

# Jhamatmal Wadhvani

Freedom Fighter, Educationist and Social Reformer,  
*President- 'Vivekanand Education Trust',*  
*President- 'Bharatiya Sindhu Sabha'*



*Sindhis - inheritors of an ancient culture and civilization, have written glorious chapters in the pages of history by the dint of their intelligence, education and capabilities. Production of textiles and the pioneering of the banking system are a few examples of their diverse skills. Sindhis traversed the length and breadth of the globe to establish businesses and have not just remained content in their own country.*

*But the partition of India compelled them to leave their ancestral homes and take refuge in territories of truncated India. Today, we meet Shri Jhamatmal Wadhwani, who is the President of Vivekananda Education Society, Mumbai. He is eighty-four years young and shows the same zest and energy with which he has been working for decades. He has dedicated every moment of his life to the selfless service of the Sindhi community.*

*Jawhrani:* Dada, Right from your days as a student you have been attached to patriotism. Can you please throw some light on the same.

*Wadhvani:* I was born in Sukkur, Sindh. My father worked for the Railways and we lived in the Railway Quarters. When I was just ten years old, Gandhiji gave a call for the burning of imported cloth. I actively participated by collecting many such clothes from residents of the Railway colony and made a bonfire of them. This led to a complaint against my father, that being a government servant, and living in Railway colony, his son was indulging in anti-government activities. This was the first instance in my life that an act of mine put my family in a spot.

*Jawhrani:* Did the ideology of Mahatma Gandhi inspire you?

*Wadhvani:* Those days, the atmosphere in Sindh was highly charged with patriotism. We used to recite patriotic poems and songs in our school, all in line with Gandhi's ideology.

*Jawhrani:* To which part of Sindh do you belong?

*Wadhvani:* We hail from Khairpur Mir. There was a grand street named 'Wadhvani Gali' and we lived there. The nature of my father's service compelled our family to relocate itself at various places frequently, like Tando Adam and Sukkur, where I was born.

*Jawhrani:* What about your education?

*Wadhvani:* It started from Sukkur, and from there I went to Hyderabad, from where I passed Inter Arts. Later on, I completed my education in law from Karachi, and then settled in Hyderabad.

*Jawhrani:* Did you take part in the freedom movement?

*Wadhvani:* I really can't say that. But in 1939, I became a member of Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh. I used to live in Metharam Hostel of Karachi, and I watched with curiosity several students going everyday to Shakhnas with sticks in their hands. They told me that it was for self-defence, and they called it Lathi-Kathi. When curiosity took me there, I realized that Lathi-Kathi was just a facade. What was of greater value were the lectures and training camps from which I learnt a lot - life's true vision, the importance of unity and how to bring about this unity.

*Jawhrani:* Do you agree with the perception that our leaders were responsible for the unfortunate partition of our motherland? Were the terms agreed upon for partition just and fair?

*Wadhvani:* I think it was extremely wrong on their part. They didn't even present a token of resistance. The bigwigs of Congress just fled from Sindh at that time. There had been riots in Quetta. When Dr. Choithram Gidwani came from there and met me at Hyderabad railway station, where I had gone to receive him along with others, he looked scared and in a state of panic. He stated that the situation in Quetta was bad and there were possibilities of a similar situation developing in Sindh. It was no longer possible to stay here. He feared a repeat of those instances in Sindh. He immediately boarded another train, on an adjoining track, and left for Marwar. No one thought about the locals or what should be done for them. They just fled from the scene!

But I stayed back for a year till December 1948. During 1947, I was in Meerut to meet my Param Pujya Guru. Guruji had visited Sindh on 7th August, 1947, and on 15th August, partition became a reality. A big rally was organised in Sindh to boost the morale of the populace, trying to alleviate their fear and apprehensions. Sadhu T. L. Vaswani presided over another rally in Karachi which was attended by lakhs. Later, when I met Guruji in Meerut he said he was aware of what was happening in Punjab and said Hindus now had no future in Pakistan and advised me to assist in the safe migration of Sindhi Hindus. I returned to Sindh and began this activity, taking his advise.

At that time I was in charge of RSS in Sindh and travelled all over Sindh - Thatta to Karachi, collecting funds. Seth Kishinchand Chellaram also gave me funds and we used these funds to buy tickets. Two of us were given the responsibility of arranging these tickets - Mukhi Mangaram and myself. In this way, we managed to arrange for the safe migration of thousands of Hindus.

*Jawhrani:* In this scenario, what was the role of Hemu Kalani?

*Wadhvani:* He was active much earlier and was martyred in 1943. We had both studied in the same school, and he was two years younger than me.

*Jawhrani:* While leaving Sindh our leaders promised us equal rights and comforts in India, but in reality nothing materialized. What are your comments?

*Wadhvani:* You are right. Some of them managed nice postings for themselves. Someone became the Governor, another a Custodian-Ghanshyamdas, Jairamdas and even Choithram Gidwani. Gope

Sidhwa and Jethi Sipahimalani also got busy with their personal agendas. It was only Choithram Gidwani, who to some extent, rendered services to the refugees from Sindh.

*Jawhrani:* Due to partition, our language, culture and traditions suffered and there has been no progress. Do you agree?

*Wadhvani:* It's not so. I salute some of our stalwarts who did a commendable job and established schools and colleges in 1947 itself. Sindhi medium schools were established. Dharamdas Kshatrya was a headmaster in Sindh Model School; he established a school here in Bombay. K. M. Kundnani established many colleges. Barrister Hotchand Advani and T. M. Advani established Jai Hind College. Many schools were established throughout the country.

*Jawhrani:* But didn't this happen much later, after we became economically strong?

*Wadhvani:* No, that's not correct. These teachers worked hard for the initial 10-15 years. Students were given education through Sindhi medium, and Sindhi culture flourished solely due to these efforts.

*Jawhrani:* Hasn't our dispersion in various states led to the gradual fall in the usage of Sindhi language?

*Wadhvani:* True. But I also think the decline in usage of Sindhi language came alongside affluence of Sindhi families in India, and their total concentration on business and trade.

*Jawhrani:* But it is very much a fact that presently our new generation avoids calling themselves Sindhis. We have to inform them that we are Sindhis and we have got our own highly developed and literary language. Who is to be blamed for this sorry state of affairs?

*Wadhvani:* We better avoid this blame game. The whole society is responsible for that. The domination of English language is obvious. At present, there is no liking even for Hindi and our new generation mostly converses in English. A great resistance to Hindi was also witnessed in South India.

*Jawhrani:* But Sindhi is our mother tongue.

*Wadhvani:* And Hindi is our national language. But that too is tottering under the domination of the English language.

*Jawhrani:* What then are your suggestions?

*Wadhvani:* Till recently, I was Vice-Chairman of "National Council for Promotion of Sindhi Language" (NCP SL). I had put forth a proposal to propagate Sindhi language, like 'Rashtra Bhasha Prachar Samiti'. I had also learnt Hindi from them in Sukkur. We should have a three years course like them. This proposal was passed and the budget sanctioned for it. Mr. K. R. Malkani helped us in this endeavour. We executed this mission with religious fervour. The books were prepared and training camps were held. In 2003, classes for those Sindhi courses got underway. We could admit 1300 students in the very first year, who have been able to complete their course satisfactorily.

*Jawhrani:* Don't you think that we have not been able to give proper due to our writers and litterateurs?

*Wadhvani:* I don't agree with you at all. The awards and recognition given to Sindhi writers is more than what is prevalent in the case of other languages.

*Jawhrani:* Our main concern at the moment is our language. With the extinction of Sindhi language, our community will lose its identity. Is Vivekananda Educational Society, established by Hashu Advani, carrying out any activity to rectify this situation?

*Wadhvani:* We are also doing our own bit. We have made it compulsory for students to learn Sindhi language from Standard V. We have also established 'Sindhi Vivek Kendra', which houses a Sindhi library. People are coming forward to help it financially. We also intend to build a 'Sindhi Bhavan', for which we have earmarked a plot of 60,000 square feet. It will display portraits and statues that would enable the beholder to visualize Sindh. The Vedas were written in Sindh. And we propose that the Bhavan contain all those articles and scenes right from those times, which will educate our present generation about our glorious past.

*Jawhrani:* Your proximity with highly respected Sindhi leader, Lal Krishan Advani is wellknown. Can you relate some moments spent with him?

*Wadhvani:* I first met him in 1943, at Hyderabad. The British government of India had proclaimed martial law due to the uprising of Hurs at that time. I was the Secretary of RSS and incharge for the whole of Sindh. Due to the imposition of martial law, we couldn't meet openly because of the imposition of section 144. We used to meet

behind closed doors. L. K. Advani, who originally lived in Karachi, had also shifted to Hyderabad at that time. He used to attend our Shakhas at that time, and in this way we came into contact with each other.

*Jawhrani:* You have initiated a movement to create a common platform for all the Sindhi panchayats of India. What is the main objective and what do you hope to achieve?

*Wadhvani:* Initially, I worked on the propagation of the Sindhi language, because I firmly believe that without the language, our community will not survive. Whatever I did in this direction, could be termed as getting a bogie on rails. Now I have to consolidate and add more bogies and make it a complete train. I can visualize our movement gathering momentum, because I have firm belief in my endeavours. Unity is the need of the hour to succeed in any mission. Sindhis need unity and a united voice. They are scattered at present. Had there been unity in our community, it would have been able to scale greater heights.

I want to provide a common platform for all the Sindhi panchayats. I started this movement six months back. Not only in India, but all panchayats worldwide should unite. For that, I travelled to the USA and attended Sindhi Sammelan there, which was followed by the London Sammelan where I made this suggestion. The Sammelan is held in only eight states of USA, but rest of the states show little interest in it. No one has given it a serious thought, as to what is the reason behind it? No one comes forward to ask; the youth do not take interest; no one is worried. I am rather perplexed and sorry to say that the very first Sammelan attracted 2200 delegates, but the last one at London hardly saw 500 delegates. We need to put in solid work in this direction. Yes, to sit together and discuss various issues facing our community is not a mean achievement, but we have to do more than that. Besides meeting, we have to implement various resolutions.

I am sorry to say that the track record of implementation is rather poor. I want to write letters to various Sindhi organizations and give them a direction. Our first step would be to form a confederation of Indian Sindhi panchayats, which will be constituted in our Mumbai meeting. We want to involve our female folk too. We had done it in Sindh in 1880. Seth Vishindas Nihalchand was the force behind it. He had penned a book and contributed generously towards this cause. A few conferences were

held in Sindh and they proved very effective. From 1925 to 1947, our panchayats exercised real power as an average Sindhi paid heed to their diktats. A lot of social service activities were also channelized through these. Presently, we Sindhis are divided. For example, the city of Ujjain has got twenty-seven Sindhi panchayats. When they invited me, I expressed my inability to attend all the twenty-seven panchayat meetings. So they arranged a common meet, which was hugely successful. Every panchayat displayed its wares and programmes at one place. The congregation attracted roughly ten thousand people. These panchayats can perform a constructive role. They can publish Sindhis' voting lists and launch a drive to convince Sindhis, that casting of vote would be advantageous to our community.

*Jawhrani:* Would you like to give any message to the community?

*Wadhvani:* My humble request to all Sindhis is that they should encourage the speaking of Sindhi in their households. It is but natural to work for the betterment of one's own family. I was born in a poor family. I worked hard and saw to it, that not only myself but all my brothers became economically stable. Likewise, I am a member of Sindhi community and it's my duty to work for the betterment of my community. I want to help my community and if it is plagued by any malady, I shall work hard and see to it that it is cured. My message to youth is clear - you have duties and responsibilities towards :-

- the family in which you were born
- the community in which you took birth and
- the country of your birth

and you have to discharge the same properly. To achieve these goals, I have initiated Sindhi classes and I appeal to all the Sindhis to please speak in Sindhi, wear Sindhi dresses, eat Sindhi food, continue with Sindhi traditions, take part in the Sindhi festivals; so that our Sindhi identity is preserved.

*Jawhrani:* Thank you Dada for your gracious presence, valuable suggestions and your thoughtful and thought-provoking comments.

*Wadhvani:* Thank you.