

Admiral R. H. Tahiliani (Retd)

Former Chief of Naval Staff,
Former Governor of Sikkim



The fertile and peaceful soil of Sindh has from time immemorial witnessed invasions from across its borders by zealous conquerors who strived to subjugate Sindh and its people.

But the peace-loving Sindhis have time and again overcome all such onslaughts and managed not only to survive but also reach historic heights in all fields - be it education, literature, fine arts, trade and industry, philanthropy and even the armed forces.

We have the honour of having in our midst, someone who has reached the pinnacle of success, making every Sindhi proud - a great son of India, Shri R. H. Tabiliani, former Chief of the Indian Naval Staff, who later went on to become the Governor of Sikkim.

Jawhrani: Sir, please accept our hearty welcome.

Tahiliani: Thank you.

Jawhrani: To begin with, which area of Sindh did your ancestors belong, and what were their activities there?

Tahiliani: I was born in Karachi. In those days my father was studying there, while my grandfather had retired from the postal department. But we originally belong to 'That Bhojraj', which is a small village situated near Mithiani. We used to go to our village frequently and in fact I was admitted to the first standard of primary school in my village. The school had a single teacher, who used to also double up as the village's postmaster. My father, after the completion of his studies also joined the Postal Department. When he was transferred to 'Noshaharo Feroz', we shifted there. Later, my father made up his mind to resign from service. Basically his first love was teaching, therefore he joined a school at 'Tando Allahyar' as Principal. With the passage of time, our family grew and as you are aware the teaching profession is not very remunerative. Hence my father resigned from that service too, and we left Sindh and came to Baroda, where he set up his own business. I was thirteen years old, at that time.

Jawhrani: So you completed the rest of your education in Baroda?

Tahiliani: Yes. I passed my matriculation from Rosary High School, Baroda, which was a missionary school. Then, we came to Bombay and I was admitted to St. Xavier's College. At that time, I got to know about a course in the Indian Navy and I applied for it.

Jawhrani: Can you recall the exact year?

Tahiliani: Yes, it was 1947. At that time, the examinations for permanent commission into the Navy were held only at one centre by Federal Public Service Commission (presently called Union Public Service Commission). That examination was held in Delhi. After that, an interview was held in the month of February and subsequently, I was sent to England for training in the month of March.

Jawhrani: You originally belonged to the aviation sector. How did you come to Navy?

Tahiliani: No. I originally belonged to the Navy. Our Navy decided to have its own aviation wing in 1949, as the Second World War proved

beyond any doubt that naval aviation made a lot of difference in armed conflicts. The attack on Pearl Harbour was made by the Japanese Navy, by aircraft from its aircraft carriers. So when we became independent, our government too wanted its navy to have an aviation wing.

Jawhrani: So, you were trained for the naval aviation wing?

Tahiliani: No, I got that training afterwards. When I came back from England after about fifty-one months, I myself volunteered for aviation training. Later, I was sent to the Indian Air Force Academy, Begumpeth, for advanced training.

Jawhrani: Did the partition affect your family too?

Tahiliani: By the grace of God, our suffering was restricted to the loss of our lands and properties only. However, the death of my father in 1947, was an unfortunate incident.

Jawhrani: A lot of Sindhis post partition, were thrust into Army Barracks and faced severe hardships...

Tahiliani: Fortunately, we were spared this trauma as we had our own rented flat.

Jawhrani: It is said, Indian Navy will always remember R. H. Tahiliani!

Tahiliani: There is always a joint contribution of all Naval personnel.

Jawhrani: Any conflict during your tenure?

Tahiliani: No war was fought during my tenure, however I was lucky, that the Navy acquired new ships including the second aircraft carrier during that time.

Jawhrani: Did you become Governor of Sikkim immediately after your retirement?

Tahiliani: No, not immediately. For two years, after my retirement, I carried on with social work through 'Servants of People's Society'. Later on, when V. P. Singh became Prime Minister, he offered me a gubernatorial post, which I accepted. That is when I was sent to Sikkim as its Governor.

Jawhrani: Do you agree with the present day policies of appointments or removals of Governors?

Tahiliani: No, certainly not. I would rather like apolitical persons to be

appointed as Governors. They should not work as stooges of the party in power at the centre.

Jawhrani: What is your opinion of today's destructive politics?

Tahiliani: I recommended President's Rule in Sikkim, as I felt it a better option in the circumstances prevailing then. On my recommendation, Narasimha Rao called for a cabinet meeting and decided to impose President's Rule in Sikkim.

Jawhrani: What about your 'Transparency International' organization?

Tahiliani: That happened later on. I sent my resignation letter in July, which was accepted in the month of September. The central government appointed Shiv Shankar to relieve me. I came back and rejoined the social organization 'Servants of People's Society'.

Jawhrani: What are the aims and objectives of that Society?

Tahiliani: It was initiated by Lala Lajpat Rai in 1921, and was inaugurated by Mahatma Gandhi himself. It helps the poor and downtrodden. I liked this job. The 'Servants of People's Society' was approached by 'Transparency International' to have one of its chapters in India too and, after this was established in 1997, I was asked to head the organisation.

Jawhrani: Does it have branches all over the world?

Tahiliani: I think it has got more than eighty branches, world over.

Jawhrani: Is it's prime objective the elimination of corruption?

Tahiliani: Yes. To remove corruption or at least try to reduce it, because it hurts our poor countrymen the most.

Jawhrani: You had stated once that if the government is sincere about removal of poverty from the country, then it should first of all remove corruption. Can you clarify this?

Tahiliani: It is very simple. The government should have the political will to eradicate corruption. There is no dearth of laws, but the real test lies in their implementation. They are to be enforced effectively. At present our investigating agencies report to the Executive, which is not sustainable. The investigating, as well as prosecuting agencies must be independent, just like the Election Commission. Only then can we expect some results. Presently, even our Chief Vigilance Commissioner looks powerless. He can just recommend some steps to be taken. This way corruption is not going to vanish,

unless the rulers..., some of whom are themselves corrupt become honest. As it is said in Hindi, "As is the king, so is the public". So corruption must be weeded out from the top.

Jawhrani: Where does India stand in the list of corrupt nations?

Tahiliani: We stand 83rd in the scale of honesty, as per the last survey..

Jawhrani: How do they reach such conclusions?

Tahiliani: There are independent agencies, like World Bank etc. They provide necessary data and then through mathematical modeling and with the use of computers, they derive their conclusion. 'Transparency International' comes out with the ranking of various countries on the scale of honesty. I am going to release this year's ranking on October 20, in New Delhi. Some 21 months back, a survey was conducted in India. The corruption we encounter in public departments like police, schools, municipalities and health etc. is not seen in the developed countries. We left out excise and customs department, as about two years back the Chairman of Central Excise, himself, was arrested. So the survey produced startling data. We computed that poor Indians, on an average pay Rs. 26,768 crores to the officers.

Jawhrani: Which department is most notorious?

Tahiliani: Health tops the list. There are variations in various regions, such as we saw that north is more corrupt than west. But, on an average unless you grease the palms of a tout, nothing moves in government hospitals. Even to obtain a Death Certificate, one has to shell out something.

Jawhrani: Are you associated with any other organization?

Tahiliani: No. The 'Servants of People's Society' has got its own schools too and these are meant for poor pupils.

Jawhrani: Are these schools located in Delhi?

Tahiliani: A separate organization 'Memorial Fund for Disaster Relief' is assigned the job to maintain these schools. It was established by Leonard Sechairre of Sechairre Holms. I am one of the trustees of that organization. It has got its own mobile T. B. Clinics. Initially, I had initiated it in Sikkim. The poor people living in inaccessible areas have little or no medical facilities. Either they remain ignorant about their ailments or if they know about the disease, they are simply unable to bear the cost for medication. Even

otherwise, T. B. medicines are costly, which an average poor Indian cannot afford. In that respect, our organization is providing a great service.

Jawhrani: Had you not initiated another movement named “Delhi Election Watch”?

Tahiliani: Yes. It comprised of 22 non-governmental organizations. I was their chairman. We had won a case in the Supreme Court of India. Now, it is mandatory for candidates to disclose their assets, liabilities and criminal background, if any.

Jawhrani: Do you feel your efforts have borne fruit and people are now more aware?

Tahiliani: This way, we ensure that only candidates of impeccable record can contest. Though most of the political parties are reluctant to field new candidates, we expect this to change. It may however, take some time.

Jawhrani: What is the future of Sindhi language - will we lose our identity?

Tahiliani: Certainly not! Sindhi language will never vanish. You people are there and Doordarshan is also there. We have other Sindhi academies too. Frankly, I don't consider myself a good Sindhi.

Jawhrani: Have you ever been to Sindh, after partition?

Tahiliani: Yes, during my training period, while I was with the British Navy, I visited Karachi twice in 1950. After that I have never had the opportunity.

Jawhrani: Any unfulfilled wish?

Tahiliani: No. Nothing. I don't consider myself special or that I have done anything great. Because, I believe it is God under whose orders we perform our jobs.

Jawhrani: Your contribution will remain etched forever in the annals of Indian history!

Tahiliani: These are all accidents of life.

Jawhrani: Thank you for sharing with us your experiences and sparing your valuable time.

Tahiliani: Thank you.