

# **Niranjan Hiranandani**

Eminent Builder & Real Estate Developer,  
*Managing Director - Hiranandani Construction Pte. Ltd.*



*Sindhi Hindus were the most severely effected victims of Partition. The community's struggle for survival, at times led one to believe that they would be relegated to the pages of history. Our elders not only managed to strengthen their economic position but also preserved their heritage while fulfilling their patriotic duties, for which they deserve full credit. Today, after 60 years this responsibility lies on the shoulders of the youth. Preservation of Sindhi language, Sindhi culture and tradition and Sindhi identity itself, is today posing a great challenge.*

*Today we meet one such personality - Mr. Niranjan Hiranandani who has accepted this challenge. He is the president of Hyderabad Sindh National Collegiate Board and is also affiliated to many non-governmental organizations. He is the younger son of Dr. L. H. Hiranandani and younger brother of Dr. Navin Hiranandani.*

*Jawhrani:* Niranjanji, how did it come about that you deviated from the medical profession, dominant in your family, and enter business?

*Niranjan:* As my father and elder brother were already in the medical profession, I felt there were enough of us in that field, although I did realize that there were several other branches of medicine. But you know, when you are young, and your elder brother has already made a mark in his profession, there is always the apprehension that you may not be able to match his achievements. So I opted for commerce and did my Chartered Accountancy and from there I got into business.

*Jawhrani:* Where were you born?

*Niranjan:* In Bombay.

*Jawhrani:* Was Sindhi atmosphere prevalent at home? Any memories?

*Niranjan:* My mother used to converse with us in Sindhi. She is a homemaker and I also acquired those traits from her. My father used to travel worldwide extensively and had got me admitted in a convent school which introduced us to the English and Hindi language. This way I was exposed to the Sindhi atmosphere from my mother's side and the English language by my father. But I feel I should have learnt Sindhi language more extensively.

*Jawhrani:* Did you straight away enter the construction business?

*Niranjan:* No, I began with textiles, then exported some food stuff also, and made a few investments in the construction business. We later faced some difficulties and I had to change my field, and moved fully into the construction business.

*Jawhrani:* When did you establish Hiranandani Construction?

*Niranjan:* We made our initial investment in 1978-79, although I continued with textiles etc. also for another two-three years and got into fullfledged construction in 1981.

*Jawhrani:* The project of Hiranandani Gardens at Powai is as good as constructing an entire city and that too on such a barren tract of land. What made you attempt such a project?

*Niranjan:* I had earlier constructed eleven buildings at Lokhandwala Complex, but I always ended up dissatisfied. My construction was good, but the environment didn't meet my standards. There were no gardens, no facilities. It was then, that I thought of constructing a city which would be recognized as a world class city.

*Jawhrani:* So that people could remember it for generations....

*Niranjan:* Whenever we went abroad we found many planned neighbourhoods. We wanted to create such a project in Bombay also.

*Jawhrani:* Is that why you wanted to construct a world class project?

*Niranjan:* Absolutely world class!

*Jawhrani:* Do the amenities provided at Hiranandani Gardens also match the world class amenities?

*Niranjan:* Yes. We constructed schools, gardens spread over hundred acres, recycled water from effluents, laid concrete roads on private land - all this for the very first time in India. Ours was the first and the largest mixed township in India, as it comprised of residential as well as commercial properties. Previously, either commercial areas were developed 'a la' Ballard Estate, Nariman Point, or exclusively residential areas like Malabar Hill.

*Jawhrani:* Recently you have established a hospital in your father's name. How did this come to your mind?

*Niranjan:* We had established two schools at the site 15 years back and thought of establishing a small nursing home with 10-15 beds. A nursing home could at least stabilize the condition of a patient who suffered a heart attack, in Powai itself. But with the progress of work our ambition grew and we felt that although the budget would increase, God is with us. And the initial budget of Rs. 7 crore ballooned to a whopping Rs. 65 crores. We built a 130 bed world class hospital named after my father.

*Jawhrani:* Are you still expanding?

*Niranjan:* It has turned out to be a world class hospital and we are expanding it to 200 beds by building an additional 90,000 sq. ft.

*Jawhrani:* What are your other projects apart from Hiranandani Complex Powai, at Mumbai?

*Niranjan:* We have another 350 acre project in Thana. One small project in Versova, Mumbai and we have begun another in Chennai (Madras). We have also begun construction activity outside India. A very prestigious project of 90 storey, being built at Dubai, will be one of the tallest residential tower in the world.

*Jawhrani:* How many towers would there be?

*Niranjan:* Just one, as it occupies some 1.2 million square feet.

*Jawhrani:* Why did you opt for a project outside India?

*Niranjan:* There are limitations to constructions in India. In Mumbai, one cannot construct such a tall building. I wanted to create a world class building, which would be remembered for many years to come. Though there is huge competition in Dubai, as there are Arabs, Pakistanis, Russians, Americans, Japanese and Koreans and to create a niche for yourself among all of them is not an easy task. We took this project as a challenge

*Jawhrani:* Do you believe in 'Thore Khatye, Ghani Barkat' (small earnings add up to maximum income)?

*Niranjan:* We must contribute towards our society. When God has showered his blessings on us, we must distribute them among others. We want to have the good wishes of our customers, so that whoever purchases our property remembers us for many years. Normally, Indian builders economized on every aspect, whereas we give our customers value for money and even if we charged a hundred rupees more per square foot, we provide amenities worth two hundred rupees, so that people realize that Indian builders can construct the best buildings in the world. Earlier, it was felt that their construction was not upto the mark. We Indians are considered to be the best in IT sector, we make the best movies, we've established the best schools, hospitals, likewise any building we construct must also be the best.

*Jawhrani:* You share good relations with the political class, both at the state as well as central level. Has it ever translated into any advantage to our Sindhi community?

*Niranjan:* We have to do more to help our community. If we get the right direction from our leaders there are possibilities of further serving the common man.

*Jawhrani:* Do you mean to say, that on an individual basis, we can do wonders but jointly we are a failure?

*Niranjan:* Yes Ram, we do not work well together.

*Jawhrani:* Recently, you had been to Pakistan. Did you also visit Thatta, your ancestral hometown?

*Niranjan:* Yes, it is the birthplace of my father. Sindh province in Pakistan is inhabited by Sindhis and though they are Muslims by religion I

felt myself at complete peace. It sounded so nice to hear Sindhi spoken all round. We should have regular interaction with these Sindhis and know more about their educational institutions and universities.

*Jawhrani:* With the governments of both countries striving hard to mend their ways and have good relations with each other, do you think the spreading of Sindhi culture and tradition will be facilitated?

*Niranjan:* Presently 90% of Sindhi institutions are located on the other side of the border and if we fail to dismantle mental barriers, it would harm us more than them.

*Jawhrani:* Are they also engaged in a similar struggle to preserve the Sindhi language?

*Niranjan:* No, they are doing it with ease.

*Jawhrani:* It is said, that Sindhis are in larger numbers in Sindh but they have limited resources. We have lesser number of Sindhi speaking people and more resources. Don't you think collaborations between the two will prove beneficial?

*Niranjan:* In Sindh, a man on the street still speaks in Sindhi, whereas we find it hard to find people speaking Sindhi language in their own homes here. So you are right in saying that if we join hands, it would certainly benefit our language.

*Jawhrani:* Recently, you have assumed the responsibilities of President of Hyderabad Sindh National Collegiate Board. Has it brought any change in the working of the institution?

*Niranjan:* First of all, there is a historical contribution made by Principal K. M. Kundnani, Dada Hotchand Advani...etc. I am doing my best to keep up the tradition and carry on the good work.

*Jawhrani:* And what about your dad, Dr. L. H. Hiranandani...

*Niranjan:* Yes, Dad and others are the pillars of our institutions. They have been able to set up fourteen such institutions, but they emphasized on economy and establishment of more and more institutions at a lesser cost. They succeeded in their efforts hundred percent. Now, we put emphasis on quality in place of quantity. Presently, our people need the best facilities. They want world class buildings and infrastructure. We have recently established three new colleges in Ulhasnagar, Nari Gursahani Law College, Dr. L. H. Hiranandani Pharmacy Degree College and one Management

School under AICTE. All three institutions were established in a single year. This way, the strength of students studying in the colleges of our board has reached 55,000, which is the highest for any single entity affiliated to the University of Mumbai. People are in fact unaware about the work being done by our collegiate board.

*Jawhrani:* The institutions run by minorities enjoy special status. What is the benefit to the Sindhi community?

*Niranjan:* The minority status given to our institutions enables us to admit 50% of Sindhi students and this way children with even lesser percentage get the benefit of admission to our prestigious institutions.

*Jawhrani:* If we apply simple calculation, then the number of Sindhi students under your collegiate board should be around 27,500, which is 50% of 55,000 students. Is that right?

*Niranjan:* Not exactly. We don't get that many number of Sindhi students. In some institutions it is 5 to 10%, in some it is more than 50%. So this way, on an average we have around 25% Sindhi students studying in our institutions.

*Jawhrani:* Previously, the colleges run by Sindhi managements used to hold various Sindhi cultural programmes. Does that happen even today?

*Niranjan:* All our colleges are always involved in some or the other Sindhi cultural programme along with other activities. Some Principals take more interest and initiative in such programmes and it is important to attract our students towards our tradition and culture by presenting these programmes in a contemporary genre.

*Jawhrani:* How can we attract our students?

*Niranjan:* The problem starts from our homes. Our students rarely speak Sindhi at home. Hence, they are naturally not inclined to participate in Sindhi programmes in the colleges.

*Jawhrani:* Our Sindhi mothers were under the wrong impression that if our children study in Sindhi medium school they would not be competent in English and will not be able to keep pace with the world. But, so many of our stalwarts have studied in Sindhi medium schools and are in no way inferior to those educated in English medium. Now you said that about 25% of your students are Sindhis. Is it not possible that these be made to opt for Sindhi as a subject conditional to being granted admission?

*Niranjan:* I think compulsion won't work. We have to attract them. If it is made compulsory, they would just work toward clearing the subject with the minimum number of marks but not take genuine interest. It would also be possible if it is made a scoring subject like French. We will have to plan accordingly and till this is done, we are experimenting with various other options.

*Jawhrani:* We have reached a stage where we have to tell our children that we are Sindhis. If this trend continues for some more years the doomsday scenario about our language, projected by some of our writers, may become a reality. We have to take some concrete steps in this direction to create awareness and interest about Sindhi language in our children. We should celebrate traditional Sindhi festivals at home to pass on the heritage of Shah, Sachal and Sami. They should appreciate and cherish the pleasure of the great poetic works of noted poets. It is therefore, necessary for Sindhi mothers to communicate with their children in Sindhi, only then will our children go for Sindhi literature. Then we come to the stage of educational institutions. Some way or the other, we have to make certain that our children learn Sindhi, if not as a medium of instructions at least as an optional subject....

*Niranjan:* We have some schools imparting education in Sindhi medium at Uhasnagar. Previously, their strength was 1200 students which has decreased and come down to just 140 students. Mind you, these schools are cent percent subsidized. In this environment, we cannot make Sindhi a compulsory subject. Rather, we should generate interest for our mother tongue in our students. We have got great Sindhi vocal culture - of Sindhi songs, drama etc. which should be encouraged. We can spread the language through the medium of entertainment. Some of our colleges have Sindhi circles which hold Sindhi festivals, entertainment programmes and drama competitions which can rekindle the interest in our language and literature.

*Jawhrani:* It is nice to hear that you are working in the right direction. But what about our community's political rights, are they safe under the country's present dispensation and what is the place occupied by our community, politically?

*Niranjan:* Look, we have L. K. Advani, Ram Jethmalani and there was Hashoo Advani. But even these people, when they achieved a

certain status, failed to work for the promotion of Sindhi language. It is a tragic moment, even they are reluctant to promote Sindhi institutions. They think on an all India level and forget their duty towards their community. They should begin from their home and ensure the safety and security of their mother tongue, their culture and civilization, and then move forward and reach up to the goals of entire India. Ram Jethmalani is helping our community a lot but mostly it is seen that when Sindhis reach a certain high level in politics these stalwarts care little about the community.

*Jawhani:* Isn't it a weakness on our part?

*Niranjan:* It is a weakness, definitely.

*Jawhrani:* It can prove fatal as even a small hole can capsize a ship....

*Niranjan:* Until and unless our leaders start thinking that they are Sindhis first, nothing concrete can be expected of them.

*Jawhrani:* Don't you feel that the community today needs a selfless and dynamic leader?

*Niranjan:* It is not necessary to forget oneself. He can maintain his leadership but along with that he should also work for his community and language, just as we always think about the betterment of our family even while working towards making our business prosper.

*Jawhrani:* In that case we can safely say that our community has failed to create real leaders. The leaders at the time of partition had promised us heaven but failed to deliver even a part of it. Many small things like the absence of Sindhi on the nomenclature of Indian currency or omission of a tableau representing Sindhis in Republican Day parade; these may be considered trivial matters but nonetheless they hurt. Have you ever given it a serious thought, as to how you could contribute towards these issues with your influence?

*Niranjan:* Recently, when the controversy regarding deletion of word 'Sindh' from national anthem was mooted, I had said, until and unless we Sindhis assert ourselves, no one is going to pay us any respect. How can we assert ourselves? We cannot fight because it is not in our genes. Be it in Gujarat, in Rajasthan or even in Andaman & Nicobar which was affected by tsunami, we should demand surplus land from any of these places from the government; even a desert, to establish a Sindhi state. We are capable of creating a Dubai or Singapore there.

*Jawhrani:* For that, would we not have to start from zero?

*Niranjan:* It is not a question of zero. It should be taken as a challenge, like Japan after World War II started from scratch; or even Germany which was decimated; or like our elders who prospered after leaving Sindh. Similarly, if given a piece of land in any state.... Rajasthan....

*Jawhrani:* Why would Rajasthan spare any land, we can probably have it from any union territory?

*Niranjan:* Anywhere, it really doesn't matter, we can just have a city named 'Sindhistan', which we shall turn from zero to a developed city. Even if it is infertile or doesn't have any water we will make a Dubai out of that infertile land. We will take it as a challenge and make a hero of a zero.

*Jawhrani:* Does it mean that before getting a piece of land we cannot be united or get our political rights? A proposal for a landless government was also mooted sometime back, whereby we obtain all rights, benefits, funds with political rights for Sindhis; will that not prove beneficial for us?

*Niranjan:* I don't buy this argument. Just as every Indian is ready to lay down his life for the tricolour we too need a symbol, like the flag - to unfurl on our own piece of land. A small piece of land, even if only 2 sq. kms. We don't need a Sindhi country or a state, we just need to be recognized as having a separate Sindhi identity; a place where we can build our home. Be it small or big, a palace or a hut - it doesn't matter. A home is a home. Our Hyderabad (Sindh) National Collegiate Board has got small schools, with a strength of only 200 students. At the same time, there is Chandibai College with ten thousand students. Our College of B.Ed has only 200 students - but they have their own building, a separate Principal and staff. So it doesn't matter how large or small - but our own. Sindhis must have a place which can be called their own.

*Jawhrani:* Let us hope some state comes forward and heeds our plea and gives us some place to build a new Sindh of our own. Few years back in a seminar jointly hosted by the Department of Sindhi, University of Mumbai and Sahyog Foundation, where our litterateurs expressed their fear regarding the survival of the Sindhi Language, the then Vice-Chancellor, University of Mumbai had announced the construction of Sindhi Bhasha Bhawan in the Kalina Campus of the University. Subsequently,

a plot was also allotted for the same where Bhoomi Pooja was performed by Dada Jashan Vaswani. I think Hyderabad Sindh National Collegiate Board is the single largest donor (about 25 lakhs) to the said project. What is its present status?

*Niranjan:* Not much has been done in this respect. A few months back, I had met the present Vice-Chancellor of the University, Dr. Vijay Khole, and proposed reconstitution of the management committee. We have to rejuvenate it. This centre can provide us with necessary inspiration.

*Jawhrani:* We would have a library, an auditorium, some conference rooms for our scholars. If we are able to revive this project, this would benefit Sindhi society immensely. Is a project on similar contours under consideration elsewhere in your collegiate board?

*Niranjan:* No. We haven't taken any new projects in our hands. Presently, we are concentrating on refurbishing and updating the auditoriums of our various existing colleges. We have completed renovation of K. C. College auditorium and the work of Bandra College is under way. We are spending a crore rupees on each of our college auditoriums. These auditoriums are to be used for performance of cultural activities of Sindhi community. Next in the list are Watumal College, Mumbai and Chandibai College of Ulhasnagar.

*Jawhrani:* What is your message to the youth?

*Niranjan:* Never fall in the trap of inferiority complex, because we Sindhis are the best among the lot and we should always aspire to do better than others. Last year, when I visited Sadhu Vaswani Mission, Pune, on the occasion of the birthday of Dada Jashan Vaswani, he was of the opinion that presently even doing the best is passé and now we should do better than the best!

Everyone in India is doing the best. Whenever anyone says that he had put his best efforts but couldn't succeed, we should understand that now we have to do better than the best. We have to think and work on these lines, only then can we really make any progress.

*Jawhrani:* You mean to say the thirst for progress should be eternal, just as the ocean is never satisfied, even with the waters of all the rivers?

*Niranjan:* Yes Ram, you are right. Until our youth aspires to be better than the best of the world, we won't be able to make India the best

country in the world. If I am a doctor, I should aspire to be better than all the doctors of the world. Look how filmstar Amitabh Bachhan, who was written off in the early nineties, bounced back like a phoenix and is presently once again considered the superstar of Bollywood, even at the age of sixty-three. When our saints want us to be better than the best, we have to perform accordingly. When our youth realize this, nobody will be able to equal them.

*Jawhrani:* Thank you, Niranjanji. Our younger generation will certainly act upon your suggestions to attain higher goals in their life and rightly said Sindhis are the builders of their own destiny.

*Niranjan:* Thank you.