

## **Pahlaj Nihalani**

Motion Picture Producer & Distributor,  
*President-* Association of Motion Pictures & T.V. Programme Producers,  
*Founder Member-* Export Promotion Council (SEPC).



*The discovery of ancient coins, etchings, carvings, earthen pots, beautiful gold and silver jewellery, handicrafts, embroidery and all such symbols of art and craft must be counted as a treasurehouse of Sindhi culture and civilization.*

*Since time immemorial, Sindhis have demonstrated their knowledge and business acumen. Our artists and craftsmen have been demonstrating their capabilities through the centuries right up to this day. Even the Indian film industry is replete with the contribution of Sindhis in production, direction, scripting, acting etc. who have left their indelible stamp on this sector.*

*We have with us today, well known film producer, distributor, Mr. Pahlaj Nihalani, who has always endeavoured to introduce and provide opportunities to new talent in keeping with his large hearted and helpful nature.*

*Jawhrani:* Pahlajji, we welcome you. First of all can you tell us how you became part of the Indian film industry?

*Pahlaj:* Please accept my gratitude to Sahyog Foundation & Doordarshan for providing me with an opportunity to speak in Sindhi language. Everyone has some desires in life. I have always been fascinated by art. I used to watch movies in large numbers in my childhood. So you can say that movie-viewing led me to the Indian film industry.

*Jawhrani:* When precisely did you enter the film industry?

*Pahlaj:* It was in 1965, when I was fifteen years old that I entered the film distribution business. This was five years after my father expired. I gradually progressed from distribution and in 1979 I began producing films, and since then I have never looked back.

*Jawhrani:* Which department of the film industry attracts you the most?

*Pahlaj:* Though I am the producer I take interest in each and every activity of film-making; be it music or editing. In fact, I'm attracted to every department of film making - right from the role of a spot boy to the financing of films. After all I have to take the blame or praise for the film's success or failure. However, I always give credit to my staff who are truly responsible for the various aspects of film making.

*Jawhrani:* It has been observed, that you always give chance to new talent in your films. Is it genuinely for the promotion of new talent or just to avoid the star system?

*Pahlaj:* There is ample talent available but unfortunately no opportunities are available for this to be showcased. I feel pleased and satisfied when, with a bit of encouragement from my side, new artists and technicians can be introduced. As long as they are able to devote the time, as per my needs, and are dedicated to their work, I back them without considering the possibilities of success or failure.

*Jawhrani:* How many films have you produced till date?

*Pahlaj:* I have produced twenty-three films till date. Previously, I used to produce one or two films a year. However recently, I have been devoting some time to social service.

*Jawhrani:* Despite being involved with showbiz, you have been extending a helping hand in the cause of the community. How do you combine these two?

*Pahlaj:* I have observed that most successful Sindhis, besides carving a

niche for themselves in their own field have always been involved in social service. There are 30 to 40 colleges, hospitals like the Hinduja, Raheja, Jaslok to name a few, established by Sindhis. I too felt the need to contribute to the welfare of my community and country. When cyclone created havoc in Orissa, or Gujarat was shaken by earthquake, I felt the need to share the government's efforts and I organized several fund raising programmes.

*Jawhrani:* You had organized 'Hum Ek Hain' programme. Can you tell us something about it?

*Pahlaj:* It was done in the wake of communal riots. Vested elements try to create a wedge between the different communities of India, which should be discouraged. I tried to convey a message of unity and equality to the masses of India through 'Hum Ek Hain' programme which was a joint effort with Doordarshan. It is an accepted fact that the word of a well known artist carries weight and people sit up and take notice of their endorsements. This can be channelized for fund raising or other such activities and since I have some leverage with big artists of Bollywood, I have always participated in such efforts. To cite an example, I was able to raise some 4.5 crores of rupees for the 'Gujarat Earth Quake Relief Fund'.

*Jawhrani:* Just one call from you and you have all the artists responding. What is the secret of your influence on them?

*Pahlaj:* The secret lies in sincerity. People know that wherever there is involvement of finance, Pahlaj will never dip his hands in the sill but will rather contribute from his own pocket. People trust Pahlaj and are always prepared to assist in the cause where I am involved. I am indeed grateful to the artists who respond to my call, stand by me and convey the message on behalf of the industry.

*Jawhrani:* There was 'Indian Motion Pictures Association' (IMPA) for film producers of India, so what was the need for another organization named 'Association of Film Producers & T.V. Programmes', initiated by you?

*Pahlaj:* 'IMPPA' or 'Guild' was meant for film producers, while there was nobody to represent T.V. producers. To give those people a voice, 'Association of Film Producers & T.V. Programmes' was established. Actually, it was the brainchild of Mr. G. P. Sippy. He was the pioneering President of the said association. But after just one year, he handed over its reins to me on the ground that the younger generation should be entrusted with such jobs. I have

been its President since the last thirteen years. So, in fact the creator of this association was G. P. Sippy, not me. He was also the first builder and promoter. When he came to Bombay from Sindh, he was the first to build ownership flats in Bombay. His contribution to film production has also been great and he could also foresee the immense potential of television. It is rightly said that the Sindhi brain has tremendous foresight and in this case too G. P. Sippy's concept is vindicated, as is obvious from the tremendous reach of television today.

*Jawhrani:* Have you ever made T.V. serials?

*Pahlaj:* Initially it looked like too small a business but with the passage of time, T.V. production has created its own niche in the market. It has got a huge potential. I feel I am late now, but my children have got into the production of T. V. serials.

*Jawhrani:* Now coming to your personal life. Any memories of partition?

*Pahlaj:* I was born in India and as such I have not been witness to those unfortunate incidents of partition, although I have heard a lot about them from my elders.

*Jawhrani:* Was your family affected by the partition?

*Pahlaj:* Definitely, my family too endured those terrible times. How can any Sindhi have escaped the ill-effects of partition? But as I myself was born in Bombay, in 1950, and though we call the whole of India our own, the fact remains that we don't have any land of our own like the other communities of India.

*Jawhrani:* Bengalis got West Bengal and Punjabis Punjab, but, Sindhis had to abandon everything in Pakistan and come to India as 'Refugees'. Could you suggest some steps, which could be taken to unite the scattered and displaced Sindhis all over India?

*Pahlaj:* The government and political parties give importance to vote banks. Democracy gives immense power to vote banks and every political party tries to appease these vote banks, be they Muslims, Dalits or various castes and sub-castes. 50 lakh Sindhis do not make a vote bank, in spite of the number, because of being scattered, resulting in a low bargaining power with the political parties. We also lack the awareness of this need, as we are completely engrossed in our own little businesses or needs, and we have never thought about the joint rights of all the Sindhis or the preservation of Sindhyat, our language, our culture and traditions.

We cannot blame others for this sorry state of ours. Sindhis should have their own Sindh in India. I salute Sindhis of Pakistan, as they are doing a commendable job of serving our language, culture and civilization. They have established three satellite T.V. channels in the Sindhi language and they should be praised for that, no matter to what religion they belong. We should impress upon our children that we are Sindhis. I am really happy to give this interview in my mother tongue. This sense of pride is to be created in our children also. They should also feel proud conversing in Sindhi language. I propose that Sindhis should have some seats reserved in both the Houses of Parliament, in lieu of having our own state.

*Jawhrani:* Sindhis have been demanding status of belonging to a 'landless state'! This way, we can have increased rights and increased funds, which can be used for the preservation and progress of our community, language, culture and traditions. Do you agree with this?

*Pahlaj:* Everything depends upon the will of the government of India. There is lot of land in India and if it agrees, it can easily provide a piece of land for Sindhis, which we can call our own state.

*Jawhrani:* Suppose the Government of India agrees with this proposal, will Sindhis scattered throughout India leave their homes and flock to this Sindh?

*Pahlaj:* I think so and why shouldn't Sindhis go there. It may take time to grow into a well habitated land but ultimately it will. We shall be the happiest people in such a case.

*Jawhrani:* We have got the electronic media, and also producers like you. Is it not possible to spread Sindhi culture and language?

*Pahlaj:* I urge everyone via this powerful electronic media to re-discover the hidden potential of Sindhis, and raise their voice, so that powers that be in Delhi take notice. We should awaken them from their deep slumber.

*Jawhrani:* Our children have lost the sense of Sindhi identity. What should be done in this respect?

*Pahlaj:* Even if someone else's mother is more beautiful, we still love our own. Likewise should be the case with our own mother tongue. We should know that we are inheritors of Mohan-jo-Daro, which is the oldest civilization on earth. We should take pride in our past and ponder over the reasons behind our current state of affairs. We have to preserve our Sindhi identity at any cost.

- Jawhrani:* Given an opportunity, would you produce a Sindhi film?
- Pahlaj:* Certainly. I am very much in favour. I have been doing a lot for my language and culture. Besides the production of a Sindhi film - a small step, I would like to do a lot more.
- Jawhrani:* We have got the resources. We can also launch a Sindhi channel. Can successful stalwarts like you, G. P. Sippy and Ramesh Sippy undertake this responsibility?
- Pahlaj:* Majority of film producers, directors and financiers are Sindhis. The entertainment industry has G. P. Sippy, Ramesh Sippy, Nari Sippy, Ramesh Taurani, Vashu Bhagnani, Gordhan Tanwani etc. They can play a major role in this regard. I appeal to all of them to advance a few steps and I assure you that I shall not lag behind. If we Sindhis join hands, we can do wonders. You will find a Sindhi in every nook and corner of the world. Even if he has changed his surname from Mansukhani to Mans, at heart he remains a Sindhi.
- Jawhrani:* The land of our ancestors is Sindh. If there is a possibility to go back there, would you?
- Pahlaj:* It is not proper on our part to think about it, as it is now part of another country. Whatever is done cannot be undone. We should rather fight for our separate land in Indian territory which can give us our own identity and which we can claim to be our own with pride.
- Jawhrani:* In which community would you like to take your next birth?
- Pahlaj:* Certainly a Sindhi. I am very much proud to be a Sindhi, and to be faithful to one's own community is a matter of great pride. I think, Sindhis do not lack anything. They just need to get united, as unity is of the greatest essence for us Sindhis today.
- Jawhrani:* At a young age you have, by leaps and bounds, achieved great success. To what extent can you attribute the contribution of Bhabhi Neeta?
- Pahlaj:* It is a fact that a woman is behind the success of every man, and in my case it is Neeta.
- Jawhrani:* We are indeed thankful to you for your time and for sharing your thoughts and views.
- Pahlaj:* Thank you.