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## Sind and Sindhis\*

**1** consider it appropriate to write something that gives our youngsters some knowledge of our distant origins and current achievements.

Sind is crossed from one end to the other by one of the mightiest rivers of North India. Like everything else in Sind, it is unique amongst the rivers of the world. Its uniqueness lies in its waywardness. Time and again, it has changed its course and justly earned for itself the nickname 'Poorali': the whimsical one.

The varying channels of the river destroyed all historical evidence of the people, the flora, the fauna and the landscape of the area through which it flowed. Europe fondly believed that history had started with the Greeks and that India was a dark continent inhabited by barbarians until their civilised cousins, the Aryans, brought to them the light of civilisation. Its inference was shattered in 1924 by the breathtaking discoveries of Mohenjodaro and Harappa, a few hundred miles to the north of India. The excavation disclosed four or five superimposed cities with hundreds of slightly built brick houses and shops ranged along wide streets, as well as narrow lanes, rising in many cases to several storeys. The evidence indisputably established, that during the third and fourth millennium BC, there existed in the area a very highly developed city life, houses with wells and bathrooms and an elaborate drainage system and a general condition of citizens superior to that prevailing in contemporary Babylonia and Egypt. Among the finds were household utensils and toilet outfits, pottery painted and plain, terracotta dyes, coins older than any previously known, seals engraved and inscribed with an unknown pictography, gold and silver bangles, earrings and necklaces and other jewellery, so well-finished and so highly polished that they might well have come from a jeweller of today, rather than from a prehistoric house 5000 years ago. The deeper they dug the more advanced was the civilisation, its art forms and its implements.

The arrogance of Europe and the fond assumptions that went with it were shattered within the course of one year. As in Europe so in the north-west of India, the marauding

Aryans from the north with their stronger physiques, healthier appetites, the virile love of wine and women, skill and courage in war, swooped down upon the more civilised and correspondingly weakened inhabitants of the temperate zones—zones in which Nature was an ally and not a rival and therefore posed no challenge and evoked no emotional response. It is a mixture of the old and the new, synthesised into something more vital that confronted Alexander the Great when he entered Sind, about three centuries before Christ. As usual, the river makes it difficult even to formulate an accurate picture of Sind as it presented itself to the great Macedonian warrior.

This theory is now seriously challenged by scholars, who believe that Aryans were indigenous to India, who left their country in search of a revered spiritual entity, settled in various parts of the world and finally returned to their original home convinced that that is where they would discover their destiny. Bhagwan Gidwani's book, the *Return of Aryans* must be read by every Sindhi.

Within seven years after Alexander turned his back on India, Sind passed under the suzerainty of Chandragupta Maurya, a lesser warrior but certainly a better king than Alexander himself. Under Ashoka, Sind got its fair share of the Buddhist influence. Buddha was a Kshatriya warrior and the Kshatriya never surrendered to the Brahmin his claim to superiority over the latter. Buddhism left a permanent trait in Sindhi society, prominent even when the British arrived. The Brahmin in Sind was a backward tribe. Never did he gain ascendancy in the intellectual or social hierarchy. As if to prove the point, the Shudra dynasty established its reign with the capital of Sind at Alor. Brahmin rule in Sind came only in the seventh century AD. It had but a brief existence and was soon supplanted by the Islamic hordes under Mohamed Bin Qasim. For nearly three centuries, Sind remained the tributary of the Arab Khalifs. The Sindhi, however, acted with tremendous intelligence and shrewdness. Even when Mahmood of Ghazni conquered it, the real rulers were the local Muslims, the Sumras and the Samas. The capital shifted under the latter down south to Thatta.

The most glorious monarch of Indian history, Akbar the Great, was Sind's contribution, both to the Mughal Empire and to the country as a whole. Though here and there, a conservative Ullema of Islam was encountered in Sind, yet the dominant strain

was provided by the gentle Sufi, who while not disowning Islam made Islam more consonant with the teachings of Hinduism, Christianity and that of the Greek philosophers.

The art and faith of Aurangzeb did not find a hospitable soil in Sind. It preferred the Darvishes with their music, dancing, drugs, ecstasy and illuminations. Doctrinally, their *phana* almost corresponded to Buddha's *nirvana* and their 'tawakur' echoed total surrender to the will of God. It is under their influence that Sindhi literature made copious use of symbolic expression borrowed from the vocabulary of wine and love, including *love* that superficially resembles the homosexual.

The world famous Sind writer and teacher Popati Hiranandani wrote a book, *Sindhis: The Scattered Treasure* and the equally famous Nayantara Sahgal in reviewing it said,

All Indians are heir to the Indus valley civilisation. But Sindhis are its natural heirs, coming from the region where it began and prospered, and made its mark in the ancient world as perhaps the most superior civilisation of its day. Prof. Hiranandani's book acquaints us with the living impact of this heritage, enriched by Arab and Persian influences, upon her community. She enables us to link the highly organised cities, the talented craftsmen and the seafaring merchants of 7000 years ago with the enterprising, cosmopolitan Sindhi we know, who ventures forth to all parts of the globe and feels at home everywhere.

This book will leave upon its readers two clear impressions. One is the secular outlook of the Sindhi, who draws his language, culture and inspiration from both Hindu and Muslim streams; the other is that the Sindhi has made the transition to modernity more successfully than most Indians. He cherishes his traditions, yet is, in *every* sense, a modern human being. Both achievements are more remarkable when we realise that, unlike any other Indian community, the Sindhis, since partition, have had no stretch of land to call their own.

Professor Hiranandani's is an apt introduction to her vivid and vigorous community. We need such a book for every linguistic group in India, not only so that we may better understand and appreciate our differences, but also that we can rejoice in the multi-faceted heritage we are fortunate enough to possess.

I must add that to a people who practise the utmost religious toleration, the cry for the partition of the country on religious lines was naturally anathema. Jinnah's poison had spread through the length and breadth of the country. The blood of the Sindhis rejected that poison much longer than any other section of the Indian nation. Sind stood out in mocking rejection of Jinnah's two-nation theory. Up to the last, the resolution in favour of Pakistan could not be rammed down the throat of the Sind Legislative Assembly. A majority, though slender, kept it at bay and finally one of the greatest nationalist Mussalrnan, Sind's Chief Minister, the late All Bux Sumro, had to be shot dead by hired assassins to create a majority.

Even while the country was divided, communal violence that took place was minimal in Sind and much of the violence that took place was precipitated by outside elements alien to Sind's native catholicity and communal affection. When the Hindu parted from his Muslim brother, often tearful scenes were witnessed and as Pakistan plunged into economic backwardness and a military dictatorship, the Sindhi Muslim in melancholy and nostalgia wished for the return of his Hindu brother. The Hindu Sindhi immigrant in India has not likewise been able to obliterate his tender memories of the land of his birth. This, of course, does not apply to the younger generation, which has no such emotional ties with Sind. It is mainly those who were born and who lived in Sind, with their warm emotional ties with Sind, who are keen on perpetuating their emotions and their experience for the future generations.

The partition of India has been very much akin to the Jewish Diaspora 2000 years ago. The Sindhi Hindu has almost been relegated to the position of the wandering Jew. One must however recognise a major difference between the two situations. Though the Sindhi Hindu has encountered subtle discrimination and often pronounced hostility, he has not suffered the indignity and persecution of the Jews. But the emotional trauma of a people left without a land to call their own is just about the same.

The trauma has not been without its compensation. Like the Jew who has overcome his handicaps and made good in every inhospitable soil and clime, the Sindhi too has been spurred into bringing forth the best in him. Take almost any field of human endeavour and a Sindhi will be found who holds a candle to the very best. Successful Sindhis in trade,

commerce, industry, medicine, law and almost every profession will make a fair sized directory. Some of them will qualify for inclusion in any high class 'Who's Who'.

Understandably, they have not made much impact in the field of politics. Small in number and thinly distributed all over the country, they have not been able to return members of their own community to the legislative bodies. Some have however got into local municipalities and Zilla Parishads and occasionally into State Assemblies. Currently, there are two in the Lok Sabha and one in the Rajya Sabha.

Minorities have, as a rule, tended to support ruling parties and secure some measure of patronage and protection in return. The Sindhis have not been an exception. Partition and its ugly manifestations have however turned a significant number in the direction of the Jan Sangh and its successor, the Bharatiya Janata Party. The late Jairamdas Doulatram has been a typical Congress Sindhi and Lai Krishan Advani a typical Jana Sanghi. Each represents a dominant political influence. Both have been clean politicians, the very best of their kind. Advani held the post of India's Deputy Prime Minister for some time.

Though no more with us, a reference to the Late revered Acharya JB Kripalani is imperative. He lived for almost a hundred years and always stood out as a tower of moral strength to all who stand for democratic decency and constitutional propriety. A true Gandhian, he shunned power for himself and in an ocean of corruption, he remained a sturdy lighthouse of integrity.

Many Sindhis have settled down in different and far-flung parts of the world. Dazzling success has come the way of many. They would like to return to their motherland, some even permanently. But stupidity of laws and insolence of bureaucrats keep them away. The country suffers in the bargain.

The primary and paramount mark of Sindhi identity is the distinct language and script. Rich though it is in lore and literature, it faces the prospect of extinction as more and more children refuse to speak and learn it. It will be a pity if this beautiful flower ceases to be a part of the Indian bouquet.

The galaxy of Sindhi poets and writers has kept the language and script alive. Organisers arrange annual *Sammelans* where Sindhis from the world over mingle and meet and savour the fragrance and flavour of Sindhi culture and civilisation. The literature

produced in Pakistan testifies the longing for reunions that saddens the heart of Sindhis in Pakistan. With the relations between the two countries getting better, this longing will bear fruition and fulfilment.