

# Laxman Das Chatnani

Chief Commissioner of Income Tax, Delhi



*Suppressing the agony of partition in their hearts, shedding unseen tears, the Sindhi Hindus started their lives afresh in India from scratch. With their hard work, intellect, understanding, perseverance, dedication and honesty they created a distinct identity for themselves. My friends, whether its education or knowledge, science or technology, health or medicare, in every field Sindhis showed their competence and achieved success. Not only that, holding important positions in government and non-governmental organizations, doing their duty with utmost honesty has brought pride and created a special niche for our community. Verily the Sindhi community is really a wonderful community. Coming as refugees, toiled hard as labourers, became philanthropists and contributed to the society and nation's progress.*

*Today, we have the opportunity of meeting one such personality, the young and talented Mr. Laxman Das Chatnani, who after clearing the Indian Revenue Service Exams, is rendering his services to the nation as Chief Commissioner of Income Tax.*

*Jawhrani:* Mr. Laxman Das, we would like to know, from which part of Sindh you hail?

*Laxman Das:* We belong to the Haji Khan Mari village, Tharushah, district Nawabshah, Sindh.

*Jawhrani:* What was the occupation of your elders there?

*Laxman Das:* My grand father was working in the Revenue Department over there and my father was still a student at the time of the Partition.

*Jawhrani:* Did your family come to India during the partition or prior to that?

*Laxman Das:* They came here after the partition. At first, only my father and his sister came to Jodhpur, while my grandparents and uncles were still there in Sindh. They came to Jodhpur after a gap of about four to six months when they felt that the conditions were safe enough to move. We had a few relatives in Allahabad who were in the Air Force. They invited us there insisting that it would be better if we reside close to each other. Therefore, we shifted to Allahabad. They were in the Indian Air Force in Sindh even before the partition and had been transferred to Allahabad.

*Jawhrani:* Your surname is Chatnani, so your great grandfather or your ancestors must have borne the name Seth Chetan Das from whom this surname is derived.

*Laxman Das:* Absolutely correct.

*Jawhrani:* Do you have any knowledge about your nukh or gotra?

*Laxman Das:* It is Lohana. Lord Ram's son Lav had gone to Sindh and resided there and we belong to that family and known as Lohana after Lav's name.

*Jawhrani:* Where were you educated?

*Laxman Das:* I completed my education in Allahabad. My father was student of a medical college in Sindh. After partition he had to naturally quit his studies as all came here to India. Here, due to financial constraints he could not pursue his studies further, and joined the postal department in Allahabad. Allahabad University being quite well known, I didn't have to go anywhere else for my education.

*Jawhrani:* After completing your education in Allahabad, where did you get your first job?

*Laxman Das:* My first job was that of a Lecturer. I had obtained the Master of Science degree in Physics. I had appeared for the Indian Revenue Service (IRS) exams, and was awaiting the results. During that time I got an offer for the post of a Lecturer in Raza Post Graduate Government Degree College at Rampur in UP, close to Bareilly and Moradabad. I joined that College as a Lecturer. When my IRS exams result was declared I was in Rampur and read about my selection in the newspaper.

*Jawhrani:* After that job you got into the Income Tax Department. Did you appear for any exam other than the IRS, for getting this job or was this the only one required?

*Laxman Das:* A graduate in any field, within the age group of 21 to 26 years could appear for the IRS exam in those days.

*Jawhrani:* After going through your bio-data, I have observed that you were the youngest person selected in the Income Tax Department.

*Laxman Das:* The minimum required age for appearing for that exam was 21 years as on the 1st August, that year, and I had reached that age on the 13th July. So, in that way, I turned out to be the youngest among those got selected.

*Jawhrani:* The income tax department stands to gain a lot from your services, as you still have some time left for your retirement.

*Laxman Das:* I have a little over six years before retirement. With the blessings and good wishes of every one, I hope to richly contribute to my department and have a successful career.

*Jawhrani:* Are there any other Sindhis holding similar important positions?

*Laxman Das:* Presently, we have a Sindhi Director General posted at Nagpur. There we have our training academy known as the National Academy of Direct Taxes and whoever is selected in the IRS exams has to undergo one year training over there. It is a very vital training and therefore they need a very competent person to head this Academy. She is the head over there.

*Jawhrani:* What is her name?

*Laxman Das:* Miss Geeta Kriplani. Even prior to this there have been many Sindhis in our department who have made a mark for themselves. One was Mr. Jaisinghani. He was the senior most officer who retired quite a long time ago and was very well respected.

*Jawhrani:* One more thing I have noticed is that even those in the service class have the longing for their language and literature. It is really appreciable that along with doing their jobs they still fulfil their duty towards their community. In every office, in every department they have started Sindhi Circles; like the Reserve Bank has its own Circle; the State Bank has its own. In a similar manner, does Income Tax Department also have its own Sindhi Circle?

*Laxman Das:* Yes. We have a Sindhi Association and also publish an annual magazine named 'Surhan'. Once a year a function is organized, which consists of a musical program. Picnics are also organized so that we can meet each other and on such occasions an atmosphere is created where we can converse in Sindhi. This is quite a nice thing.

*Jawhrani:* Since this topic of publishing is being discussed, I have information that you have even written some books.

*Laxman Das:* I haven't written any book as such. I have written my thesis on 'The Role and Evaluation of Foreign Investments in India' which got the Best Thesis Award at the NDC Course attended by 72 officers from India and abroad. It is a one year course conducted by the National Defence College, New Delhi. It is the most prestigious course in India, for the Government Officers, especially those in the Defence Forces. Defence Officers who are likely to reach high positions like that of Army General or the Chief of Navy or Air Force have to necessarily attend this course. In our neighbouring friendly countries also, most of the Service Chiefs have done this course.

*Jawhrani:* Since we are on the topic of awards, let us know about any other awards or honours that you may have received?

*Laxman Das:* I have received a reward of Rs. One lakh from the Income Tax Department.

*Jawhrani:* In which year did you receive this reward?

*Laxman Das:* This year, in March.

*Jawhrani:* As can be seen you have keen interest in education. Are your siblings or children also inclined towards education?

*Laxman Das:* With the blessings of God, my younger brother is an Assistant Commissioner of Income Tax and very soon he will be promoted as a Deputy Commissioner. My youngest brother is a Civil

Engineer. One of my two sisters is also a graduate from the Allahabad University.

*Jawhrani:* What about your children?

*Laxman Das:* I am really lucky in this regard also. My son has completed his Computer Engineering in Bombay and has done his Masters in Computer Science from California in USA. He received 'Outstanding Achievement Award' from the University of Southern California, Los Angeles. My daughter is in the Third Year of Computer Engineering in Thadomal Shahani Engineering College, Bombay.

*Jawhrani:* So, this trend of awards is going on. After you, even your son has received one?

*Laxman Das:* It is due to the blessings of God and our elders who have sacrificed a lot, like my father who was a medical student and on Partition gave up his studies to take up a job for the sake of the family.

*Jawhrani:* To call oneself Sindhi proves that we are the children and inheritors of that rich heritage and culture which showed the path of progress to the entire world. This is in fact a matter of pride. But nowadays, the younger generation is shying away from calling themselves Sindhi. What are the reasons behind this?

*Laxman Das:* I feel that the people today are not aware of the greatness of our culture. They don't have the idea that our rich culture is about five to six thousand years old and so many religions have come into existence after us. They don't know the importance of this heritage and culture. I feel that they should be educated about the importance and the value of our culture through small books in English, Hindi and Sindhi.

*Jawhrani:* We have this dispute about the script. Some are in favour of the Arabic script while some are in favour of Devnagri. In which script do you feel the youngsters today will prefer to read about our invaluable inheritance, our legacy, our wealth of literature?

*Laxman Das:* As long as we adhere to the Persian script, it will be very difficult to save our Sindhi language. So, the choice is between the Devnagri and the Roman scripts. If we take a look at our population, then those who understand the Devnagri script are in majority. There will be some who understand the Roman script, but those who understand the Devnagri script will be much more. So, with the

Devnagri script we can reach a large number of people. The language should be Sindhi but if the script is Devnagri or Roman then many will get the knowledge about our culture. In fact, even I was not aware about many things which slowly unfolded in front of me. If all these things are made known to the youngsters in the beginning then they won't feel incomplete or deficient.

The next issue as you said is that people are shying away from calling themselves Sindhis. I feel that in the beginning when we came here, we were emotionally and financially broken down by Partition. So, the impression and opinion of others about us was not so good. Now, if we put forth our progress in a proper way in front of the people then their opinion about us will definitely change. Their opinion about us is already changing because we have done quite a lot specially in Bombay, in the fields of education and medicine etc.

*Jawhrani:* Not only in Bombay but throughout India we have contributed to the field of education.

*Laxman Das:* But still there are places like Ulhasnagar and others where there is a lot of scope for improvement.

*Jawhrani:* Regarding Ulhasnagar, people have a wrong notion but....

*Laxman Das:* Ulhasnagar is quite good, but we have to make it better and better showcase it to the people so that they come forward and they themselves praise it and we don't have to advertise about it.

*Jawhrani:* We ourselves opened our shops, cleaned them ourselves and we ourselves sat in the shops to sell the goods. Therefore from that point of view, our cost was less and we could sell our goods at a cheaper price. Because of that a wrong impression was created in the minds of the people regarding cheap goods from Ulhasnagar. But this has now vanished.

*Laxman Das:* Yes, but we can still improve it further. Like in areas relating to hygiene, cleanliness and availability of medical facilities. Engineering Colleges and Medical Colleges can be started there. We don't have the problem of space there. If we concentrate on these matters, it will be quite good for our community. For example, we have all heard about Kota in Rajasthan, where very good coaching for IIT Entrance Tests is available. Previously no one knew about Kota, as it was a small town. But now, so many good educational institutes and coaching centres have come up there that people have started taking note of it. In fact, in our

department, many officers try to take a transfer to Kota so that they can provide good IIT Entrance Test coaching to their children. If we can do something like this in Ulhasnagar which is of utility not only for Sindhis but also for others and general public at large, then it will be a matter of great pride for us.

*Jawhrani:* Whatever contribution we Sindhis have made towards the progress of India, the fruits of it can be enjoyed by everyone.

*Laxman Das:* Yes. We should always think on the lines of contributing and giving, and God willing, we should never have this thought of receiving or asking for ourselves.

*Jawhrani:* Do your children speak Sindhi at home?

*Laxman Das:* Yes, they do. We converse in Sindhi with our parents, siblings and children. But the only problem is that we cannot read and write in Sindhi and this is because of the problem of the script. I feel if we adhere only to the Persian script then I fear that one day our language will vanish. I feel one should not argue so much for the Arabic script. After all, it is not our own original script. It is the script of those who came to Sindh from outside, ruled over us and forced us to accept their script.

*Jawhrani:* It is a very ancient script?

*Laxman Das:* No doubt it is old. But basically its not our own. So, if at all we have to be devoted to any script, it is better to be devoted to our own Devnagri script which has originated from our own ancient Sanskrit. Our original script has not yet been deciphered, which was our Indian script and not the foreigner's script or the script of the invaders, but it was our very own, of our own country. At least Devnagri is our country's script. So, I feel we should stick to the Devnagri script or else our children will not know our language. If we stress on the Persian script, no one will be ready to learn it as no one has the time for it.

*Jawhrani:* Today at this juncture, in your opinion how should we further develop our language? Because from almost all schools and colleges the Sindhi subject has vanished and to such an extent that in no state is the history of Sindh being taught. Like for example, who is Hemu Kalani, our youngsters don't know. The sacrifice of Hemu Kalani can be compared to that of Bhagatsingh who in his youthful days sacrificed his life. To get across this message to our youth, would you give importance to theatre?

*Laxman Das:* I feel that because of theatre and stage the youth will be attracted and they themselves will also participate in it. Through this medium if we tell them about our ancestors then they will feel proud about it. We can also publish small books in English, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati and Sindhi (in Devnagri and Roman scripts) and make it available to them so that by reading they can get vast knowledge about Sindhyat. Then they will realize that although we are less in numbers, our contribution is immense; in fact the name of our country has been derived from us. When they realize this, they will have a strong determination to preserve our culture.

*Jawhrani:* You mean to say that Hind is derived from Sindh.

*Laxman Das:* Yes. And our country India was named after the river Indus. We should maintain our identity on our own and not seek anything from anyone else. We should realize that we had been leading; then why are we behind now? Let us ponder how Bengalis and Parsis have progressed so much.

*Jawhrani:* As far as financial conditions are concerned, even we are quite strong. The main damage caused to our community after partition has been to our language, our literature, our culture and our civilization. How do we make good on this loss?

*Laxman Das:* At present we are in quite a good position so as to make up for those losses. All these matters relating to language or culture can be taken care of only when one is financially strong. It is said, "one cannot pray on an empty stomach". In a similar way, when one is not economically strong then he will not be in a position to take care of matters relating to language and culture. Now, we have reached a stage where we can easily make up for all these shortcomings but the only thing is that we should realize that these are also the areas we have to take care of and devote some of our time towards them. Today we have our schools, colleges and auditoriums. There, we can invite our professors, doctors, advocates, poets, authors, stalwarts in the film industry and high officials in government and private sectors to our functions, conferences and seminars and through them educate our people about our culture.

*Jawhrani:* The main thing is that we have to infuse enthusiasm in our youth today about being Sindhi, then all else will follow. We should make them realize that we are Sindhis who are the inheritors of the ancient culture. Till this does not happen we cannot save our culture.

*Laxman Das:* Yes. Absolutely true.

*Jawhrani:* Nowadays, even inter-caste marriages are taking place. What is your opinion in this regard?

*Laxman Das:* In case of arranged marriages, Sindhis should try to get married to Sindhis. But in love marriages when one gets attracted to someone then you cannot say anything in that matter and we should learn to adjust.

*Jawhrani:* In whichever state we have settled, we have adopted the customs and traditions of that state very quickly. We do Ganpati Puja, Durga Puja and we believe in all Gods and Goddesses. How do we inform the world about our own God Jhulelal? In fact our own youngsters are unaware about our God, they don't know about 'Chaliyo Saheb' etc. What has been our shortcoming?

*Laxman Das:* It is better that we tell our children before we tell others about our God. Frankly speaking, since the last 20 years even we do Ganpati Puja and worship the Lord Ganesha during the Ganeshotsav at our home but we have not worshiped Lord Jhulelal as we worship Lord Ganesha.

*Jawhrani:* Then this should start happening. Just as we worship Lord Ganesha for one and a half day or so during the Ganeshotsava, we should also worship Lord Jhulelal for a day or two so that our children know about the Lord. By doing so, not only our children but even the non-Sindhis will know about our Lord.

*Laxman Das:* Yes, I agree with you that we have lagged behind in this matter and not worshipped Lord Jhulelal. This is a good thing that I have learnt from you today that we should worship our Lord and should encourage other Sindhis also to do so.

*Jawhrani:* One last question, 60 years have passed since partition but till date our elders complain about the promises and assurances given to us; equal constitutional rights etc. In your opinion have we achieved those?

*Laxman Das:* We have got equal constitutional rights. I feel we have achieved quite a lot over here. And we should stop grumbling that we didn't receive this thing or that. We should think on these lines our population was about 25 to 30 lakhs and on that basis we would have got not even three-four Members of Parliament. But even if we had these MPs from a Sindhi Region in India, then out of 542 Members of Parliament in Lok Sabha, of what importance would

our three-four MPs have been? In fact, as we are now spread out all over, we are receiving goodwill and love from everyone. Everyone is admiring us. It is better if we don't think about the promises and what was received and what was not. I feel that maybe at that time we could have got something more, but now neither do we need anything nor will anyone give us anything.

*Jawhrani:* You mean to say that instead of fighting for our rights we should perform our duties which will be beneficial for us. We are grateful to you for coming here, and although we would love to continue, due to the paucity of time we have to conclude the meeting.

*Laxman Das:* Yes, it will be beneficial for all. I am also very grateful to you for giving me this opportunity to express my views to our community of great achievers.