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Sindhi society is replete with precedents, since time immemorial, of its sons having revered its language and traditions to the hilt. They have literally dedicated themselves to the interest of their community, culture and civilization.

We not only intend to archive their hard work, but provide an impetus to our future generations to follow in their footsteps.

Today, we take a peek into the inner core of one such personality to enlighten our community about his selfless service. And he is - Dr. Ram Buxani, who has been kind enough to come all the way from Dubai to share his life's experiences with us today. He is not only a renowned businessman, but also an accomplished litterateur.

Jawhrani: Dr. Buxani, can you tell us something about your background, specifically from which area of Sindh you hail?

Buxani: First of all, I must congratulate you for such a nice presentation on the concept of this programme. Then, I offer my gratitude that you found me worthy of appearing in your programme.

Jawhrani: Sir, you are an inspiration for the future generations of our community.

Buxani: I can very much appreciate the spirit, dedication and efforts you have put in, to make this programme a success. Coming to your question, my ancestral town was Hyderabad, Sindh.

Jawhrani: What was the occupation of your family?

Buxani: My grandfather was engaged in the business of boats. But, since the days of my father we moved out of Sindh for business, like other Sindhwarkis.

Jawhrani: Those were the days of freedom movement. What was your own, or your family's contribution?

Buxani: In my memory, people of Sindh were less active in the freedom movement than the other provinces, probably because of a low awareness or I may have gathered this impression as my elders used to say that English government was the best. This premise may be based on the hardships Sindhis had to subsequently face, when they had to migrate after partition.

Jawhrani: The tale of partition is replete with stories of blood and gore, when many innocents lost their lives. Every Sindhi family was affected. Can you recollect any such instance?

Buxani: What worse can happen to a family than having to abandon its ancestral dwelling and proceed towards an alien land, literally empty handed. Unfortunately, my father passed away during those fateful days and we became orphans.

Jawhrani: Independence of India was obtained at the price of its partition and creation of Pakistan. This is unlawful under the purview of international law. Have you ever felt that our leaders committed heavy blunders?

Buxani: This partition could have been avoided as it was not a necessity. Our objective was independence from the English but by creating a split between two brothers the pain and anguish the English

caused is difficult to heal. The current leaders are pursuing the normalization of relations between our countries. Then what was the need for partition in the first place?

Jawhrani: Do you feel that our leaders deliberately confused us and left us in the lurch while they themselves were comfortably ensconced in their own nests?

Buxani: No second thought to it! They achieved their goals, while millions of Indians had to face the consequences of partition.

Jawhrani: It is said that the district of Tharparkar in Sindh had majority of Hindus and our leaders could have insisted on retaining it for Sindh Hindus, but, K. R. Malkani in his book 'Sindh Story' has contested this claim. What are your views?

Buxani: I don't know much about history. K.R. Malkani may have been right in his assertion. But if our leaders had insisted on its inclusion into India, then that would have been very good for the Sindh Hindus and we could have remained and developed Tharparkar as our Sindh.

Jawhrani: Our leaders provided us Gandhidham, a barren land, to settle down. The area boasted of nothing but snakes and scorpions, where people used to be paid eight and four annas to catch a snake and scorpion, respectively. Why did our leaders zero in on that barren land to develop a new Sindh?

Buxani: Actually, I would rather congratulate Bhai Partap for selecting that area for settlement of Sindhis, as it was climatically akin to Sindh. Even otherwise, which other state would have given us that much land to create a new Sindh?

Jawhrani: Sindh had given Hind its name, and every Indian feels proud of his origin, being the inheritor of the oldest civilization of Mohan-jo-Daro, which we had to surrender. Could we have asked for more in those days and forced our leaders to accept our demands?

Buxani: You are right in saying so. We could have asked for little Sindh and could have got it from some central territorial areas. But expecting any state to give its part for formation of little Sindh was not possible. The then Maharaja of Kutchh, conceded our demand and allowed us to build Sindh at Gandhidham, which was later on amalgamated with the state of Gujarat, which proved detrimental

to the interests of Sindhis. Sindhis didn't like Gandhidham, as they were traditionally more inclined to settle on the banks of a river. I recollect Atur Sangtani's efforts to make Silvasa, a haven for Sindhis. He was himself responsible for the development of the city of Pune. Silvasa was a union territory and it was easy for the Government of India to have acceded to the request, but unfortunately Mr. Sangtani died early and the demand could not gain the requisite momentum. But yes, I agree with your contention that our Sindhi leaders erred in that respect and that they could have insisted on inclusion of Tharparkar into the Indian fold and then we could have said with pride that we Sindhis also have our own territory in India.

Jawhrani: After partition, where in India did you settle initially?

Buxani: Initially, we were bundled en-masse to Madras and from there one year later we came to Baroda. I received my primary education in Baroda.

Jawhrani: What made you move to Dubai from Baroda, as it is said that in those days even water was rationed in Dubai?

Buxani: I was employed in Baroda in those days, but just like every Sindhi has this desire to get into business, my blood too has the Sindhwarki ethos and there was a wish to be associated with a company having its base outside India. Dalamal, Chotirmall Dhanamal, Kishinchand Chellaram etc. were famous Sindhwarki firms of those days. By chance, I saw an advertisement of Chotirmall. They wanted a person for their Dubai office. I applied for it immediately, even though during those days, I didn't know anything about Dubai. My elder brother was skeptical about it and he wrote to me questioning my intent. I replied that it was unwise to miss the right opportunity, many others were also living in Dubai.

Jawhrani: I recall a verse that would reflect on the perseverance, hard work and intelligence by which you tided over your unfortunate days : *"Raat Jitni Sangeen Hogi, Subah utni hi Rangeen hogi"* (The bitter the night, the sweeter the morning that follows) What did you learn from this entire experience?

Buxani: Once Khalil Jibran said that "There is no elevator to success, you have to climb stairs". It means, that hard work is a must for success and there are no short cuts to it. Happiness and sorrow are part of

life. A single moment of happiness comes sandwiched between two sorrows. Definitely, there are more sorrows in life. One has to learn to live and cope.

Jawhrani: It is said that 'Charity begins at home' - do you subscribe to this philosophy?

Buxani: Very much, indeed! I like the policy of the Arabs. If there are ten members in their family, they prepare food for twenty people. They give the extra food prepared to charity. They never give out the residual food in charity. I consider that every human being is a trustee of God's goods. He should share the good things of life with other people.

I would rather go a step further. I grew up in an atmosphere when my granny used to feed crows before feeding herself. Some people feed the needy first and I have been part of such a family. A man is a trustee of God, as he not only comes empty handed but even goes empty handed. That is why there is no pocket in a shroud. He is like a postman who has to deposit undelivered post with the post office before going home. A man has to distribute all his belongings in this world. There are no co-incidences, everything is destiny. Probably, God has been judicious and entrusted the redistribution of wealth among needy people with a select few to ensure that there is no misappropriation.

Jawhrani: You are very much attached to the Sindhi language and its literature. Have you been doing anything in Dubai in the cause of Sindhyat?

Buxani: I always maintain "*Kinyan visaryan boli jain mein mao dini mukhe loli.*" (How can I ever forget the language in which my mother sang lullabies to me). As mothers of today do not sing this lullaby, children are not exposed to the language. Hence, it is essential that Sindhyat survives else 50 years down the line our children may respond by merely saying we are Hindustani Sindhis, when asked about their roots, without knowing what is the essence of a Sindhi and for this they will never forgive us.

Jawhrani: How do we convey the message of Sindhyat?

Buxani: Even if our educational institutions stop imparting education in our mother tongue we should continue to converse with our children in the Sindhi language and make them aware of our traditions, customs, culture and civilization. Nuances of the

language may even be communicated in English, if necessary, and this will certainly make them proud about our origins.

Jawhrani: There was a time when Sindhis were reluctant to even acknowledge themselves as Sindhis, fortunately it is no longer so

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Buxani: Amongst Sindhis, we have the best of fashion designers, actors, film directors etc. and even hoteliers. A Sindhi restaurateur can introduce Sindhi cuisine along with continental cuisine. He has to just name it in English. This way, besides Sindhis a new clientele can be created for Sindhi food and Sindhi goods. For example, Sindhi Khichdi is one of the nicest dish and I am confident that other communities would also love it, the way we do.

Jawhrani: Recently, you published your autobiography in English, which was later on translated and published in Sindhi, by Delhi Sindhi Academy. I think, people pen down their biography at the twilight stage of their lives, whereas you have done it at a much younger age. What prompted you to do so?

Buxani: The wrist-watch I wear at present has a picture of Dada Jashan Vaswani, with his quote, "The greatest tragedy of a man is that he thinks that he has plenty of time!" I believe in doing tomorrow's job today. I think, I am the first businessman to have come out with my autobiography. Whichever community and whosoever left his impression upon my person, needed to be acknowledged, and what better way to do so. It has also helped the non-Sindhis see us in the right perspective.

Jawhrani: Buxaniji, when did you begin writing for 'Sabhyata' magazine?

Buxani: I used to write when I was living in Baroda for the magazine 'Sabhyata' which was an organ of Sindhu Samaj. I was secretary of 'Sindhu Samaj of Baroda' and Dr. Lakhmichand 'Prem' was its President. Another weekly, 'Jagrti' was also published in those days which was not a magazine, in the strict sense of the term, but more of a 'tabloid'. Both publications and also 'Hindvasi' carried my articles from time to time.

Jawhrani: Sometimes you write and at other times you perform live on the stage. What has been your inspiration behind all this?

Buxani: People experience mixed feelings, happiness as well as sorrow at different times and a person with an artistic bend of mind feels an urge to express himself. Some express this by speaking, others by

writing or performing. I derive pleasure in writing and performing, though I don't count myself as a writer, but, I do feel elated expressing myself.

Jawhrani: You have been through a difficult phase and it was sheer hard work and honesty which saw you through the harsh days of poverty. Can you share your experience of those struggling days with the us?

Buxani: There is a saying in English, "Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional". It emphasizes the inevitability of pain but how do people react to it, varies from person to person. Life is like a sandwich. A moment of happiness is bound between two moments of sorrow and to experience the pleasure of that sandwich, you need both layers of bread. Sorrows in fact make people humble.

Jawhrani: It is said that the mother is the manifestation of God and they are fortunate who receive blessings from their mother. You have received abundant love and affection from your mother, in whose memory you have instituted 'Ishwaribai Buxani Award.' Besides this, what else made you initiate these awards?

Buxani: There is no motive other than keeping the name of my mother alive. There is a lyric by some unknown poet, which translates as "The new generation abandons parents, discarding diamonds, mistakenly as pieces of glass". I wanted my mother's name to last forever, whether my name lasts or not.

Jawhrani: It is said true charity is that which goes to alleviate sorrow and pain, but, some perceive charity as feeding the poor or giving donations to temples etc. What are your perceptions about charity?

Buxani: Sadhu T. L. Vaswani used to say, whenever you feel like giving, go ahead and do it. He never applied any theory to these issues. A donation is a donation. It is humiliating for a person to ask for something and a giver should never judge the genuineness of the request. Once someone asked Sadhu Vaswani why he never verifies the request of a person who asks for something and gives out immediately. Sadhu T. L. Vaswani replied, "when God didn't verify my creditability, who am I to do so? Whenever your inner voice recommends follow it!"

I shall also tell you a tale from Sindh. While defecating, during a severe winter a person heard a call for a shawl. He promptly threw

out his shawl to the person who was shivering with cold. His wife came running towards him and asked him why couldn't he have waited and given the shawl after easing himself. He said that he might have changed his mind by then; therefore he had thrown it instantly. It is God Himself who directs you to do so, though one has to exercise his discretion, too.

Jawhrani: After partition, many Sindhis have migrated worldwide and are known as non-resident Indians. What is their attitude towards Sindhis in India, as it is felt that NRI's are remembered only during times of need?

Buxani: You have asked me two questions. First of all NRIs, I must emphasize that we regard our Indian Sindhis as our brothers and sisters. Now your second question, I would like to give you an example. For a train to traverse from Bombay to Pune, it needs an additional engine at Karjat, likewise you should treat us NRIs as a second engine. The prime initiative has to come from you people, and then only can we come forward and help you. As far as the love angle is concerned we regard you Indian Sindhis in high esteem. Time and again, you must have seen that we visit India on a regular basis and mostly we try to perform all special celebrations in India.

Jawhrani: You have tried your best to lobby for the problems of NRIs with the government of India; whether it is education, estate duty or free port. Can you elaborate on these efforts?

Buxani: All these problems are not limited to the interests of Sindhis alone. These are related to all Indians living abroad. An 'estate duty' is some sort of a death tax. After the passing away of any Indian, the government wants to have a share of the property of the deceased. Though it is prevalent worldwide, in India it was highly exorbitant. Rajas had to dispose of their palaces to settle their estate-duty dues with the government. When Prithvi Raj Kapoor died, his bungalow had to be auctioned to pay off the estate duty of Rs.1.2 million. Even after such harsh taxation laws, the government of India could collect only Rs. 220 million annually during the days of late P.M., Mrs. Indira Gandhi. A story of an Indian dying in Dubai will be of much interest to you. When he died in Dubai, his accounts in India were frozen and the question arose about which government should levy the estate duty? I suggested to the government of India that it should not levy

any estate duty on the properties of non-resident Indians; otherwise they would prefer keeping their funds outside India. At that time, there was a competent finance minister of India, Mr. Pranab Mukerji. But before he could decide on the issue, Smt. Indira Gandhi passed away. Then came Mr. Rajiv Gandhi as Prime Minister and V. P. Singh as his finance minister. They could very well understand the importance of the issue and they abolished the levy of estate-duty altogether. We heaved a sigh of relief and said that now we can die peacefully in India without worrying about the payment of estate-duty!

Jawhrani: You had also pleaded for privatisation of education and a free port with the Prime Minister of India. What were your experiences on these attempts?

Buxani: Even today, Indians go to foreign shores like America, England and Australia for higher education. Indians, Chinese and Japanese jointly pay nine billion dollars to America for the education of their children. In America, most of the students as well as teachers are Indian and the money spent is also Indian only the soil is American. Can't it be arranged in India? We Indians have not been able to fortify the foundations of education in India. The number of educational institutions in India do not have the capacity to cater to almost one billion Indians. The schools should be privatized. The people, who can afford the fees of private institutions can admit their wards in such institutions and those who cannot, can send their children to government run institutions. I had raised this issue from the platform of FICCI. Though it is an association of the business community, then too it was sympathetic towards this issue. As a matter of fact, education should be given the status of Industry. The economy has been liberalized but a lot is to be done in the field of education as it is still in shackles.

Now, our demand of a free port. You must be aware of the fact that Hong Kong has been a window to the outside world for China and we wanted India to have one such free port at Andaman and Nicobar Islands, as it was away from mainland India. It could have been developed on the lines of One Country-Two Systems, so that Indians could shop from one part of India and not go outside for shopping purposes. At that time, Subramaniam Swami was the Indian Commerce Minister. A committee was setup to look into the matter. It had to decide on the location of the free port. The

committee was headed by Raunaq Singh and I was a member of that committee. We visited many places, like Singapore, Hong Kong, Pondicherry, Kandla and Goa and after that we suggested the name of Goa for a free port. Though our proposals were accepted in principle, the rapid changes of government put the issue in cold storage and in the present circumstances the issue seems superfluous as the whole country has already become literally duty free.

Jawhrani: You are associated with many business houses, at various places like Dubai and Mumbai. You are also part of the Hinduja group. What made you consider establishing the first bank owned by Sindhis?

Buxani: It is a very good question. There was a time, when Indira Gandhi nationalized Indian banks, but later, when the re-establishment of private banks was cleared under a new policy, the first private bank established was by Sindhis - IndusInd Bank.

Jawhrani: A fatigue has seeped in today's man. He has lost the desire to move towards his goals. What would you suggest to such a man?

Buxani: If we evaluate our life it would seem, "yeh zindagi bhar ki saudagiri, insaan ko ek kafan ke siwa kya de sakti hai" (All the hard work of a lifetime eventually leaves a man with just a shroud). But at the same time if someone feels depressed or weak he should remember, "Birds fly, elephants don't!"

Jawhrani: That is nice. May the younger generation follow your footsteps. We are thankful to you for your presence.

Buxani: Thank you.