

L. K. Advani: Immediately after partition, I came to Delhi and thereafter for 10 years I moved to Rajasthan.

Jawhrani: Were there any refugee camps in Rajasthan?

L. K. Advani: I didn't stay in the refugee camps those days. I did not even stay with my family. Right from the days in Karachi, I was a strong supporter and propagator of RSS and even in Rajasthan I was greatly involved with RSS activities.

Jawhrani: It is believed that migrant Sindhis went through lots of hardships in refugee camps; did your family also face similar conditions?

L. K. Advani: No. My family did not experience any refugee camp life. My grandmother who was about 80 years in 1947 expressed her desire to my father to spend the last days of her life in Kashi, Banaras, considering the uncertain times, so my family initially stayed in Kashi for about three to four years.

Jawhrani: When did you leave Sindh?

L. K. Advani: I left in September 1947 and my family members must have left in either October or November 1947.

Jawhrani: At what point of time did you actively enter the Indian Political scene and how?

L. K. Advani: I joined politics in India in 1951, when the Jana Sangh was established by Dr. Mukherjee. Along with me about 20 to 25 propagators of RSS were also asked to join politics.

Jawhrani: Who has been your mentor or guru in the political arena?

L. K. Advani: Shri Deendayal Upadhaya. In Sindh, when I joined RSS it was Rajpal Puri. My book "My Country My Life" is dedicated to them.

Jawhrani: You are among the few who have participated in every General Election since 1952. What is the difference between the elections of 50's and 60's and those contested now?

L. K. Advani: There is a huge difference. In the beginning, other than the Congress there wasn't any political party who could even dream of coming to power. Jana Sangh and BJP played a major role in breaking the monopoly of the Congress.

Jawhrani: Many regional parties in various states have also cropped up, who have now an important role to play in the formation of the government at the Center. Has this been beneficial?

L. K. Advani: Yes, the change has come in the right direction but at the same time I feel that there is a general lack of vision among political activists. One does feel bad at heart. When we entered politics in those days, it was not with the sole and selfish objective of achieving something for ourselves, but for serving the people. It was not to get something but on the contrary to give away something. In those days, politics was regarded as a service, and a mission. I do believe that when India was under the British Rule, there was this desire for freedom in the mind of every youth. That was the spirit that created a mission. I don't say that politics should be like it was during pre 1947, i.e., like a mission, but it should at least be an honourable profession in which professional integrity counts the most. The collapse of this professional integrity is most hurting.

Jawhrani: You have yourself been a journalist. Today, one finds media wielding tremendous power and clout, so much so that it is interfering in every field, including politics. What do you have to say on that?

L. K. Advani: There is no harm in interference or being influenced by it but the

deterioration in values, especially after the coming of television, is something that is quite painful and distressing.

Jawhrani: Coming back to the Sindhi community, is the demand for a union territory or stateless government justified?

L. K. Advani: I am not in favour of this. I believe that had Sindhis been concentrated in one place then it would have been a different question. But Sindhis, being a business community, have spread far and wide. In fact, wherever I go, I do pose this question to some. For instance, when I went to Coimbatore, I asked a Sindhi there the same question, but he flatly refused. Similarly, those who are staying in Assam or elsewhere would also not agree to leave their home, hearths and livelihood. I am of the view that whatever the Sindhis have achieved they have done so on the basis of their own merit. The same can be said of the Parsi community which has also achieved everything on merit. I firmly believe that we should do whatever we can achieve on the basis of our merit, without the help of the State.

Jawhrani: Many Sindhis feel that we should be granted a landless state, and many organizations are demanding such a state and the rights of statehood.

L. K. Advani: I am not a supporter of this view.

Jawhrani: After Partition, the Maharaja of Kutch granted land and Bhai Pratap had the dream of rebuilding Sindh over there. Was that the right decision, considering that it was a barren land, infested with scorpions and snakes?

L. K. Advani: This was no excuse. Basically, the trading community which has to do business would go and settle wherever they get land.

Jawhrani: But they didn't have the required infrastructure and other much needed logistic support to start the business there.

L. K. Advani: I don't agree with this. Let's take the example of Sindhis settled in Assam. I am sure if you give them the offer to come and settle anywhere else they won't agree.

Jawhrani: Do you mean to say that the decision taken by Bhai Pratap at that time was correct?

L. K. Advani: Yes, it was correct; there is no doubt about it. But, the fact of the matter is that not many Sindhis are left there, as many of their

children have settled overseas. It's only for namesake that we can say that Sindhis are there. Now let us take the example of Ulhasnagar also. In the beginning majority of the population there comprised of Sindhis, but now, more than 60% are non-Sindhis. Slowly and steadily all the areas are getting a mixed population. Let's look at cosmopolitan Bombay, where the number of non-Marathi speaking people is more than that of Marathi speaking. The demographic profile of Delhi has also completely changed over a period of time

Jawhrani: Did the fact of your origin from Sindh in Pakistan have any impact on your political career?

L. K. Advani: No. When I was in Pakistan, every one used to wonder, how I had managed to become the deputy Prime Minister of India, being a Sindhi. They asked me this question at a small gathering, where the representatives of all parties were present. They said, "You are a Sindhi, born and brought up in Karachi, wasn't this fact a hindrance in your political career?" I replied in the negative and told them that it was for them to analyze this. I told them that, be it a Sindhi, a Punjabi or a Bengali, whoever went to India was absorbed there. Dr. Manmohan Singh who is the Prime Minister today hails from West Punjab, (a part of Pakistan today) which means that even his origins are in Pakistan. While I had become the Deputy Prime Minister, in Bengal, a person like Jyoti Basu from Bengal (now Bangladesh) had also earned prominence in Politics. Indian society and Indian ethos is assimilative. Pakistani ethos and Pakistani society, on the other hand, is exclusivist to such an extent that the Muslims who went there after Partition, from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Maharashtra, still feel the heat even after more than six decades. In Pakistan, Punjab dominates. The Sindhis feel left out. In fact, I told them that they need to contemplate on this issue.

Jawhrani: What are your views on the controversy regarding the Sindhi script?

L. K. Advani: Once, I saw a book, on the cover of which, was written 'English to Sindhi Dictionary'. I picked up the book, glanced through it and asked my father "What is this, outside it is mentioned English to Sindhi Dictionary, but the contents are in Hindi, there are no Sindhi words inside." He replied that earlier this was the Sindhi script!

Jawhrani: By earlier, do you mean about 100 to 150 years ago?

L. K. Advani: Yes, about 200 years ago.

Jawhrani: The future generations may not know the original Sindhi script. They would be able to read only the Hindi and Roman script. I feel that the Sindhi literature which has been written in the Arabic script may go to waste as no one will be able to read it. What do you have to say on this?

L. K. Advani: I don't think, it will go waste, as in Pakistan they are still using the Arabic script.

Jawhrani: I still remember Gobind Malhi, A.J. Utaam and Kirat had strongly objected to the Devnagri script and wanted that the Arabic script should continue.

L. K. Advani: Yes, many writers objected to Devnagri for reasons best know to them.

Jawhrani: There was a time when 'Hindustan' newspaper started publishing half a page in the Devnagri script, on the fourth page of their newspaper.

L. K. Advani: This happened because of Dada Jairamdas who was strongly in favor of the Devnagri script. Even we were in favor of the same. The inclusion of Sindhi in the Schedule of languages in the Constitution was due to our party's efforts.

Jawhrani: Exactly, it was possible because of your efforts along with Shri Atal Bihariji. The irony, however, is that despite its inclusion in the Eighth Schedule, Sindhi language has not been given that much importance at the government level. For example, on the currency note all languages reflected in the Eighth schedule appear, except Sindhi, which is rather unfair. On the 26th January, Republic Day Parade also one finds an absence of a Sindhi tableau. What is your reaction on this?

L. K. Advani: After all, what is the population of Sindhis? There are very few of them and that too dispersed all over. But if we unitedly approach the concerned authorities, they would definitely consider our demands.

Jawhrani: Taking you back again to the partition of the country, who in your view, started the riots, the Muslims residing there or the Muslims who migrated from India?

L. K. Advani: In those days, riots did not occur in Sindh to the extent they did in Punjab, in the frontier and other provinces. One did hear of murders in Sindh but no mass riots really took place in Sindh. However, after January 1948, riots did take place in Sindh, but local Sindhi Muslims were not as much involved in those riots, as in Punjab.

Jawhrani: Wasn't the Sikh community also targeted to a great extent?

L. K. Advani: Yes, it was because they were easily identifiable.

Jawhrani: According to one school of thought, leaving Sindh was a 'blessing in disguise' for Sindhis. Do you agree?

L. K. Advani: I am also of this view, that had we not left Sindh and come here, we wouldn't have progressed as we have over here.

Jawhrani: What reason would you attribute to this?

L. K. Advani: When a human being is uprooted from his home and hearth, his maximum potential surfaces. One, however, has to have the strength of character and resilience, which one finds aplenty in our community and also Punjabis. I feel, this is lacking to some extent among the migrant Bengalis. Interestingly, even before Partition, our Sindhwaris who left Sindh to far off countries, like Hong Kong and Spain proved their mettle in business. Therefore, it is my firm belief that Sindhis with their qualities of hard work and skills can still do better and they should do so.

Jawhrani: It is felt that after the partition, our language and culture have suffered tremendously.

L. K. Advani: Yes, I agree that our Sindhi language has suffered a great setback but had there been consensus regarding the script the damage would have been less.

Jawhrani: Do you have any suggestions?

L. K. Advani: I keep telling everyone that at least the language should be widely spoken amongst the Sindhi Hindus. The elders should speak with their children in Sindhi.

Jawhrani: Should our Sindhi literature be translated into English or any other language?

L. K. Advani: Not really. The English language won't be of any help in promoting our Sindhi literature.

Jawhrani: Did you participate in sports during your childhood days, and if so, which sporting activities were you interested in?

L. K. Advani: My love in school was cricket! I was not an extraordinary player, but I was an avid listener of A. F. S. Taleyarkhan's radio commentary of Test cricket, Ranji Trophy and the highly popular Bombay Pentangular matches played among the five teams of Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, Europeans and the rest. Each year the final match in the Pentangular Tournament was invariably between the Hindu and Muslim teams. It was fought with the same excitement and passion that we witness these days, when India plays Pakistan. Taleyarkhan's was a legendary voice on radio, and, like many cricket fans, I too was as interested in his style of commentary as in the match. I used to frequently entertain my friends by mimicking his description and analysis of the game. I remember that the only time I bunked school was when, instead of only listening to the radio commentary, I was able to watch the five-day Ranji Trophy final in Karachi between the teams of Sindh and Maharashtra. The Maharashtra team was led by D. B. Deodhar, who lived to the ripe age of one hundred years. In the same match I also watched other great cricketers like Vijay Merchant, Vinoo Mankad, Naomal and M. J. Mubed from the Sindh team.

Jawhrani: It is a well known fact that you are fond of watching Hindi films. Did you ever have any personal interaction with the film industry?

L. K. Advani: I have been a connoisseur of films and also a movie critic during my years with the 'ORGANISER' in the 1960's. I cherish the acquaintances made with many distinguished film personalities during my tenure as Minister of Information and Broadcasting. Amongst them were Raj Kapoor, Dev Anand, Manoj Kumar, Mala Sinha, music composer Jaidev and singer Penaz Masani. I especially treasure my meeting with the legendary moviemaker Satyajit Ray, whose realistic and sensitive Bengali films, had already earned international renown. I had seen nearly all his films and admired his work greatly.

Jawhrani: Dada, you have lived your entire life on the basis of your ideology and principles, Have you ever felt lonesome?

L. K. Advani: I have lived my entire life in the pursuit of my ideology and always remained steadfast to my principles and never compromised on

this path. Even during the time when false charges were leveled against me, I immediately resigned from the Lok Sabha and announced at a press conference that I would not go back to the Parliament until the false allegations were struck down by the court of law.

Jawhrani: What has been the contribution of your wife and children in your success?

L. K. Advani: Enormous! I always say that my two strengths are my ideological family i.e. the RSS, the Jana Sangh or the BJP and my personal family. And both have empowered me incredibly. My wife Kamla is a great support and till date I don't know my income or the income tax that I have to pay. From food to finance, she looks after everything.

Jawhrani: Lastly, do you have any message for the Sindhi community of the world, specially for the younger generation which can enlighten their paths in future.

L. K. Advani: This message for Sindhis, even those who were not born in Sindh, but born after partition, is that they should never forget that Sindh was and is a part and parcel of the undivided India to such an extent that today if we are Hindus, the very word Hindu is derived from Sindhu. After the partition, some people told Nehru that Sindh should be deleted from the National Anthem as it was no longer in India. Nehru replied 'How can we leave out Sindh or Sindhu, Hindu has originated from Sindhu.' They should remember this one thing that the whole of India is sacred to us and is our nation and we must contribute to the state and the country, where we reside. However, the main thing is that we should never ever forget that we are Sindhis and despite the fact that we may not know how to read or write Sindhi language, we must definitely speak in Sindhi.

Jawhrani: I am sure that your wonderful message would surely reach our younger generation and I'm certain they would also follow it. Dada, surely the entire Sindhi community the world over would like to see you at the helm of affairs, as the Prime Minister.

L. K. Advani: Ram, I believe that whatever I have achieved in my life is much more than any designation or office that I have held. Thank you.

Jawhrani: Thank you Dada. You have rightly said that whatever Sindhis