

Dr. Ram Buxani

Around the world, there are some figures who are seen as leaders not only by virtue of their success and stature in society but by their actions and qualities. Dr. Ram Buxani is one such who has spearheaded the need to give dignity to the Indian community abroad and much of the understanding and cooperation between India and the U.A.E. has seen him play a leading role in it.

His autobiographic work, a rare effort by any Indian businessman in one's lifetime and later doing a thesis on "Governance of Dubai – Role of Tribal Element in Managing the City State" which got him a doctorate are evidence of his keen interest in literature and academics.

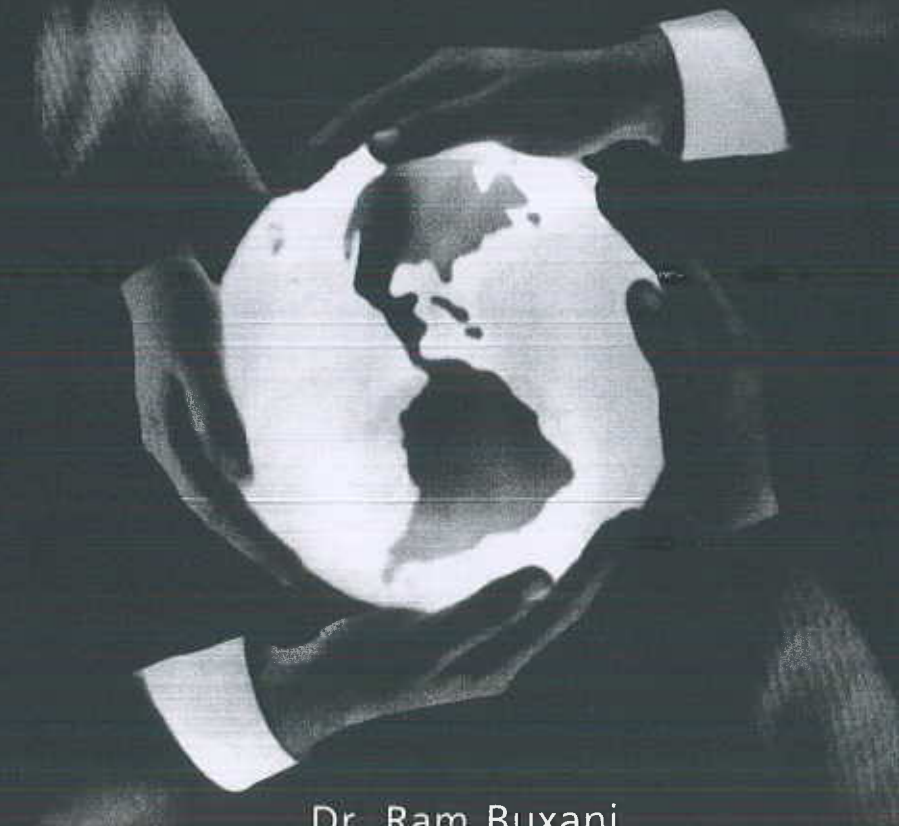
Dr. Ram Buxani, an eminent educationalist and businessman who has spent 48 years of his life overseas, fascinated the audience with his vibrant paper read at a seminar on Relevance of Sindhayat in Modern Times at the Quasi Centennial function organised by the University of Bombay. It proves that the fire of Sindhayat has not extinguished in the minds of the community even with the lapse of time. The new seed sown by him in his message is bound to bring some positive results

University of Mumbai



Sindhis

*God's gift to
Global Economy
a reflection*



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Sindhis



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- a reflection*

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FOREWORD

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SINDHIS - GOD'S GIFT TO GLOBAL ECONOMY

- a reflection

Research Essay

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FOREWORD

The opportunity given to the Department of Sindhi by the University of Mumbai, as part of its sesquicentenary year celebrations, to host an International Seminar. 'Relevance of Sindhyat in Modern Times', on 6th March 2007, was for me the fulfillment of a long cherished dream.

I always wanted that the stalwarts of the Sindhi Community from different walks of life join hands for the common cause of Sindhis and come together on a common platform to tell the world about the relevance of soofi thoughts and practice of tolerance, the panacea for all the hatred and violence that has gripped the world and divided it vertically. Every speaker emphasized the need to look at the Sindhi traditions, high standards of Sindhu civilization et al, to bridge the fissures created between world communities which have reached the point where people have started discussing about the clash of civilizations. Sindhis have always been the flag bearers of world peace. Sindh has provided the best forms of handicrafts and instruments of fine arts, music, dance and sculpture, but always shunned any form of violence. The findings from the excavations of world's oldest city of Mohen-jo-Daro has shown pottery, finest form of architecture,

jewellery, sculpture & clothings but no arms; which proves beyond any doubt that our forefathers had a taste for finer elements of life and didn't find any need to have any tools for violence.

It is sheer love and compassion on the part of our world luminaries, like Srichand Hinduja (London); Dr. Ram Buxani (Dubai), Mazhar ul Haque Siddiqui, present Vice-Chancellor, University of Sindh and most well known face of Sindhi literature & Ex-Vice Chancellor of Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, Amar Jaleel to have attended the seminar. All, including me, presented one paper each, on various dimensions of the seminar aptly titled "Relevance of Sindhyat in Modern Times".

"God's gift to Global Economy- A Reflection" presented by Dr. Ram Buxani is truly an outstanding paper. He hails from business background. But this international businessman is obviously a master on global economy and his love and dedication for Sindhyat hones his scholarly prowess. Elaborate and scholarly, the paper enumerates the maladies afflicting the Sindhi language and culture and simultaneously suggests remedies for the same, besides conveying in a clear and coherent manner the message of love and peace, hallmark of our community, that could be instrumental in decimating the barriers between divided world communities.

A very pertinent issue he raises is about the abysmal lack of representation in the Parliament and other government bodies which is absolutely essential to ensure a fair deal to the Sindhi community. His paper compels you to contemplate and mull over the plethora of issues of concern while leaving you with a certain warmth and sense of pride at being born a Sindhi.

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PREFACE

DR. RAM BUXANI

PREFACE

There is a saying in Ethiopia which goes: "Nobody is a fool, so long as he is in his own country, by his own riverside, in his own village, within his own community." Unfortunately history seldom allowed a Sindhi to remain too long in his own country, by his own riverside, in his own village. Many times he was even separated from his community. But no body called him a fool. In fact, he emerged successful whenever the dice was heavily loaded against him and especially when he had to leave "the land of milk and honey" and put down new roots elsewhere. Like the proverbial Phoenix, he always rose from the ashes. He may not have a land of his own; all the same, he has managed to make himself a home wherever the winds of fate have taken him.

When I was invited by Dr. Baldev Matlani to speak at the Seminar on 'Relevance of Sindhiyat in Modern Times' at the Quasi Centennial Ceremony of the Bombay University, I chose the subject - Sindhis-God's Gift to the Global Economy- a reflection - for my address, to record my observations about a community which has been destined to play definitive roles at various points in the history of the sub-continent. It is, no doubt, a subjective presentation but it is my hope that it will provide the younger generation some perspective on their community's resilience that helped it face challenges after challenges throughout its history.

The community always emerged victorious each time because of its inbuilt resilience. Whether it was invasion by foreigners in ancient times, or partition in recent times, challenges and tragedies thrown up by the vagaries of history always provided the community new opportunities to redefine its destiny. Our community showed to the world, time and again, that despite problems and hurdles it was possible to make progress through perseverance and faith.

My topic has three components: The period before the partition, the spread of the diaspora and the qualities that make a Sindhi a successful businessman. My address also highlighted the challenges the community may face in the future.

I have also tried to answer the question of future challenges. Challenge of maintaining our Identity- our Traditions- our Language- our Literature- our Culture- our Attire- Our Cuisine. I dared to put forward some suggestions because I have often asked these questions to myself in order to arrive at some answers. I formulated them against the background of my experience as an NRI, a businessman, a husband and father, and above all as a member with real concern for the welfare of the community. My stay abroad for about half a century has also enabled me to stand back and look at events that matter to the community somewhat more objectively.

I cannot resist asking simple questions about our daily existence as members of a vibrant community that has spread its roots far and wide in the world. I have, therefore, even in this address, raised some questions that may look naive. But believe me, I raised them only because, to me, they are very serious. There is a Chinese saying about those who ask questions: "He who asks a question is a fool for five minutes; he who does not ask a question remains a fool forever." I must say, I would like to be included in the five minutes' league.

I have great faith in our younger generation. I have often heard complaints from people who represent the older generation that our younger generation is too modern to carry on with the traditions of our

community. Sindhis have an exceptional ability to adapt. But some people fear that this ability will ultimately work against the "Sindhiness" of the community. The younger generation of Sindhis living in many countries across the world is not comfortable with their native tongue. They are much comfortable with the language of their adopted country. So what will happen in the future? Can Sindhis retain their tradition without their own language? These are all vital questions. But as I said before, our younger generation is smart and they will find ways to retain their identity.

I have a word for the older generation: "If you want happiness for a lifetime, help our next generation." Don't tell them what to do. If you do so, they'll forget; show them and they may remember; involve them and they'll understand. So, while passing on the torch to them, we also have to run with them. When you do this they may follow the adage: To know the road ahead, ask those coming back.

I hope every Sindhi & non-Sindhi will reflect while reading this booklet and stand behind the community who are the torchbearers of Indus Valley Civilization to get their rightful pedestal.

Dr Ram Buxani

Sindhis

God's gift to Global Economy
- a reflection

Sindhis are indeed a chosen lot. Well known Sindhi writer, Late Popati Hiranandani while describing the community as a “Scattered Treasure” called the Sindhi a “Peacock Hearted International Citizen”. One common link that is noticed between this gorgeous bird and the Sindhis is that both have long been known outside their native countries.

Once the person introduces himself as a Sindhi, people would know as to with whom they are talking to. The vibration of shrewdness and vast business acumen is immediately felt. Some even compare us with Jews.

Sind has always been the first target of foreign invaders who crossed Khyber and Bolan Passes and entered India to loot and plunder. Nadirshah, Ahmed Shah Abdali, Alexander and Mohammed Bin Qasim were among those who found India

irresistible. From 712 AD to this date, Sind and Sindhis have had their share of misery and misfortune and yet they have survived – rising like a phoenix from its own ashes. It was Sumner Redstone, once controlling shareholder of CBS Corporation who said:

**“Success is not built on success,
it is built on failure,
it is built on frustration,
sometimes it is built on catastrophe”**

In fact, Sind has acted as a shield against invaders of India for several centuries and has absorbed shocks, religious conversions and cultural changes itself, preventing further spread to other parts of India.

As I mentioned earlier, Sind was subjected to attacks from foreign countries at different periods of time. The community survived all those assaults because of its resilience and positive outlook. The positive side of foreign invasions was that Sindhi tradesmen had the opportunity to mingle with people of different cultures. They also provided the opportunity to travel and settle abroad.

Here I would like to recall an anecdote I read in an article. In ancient days Sindhis were known for their seafaring prowess. Alexander the Great sought the help of Sindhis to evacuate a large part of his invading army out of India in 356 BC. His admiral Nearchus assembled hundreds of Sindhi shipwrights and carpenters to build a flotilla of boats to carry the Macedonian army from the mouths of the Indus to Persia on its way home. The ports of the long lost Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa Civilisations must have been witness to this trade carried on by Sindhi sailors and Sindhi enterprise. Grain and cotton clothes were exported to new destinations due to this interaction with the Macedonian army.

This contact also provided them opportunity to settle down in new destinations. We have definite historical evidence to prove that Sindhi merchants were settled on the Iranian side of the

Arabian Gulf from the 9th century. They also traded with Oman and Yemen and beyond, towards the Red Sea.

The modern-day migration is said to have begun in the 15th century when the merchants, the Bhatias from Thatta in lower Sind, engaged in trading activity in Oman. This Gulf kingdom remained an important colony where, in subsequent years, people from other parts of Sind, the Bhatias from Kutch and the Khojas from Hyderabad also joined. It was this historical connection that helped modern-day Sindhi migration to other Gulf countries.

Towards the mid-18th century, it was from Shikarpur, a small town in upper Sind, that migration started in an organised way. Some hundred years later, Hyderabad, the capital of Sind, joined the bandwagon. As we all know, these two centres had their own characteristics as far as the nature of merchant migration was concerned.

Shikarpuris were mainly bankers and financiers and were known for the indigenous banking system formulated for rapid transfer of money to distant areas. Known as hundi, or bill of exchange, the system had its own code of conduct and idiom for fast transactions and transfers of money from one place to another. Today with modern communication facilities like internet we can make instant transfer of money to many parts of the world. But when communication between two places was possible only through personal messengers, the Shikarpuris introduced the system of money transfer.

The ingenuity of the Shikarpuris in the financial field took them to places as far afield as Russia in the 18th and 19th centuries. They were able to create a niche for themselves in Russian Central Asia because of their unrivalled skill in settling payments through hundi. The hundi system was a great solace for travellers and tradesmen who moved along dangerous trade routes, such as Central Asia. It gave them the liberty of not carrying money and goods on person. If a person was travelling from Kandahar in Afghanistan to a town in Central Asia, he could use the hundi that

would enable him to collect money on arrival at his destination.

They also had a strong presence in the Chinese province of Sinkiang and southern Iran. And they were a major factor in Central Asia till the Russian revolution in 1917. The turmoil that followed the political change in Russia forced these bankers back to India where they redeployed themselves as indigenous bankers. In India, they initially set up their strongholds in Bombay and Madras presidencies. Subsequently they extended their operations to Burma and Ceylon. Later they diversified their business in India to meet the challenge of the expanding Indian economy.

Unfortunately, sixty years back, in the wake of India's independence and partition of the sub-continent, Sindhis had to abandon their home and hearth, leaving their large movable and immovable properties with bare minimum clothes on their bodies in search of new abodes.

The British left the country, but not before dividing it on religious basis into two parts. Sind too, should have been partitioned, like Punjab and Bengal. One part of it, howsoever small, should have remained with India. Then it would not have become necessary for Hindu Sindhis to leave their homeland. Even if India did not get a part of Sind, it could have given some portion of erstwhile Bombay State, of which Sind was an integral part. This was not done.

It resulted in Hindu Sindhis not getting even an inch of land to call as their own state. India has not allowed the community to nominate even a single representative in any law making body to look after the interests of such a vibrant and economically viable community.

Dr. Jagat Motwani in his book *"Five Thousand Years of Sindhis"* has rightly tried to put in a befitting manner the strength of Sindhi Entrepreneurship with authenticity when he quotes Mahatma Gandhi saying in the year 1947 *"If even a single Sindhi leaves Sindh, it will be a matter of shame to Mr. Jinnha as Governor General. The Sindhi Hindus are first-class businessmen. Why are they running away to Bombay,*

Madras and other places? It will not be they who will be losers, but Sindh. For they will make money for themselves, wherever they go".

Still, as many as 1.3 million Sindhis migrated to different cities, divested of their original splendour as Zamindars of sprawling acres of lands, prosperous Diwans or even cotton-mill owners. Such a large exodus from the land of birth was never witnessed in the history of mankind except in the case of Jews who were butchered, put in gas chambers and hounded the world over. They got scattered everywhere and could not dream of having their own piece of land till recently.

Similarly life was grim for Sindhis who migrated. Families were torn apart and scattered. Clans and well-knit communities disintegrated. A once-proud people were reduced to penury and misery. It was a struggle for survival for people who had lost all they possessed and had to begin anew. Sindhis were un-welcome refugees in their own country and found shelter in thatched houses and abandoned military barracks. They were denied basic amenities and were supplied ration not fit for human consumption. However, inadequate water supply, non-availability of lavatories and bathrooms and absence of privacy, with social problems galore, shook and awakened them from slumber. Something had to be done. They could not imagine themselves living on charities and thus started their struggle for resettlement.

They had with them their spirit - an indomitable one, and the tenacity and instinct to survive. They had inherited a strong and unparalleled business acumen. And today, spread in all nooks and corners of India and over 100 countries of the world, Sindhis have proven their mettle **that they are born to lead and set example for others.**

Gradually they changed their profile. From refugees they not only became contributors to the local and national economy, but also to the social life. They changed the face of the barracks in Kalyan, which were built to house prisoners during World War II. Sindhi entrepreneurship saw the transformation of the camp into the

famed Ullhasnagar and the emergence of millionaires from there.

I can say with certain amount of pride that we taught the world not only the art of survival but also the art of entrepreneurship. Our people have spread around the world. May be this is a divine design. May be it is the divine way of demonstrating the art of business. We succeeded because we are hard workers. As Vince Lombardi, one of football's accomplished coaches said:

“The price of success is hard work,

dedication to the job at hand,

and determination that, whether we win or loose

we have applied the best of alertness to the task at hand”

They also made considerable and outstanding contributions in the field of education and health. There are nearly 20 prominent colleges in the metropolis of Mumbai alone run by the Sindhi community where more than 80% beneficiaries are non-sindhis. And they are institutions of repute like Jai Hind College and KC College. The Vivekananda Education Society of Bombay and the Mira Education Society of Pune are also doing commendable services in the field of education. Maitri Mandal in Gandhidham has over twelve large schools. Jeev Sewa Sansthan in Bairagarh runs several educational institutions. In Baroda, Shri Ladhrum Sind Hindu Higher Secondary School, Hari Shewa Girls' Higher Secondary Vidyalaya and Ishwaribai Buxani English Academy have produced many successful businessmen around the world. These have all been built with the help of Sindhis. It reminds me of one of the great women of our times Eleanor Roosevelt, when she said:

**“When you cease to make a contribution
you begin to die”**

In the health sector the names of Jaslok Hospital and Hinduja hospital are synonymous with modernity, care, quality and efficiency. Inlaks Hospital in Pune, run by Sadhu Vaswani Mission is another prominent contribution by Sindhis.

Sindhis also introduced many innovations in the field they concentrated on. The ownership flat system is a Sindhi innovation in Bombay. Advanis, Rahejas, Hiranandanis, Daryananis, Motwanis and many more, pioneered the field with hundreds of thousands of flats to their credit in Bombay alone. Jethi Sipahimalani's chain of Navajivan Housing Colonies in Bombay is a shining example of co-operative enterprise in the field of housing. Atur Sangtani, Gheras and Bhai Partap under the banner of Sindhu Resettlement Corporation are names that created legends in Pune, Adipur and Gandhidham.

Even in foreign countries Sindhis have made their mark. Today the Hinduja brothers' business interests span the globe - from India to Europe and the United States. Together they have a substantial stake in global finance, telecommunications, film and oil businesses. One British newspaper estimated their wealth to be in the region of \$8bn. Strichand and Gopichand are now estimated by the British press to be the 13th wealthiest people in Britain.

While Hinduja and Harilelas have given identity to the community, there are several other people in different regions who have kept the head of the community high – like Rajkumar Hiranandanis (Royal Group), Bhojwanis (Shankar's Emporium) and Budhranis in **Singapore**, Purswanis in **Thailand**, Haru Mahtani, Ram Panjabi, Rupchand Chugani and Ram Sorya in **Indonesia**, K. Sital, Udho Buxani, Balu Chanrai, Arjan Melwani, G.Doulatram, Satish & Vijay Makhija, and Jairam Gidwani in **Hong Kong**, Chhabrias, Pancholias, Jashanmals, Intra Group, Safeer Group, Jagtians, Choitrans and Regal Group in the **Middle East**, Bharwanis (Maya Group), Fabianis, Lal Sirwani and Satish Raisinghani in **Spain**, Chellarams, Chanrais, Vaswanis and Hathiramanis in **Nigeria**, Valiram Group in **Malaysia**, Mangharam Harwani in **Denmark**, Bhagwan Mirchandani in **London**, Vashi Khubani, Lal Sani and Vijay Kewalramani in **USA**, Ryoko Hira and Suresh Lall in **Japan**, Kundanmals and Hirdaramanis in **Srilanka**, Bulchands, Alwanis, Aju Daswani, Sakhranis and Mirpuris in the **Caribbean Islands**, Watumalls in

Hawai, Dadlanis in Jamaica, Bob Mirani in Philippines, Harry Pamamull, Murli Bhojwani and Chandru Tolani in Australia. These are a few of the Sindhis who have contributed without much fan-fare. **Indeed the community is God's gift to global economy.**

Sindhis are continuing their tradition. The fact that the first private bank in the post-nationalisation era in India was established by Sindhis is a fitting tribute to their banking and financial management skills. The history of the IndusInd Bank will have special place in the banking history of the country. The name is a combination of the Indus Valley Civilisation and India. It was in 67 days that S.P. Hinduja made the dream of a 100- crore bank come true by roping in leading names from all around the world. The capital was raised without spending any of the customary expenses. This is not a small achievement for a refugee community. **I can safely say that the percentage of millionaires, in US Dollar terms, among Sindhis vis-à-vis their population is greater than that of any other community in the world – Americans included.**

Sindhi community's success in business has a secret. Business is in their blood. It's second nature. They grow up listening to the language of business. The very name Sindhi conjures up images of an industrious tradesman in the minds of a non-Sindhi. **In fact, the word Sindhi has become a generic alternative for business or trade.**

Sindhi tradesmen were known as **Sindhwarkis** from the time of the British and earlier. The name has an interesting etymology. Sindhis were famed for their handicrafts; and foreigners in search of such craftsmanship would come asking for the "work of Sindh". In time, "work of Sindh" was abbreviated to "Sindhwork". Naturally enough, the craftsmen, mostly from Hyderabad, who promoted these handicrafts abroad came to be known as *Sindhwarkis* among the Sindhi themselves.

In the past the son of a Sindhi tradesman learned his business

ropes well before reaching adulthood. He might play for some time with his friends after coming back from school, but he would, without fail, go to his father's shop for a couple of hours to lend a helping hand.

Traditionally, a Sindhi tradesman inducted his son into the family business the day he graduated from school. Higher education or a **degree was of little use in carrying on with the business, the best education for the purpose being provided by the shop itself.** It is not that the traditional Sindhi tradesman held any particular aversion for higher education. The driving force had been ambition and ambition could not waste precious years in study. In fact, for the Sindhi businessman, the best university has traditionally been his own town, shop and house, since they impart utilitarian practical education in trade and commerce.

Business was so natural for a Sindhi boy that he could talk about the merchandise from various countries with authority, because he had uncles and cousins working there. A vacation would mean a trip to meet an uncle in Hong Kong or the Canary Islands. Bred in such an environment, he would be well versed with the tricks of the trade by the time he turned 17 or 18. And by the time he matured to manhood, he had enough experience to embark on his own into the intricate world of business and negotiate his way into the future.

George Matthew Adams, a popular American columnist around the turn of the 19th Century, had summed up this attitude saying *"There should be no age limit placed upon ambition, alertness, creativity, or in fact on anything that make the mental or spiritual progress of any human being. There is an old saying: "Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained". Obviously true, but on the other hand, even though many of our ventures come to a non-profitable end, the very fact that we ventured should be to our credit. People who stand still, or just watch from the sidelines of life, live only partly. To venture, and only to get fun out of it, has a constructive angle to it. Keep venturing and you'll never grow dull."*

Adams could well have been talking about the Sindhis, for his

words truly reflect the thinking of a typical traditional Sindhi tradesman.

In the earlier days, Sindhi tradesmen dealt mostly in textiles as Sind was known for its excellent and exotic cotton fabrics. In modern times, it was with the coming of the British to India that the fame of Sindhi weavers spread to the West. Wherever Sindhis settled, whether in Singapore, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan or Dubai, there would always be a good number of textile dealers among them. That is true even today. A couple of months back *Times of India* reported that China's textile market around the world is ruled by Sindhis living in Shaoxing. Shaoxing sends 2000 containers of textiles, containing nearly 50 million meters of cloth, to markets across the world.

If you ask me what is the single most outstanding quality of the Sindhi community as a whole, without any hesitation I would say: "Positive outlook." If you go back to history you will realise that the community overcame challenges at various points in its history due its positive outlook. As Oprah Winfrey, the celebrity television host said:

**"It doesn't matter who you are,
where you come from.**

The ability to triumph begins with you.

Always"

For a while however, in the quest for economic survival and national success, and perhaps due to their ability to adapt, their cultural heritage remained submerged, or rather merged with a whole spectrum of new customs.

A friend of mine, a non-Sindhi, turned to me some time ago and said, "You know why you all make so much money, it is because you have magnetic personalities". He was half joking but there was a truth in what he said. We are dedicated. We do have a certain ability to make the right decisions at the right time, to recognise opportunity for what it is, to weigh success and failure in the same scale and to

get up and start again when we have stumbled. These are character traits that make us swell with gentle pride and satisfaction...that, despite our high success ratio, wealth has not bruised our value system. Our respect for elders, our protection of the greater family, our religious beliefs, our conservatism have added to the Sindhi strength.

Other communities look at us and comment on the affluence we tend to display. If anything, we are occasionally accused of ostentation. This confuses us because we feel misunderstood. People who make such comments fail to appreciate what went into that success story. We came to various parts of the world with nothing. We adapted to the local conditions. We created a work ethos. We built bridges with the people. We contributed to the commonwealth. We took risks, we took chances and we put what we had on the line. As American President Eisenhower said:

"The middle of the road is all of the usable surface.

The extremes, right and left, are the gutters"

And if, again and again, whether in the East or the West, in remote island archipelagos or the bustling confines of Hong Kong, here in the desert miracles, or in the wilds of Africa, we came out on top, we sometimes express our gratitude in tangible terms. This is where the world thinks we are showing off. What we are doing is sharing our bounty, underscoring our thankfulness to the Lord for his graciousness. For there are few communities as dedicated, as religious, or as given to quiet charity as the Sindhis.

However, the community is again facing a challenge to its very existence. This is the age of globalisation. I seek the attention of the Sindhi leaders to ponder over the impact of globalisation on the Sindhi community. Over the years many community leaders have been expressing concern over the identity of the community as it began spreading around the world. If they had apprehensions in those days, what would be their reactions now when the world is becoming increasingly seamless by the day?

Globalisation is not only of trade and economics. It touches every aspect of human life in every corner of the world. And culture is no exception. I'm concerned here because when I think about the identity of the community what strikes me is how strongly the cultural aspect has been ingrained into the Sindhi identity.

Here culture should be understood as the total way of life of a people. It encompasses ideas, habits, skills and knowledge learnt, valued, shared and transmitted from one generation to the other. And it is an accepted fact that culture determines how members of society think and feel. It influences their actions and even defines their outlook of life. Since it is a central aspect of human existence its implications on their interaction and aspirations are enormous. I'm overemphasising this aspect of culture because ultimately that is going to define the Sindhi identity more than anything else in the globalised world.

Fifty years ago if one had asked a person who is a Sindhi, the answer would have been "a person from Sind." With the dispersal of the Sindhi diaspora far and wide, the answer to the same question would certainly elicit a different answer, especially from the younger generation who may have a vague notion about their ancestral land.

They might have heard stories from their parents and uncles about their forefathers who were very happy in their homeland, "Son Ji Sind, (Golden Sindh)," which also included places like Karachi, Shikarpur, Sukkur, Hyderabad and Larkana. They might have heard about, with nostalgia, the comfortable life the aristocratic Sindhis had in the spacious and well-ventilated Havelis. The stories about beautiful mountains and rivers and mouth-watering delicacies the ladies prepared in their houses might fire their imaginations. But in the present-day reality these will all remain as vague notions as the younger generation spread around the world may never get an opportunity to visit the land of their forefathers. However, the culture they inherited could remain a strong binding force to preserve the Sindhi identity. But experience tells us that

the culture, central to our existence as a community, is being diluted. If the trend continues it may disappear altogether. I'm afraid even the old generation cannot shirk away from the responsibility, as they did not give enough thought to this aspect — their single pointed aim had been economic security.

We can still remedy it and I am sure the community will do it. I have great faith in the younger generation. I have seen young ones in their early 20s making attempts to form clubs and interest groups in their effort to gather and share facts and knowledge about Sindhi heritage and culture. They take great pride in the fact that they are the inheritors of the Indus Valley Civilization, one of the oldest in the world.

It is heartening to note that the younger generation has imbibed the value system that sustained the community which had to struggle against great odds to keep alive their tradition. The respect the younger generation, whether they live in the East or West, show towards their elders is proof that they did not bruise their value system. This respect is borne out of the conviction that they are indebted to their parents and forefathers for the good fortune they enjoy today. In this context I would like to recall what George Mathew Adams said about our indebtedness to other people. He said: *"There is no such thing as a self-made man. We are all made up of thousands of others. Everyone who has even done a kind deed for us, or spoken one word of encouragement to us, has entered into the make-up of our character and of our thoughts, as well as our success."*

One thing the world admits about the Sindhi community is that it's a community that's been built up with courage and fortitude. Since there is inherent strength, the community members, wherever they are, have taken great care to protect the greater family and their beliefs. In spite of their cosmopolitan nature, they hold on to their basic conservatism. Of course, all these have added to the character and strength of the community.

As I mentioned earlier Sindhi children will have a crucial role to play in perpetuating the success of the community. The challenges

they have to face in many respects will be much more than those faced by the previous generations. At stake will be the preservation of their identity. But I have full faith in the young ones. They have largely paid off the love and trust we have invested in them. Our children have made good of the technical revolution and in this respect they lag behind no one. As we hand over the torch to the new generation, we'll be comforted by the fact that they've learned their lessons well and will raise the community's fortunes still higher.

Still there is no room for any laxity. We have to keep on reminding ourselves that the diaspora is spreading too far, too wide and too fast. So we have to keep a watch on our children so that they do not splinter from the pack, out of necessity, and leave the fold as the forces of globalisation forge ahead. We cannot expect them to enjoy the pleasures of larger extended family of aunts, uncles, grandparents and cousins. But we can inculcate the spirit of Sindhyat in them.

This can be achieved only by promoting our language which is one of the cementing factors of our community. We should not forget the fact that it was language that gave the older generation their cultural identity. It was the sustaining force.

Dr. Trumpp in the year 1872, mentioned in his book **“Grammer of Sindhi Language”**: *“Sindhi is a pure Sanskritical language, more free from foreign elements than any other of the North Indian vernaculars. It is much more closely related to the old Prakrit than the Marathi, Hindi, Panjabi and Bengali of our days and it has preserved an exuberance of grammatical forms for which all its sisters may well envy it.”*

However, we have to admit that our children are not comfortable with our language as they grow in environments where they associate with other languages, which ultimately become the chief and comfortable vehicle of communication for them. In many instances, even if they speak Sindhi, they tend to mix it with other languages they are more comfortable with. Things have come to such a pass that for many of them Sindhi is no more their native

tongue. Some of them speak but can't read. If you go to South India you can see younger-generation Sindhis who are more comfortable with English and the local language of the state where they live. The fact that the community readily assimilates with local cultures makes the Sindhi language vulnerable.

So it is up to the community to take collective effort to preserve and perpetuate the purity of Sindhi language. When I say purity of language **I don't mean we cannot reform the language if there is such a need. No language can exist in isolation. It has to grow and evolve.** In that process some new vocabulary would be added, even some fundamentals may have to be rewritten— the script of some Indian languages have undergone many drastic changes that the older generation find difficult to read it. Still the change was accepted because it was necessary to suit computer keyboards. Like any other language Sindhi may also undergo changes. The older generation should not feel any discomfort on this account. We must realize that it was only in 1853 that the present Arabic script was adopted.

If we do not keep alive our language, then we will invite the death of Sindhi literature and media. Right now the Sindhi media — film, visual and print— is not growing because the community is small and dispersed. Since there is a limited market, no business venture in this field will be economically viable.

I emphasise the need to take practical steps to perpetuate the language, because that is the only way we can keep our identity in the changing world. We have lost our names. Now it is difficult to distinguish from the names of the younger generation their ethnic identity. Names have become so secular.

What about the traditional Sindhi dress? I don't think many people outside our community have ever heard about or seen our traditional dress. Many of our community members see their traditional dress only on stage and films. This is because Sindhis hardly make any effort to wear their national dress in public or even at marriages and other cultural events. Are we ashamed of

our traditional dress? May be it hasn't experienced any transformation for several decades as other attires did. While Gujarati and Punjabi attire underwent tremendous transformation to suit the taste of changing times the country's leading fashion designers have totally ignored traditional Sindhi dress. If the Sindhi dress had undergone the necessary changes, so as to be acceptable in the changing times, our *kurta* and *suthan* would have found a place in the wardrobes of the elite of the country by now.

Sindhi cuisine is also no exception. I have still to see any respectable restaurant that specialises in Sindhi cuisine. You may not even find one in Sindhi dominated areas.

According to the great Chinese philosopher Confucius, reflection is very important, as it is one of the three and most noble way to wisdom. The second being imitation, which is the easiest, and the third is experience, which is the bitterest. We all have enough experience in life and our profession and sometimes we also try to imitate someone but still remain far from the road to wisdom. I think that is because we haven't made any serious attempt to reflect on our life. Germany's greatest 20th century poet – Rainer Maria Rilke once said:

"There is only one journey.

Going inside yourself."

When I sit and reflect on being a Sindhi, I get a sense of achievement. A Sindhi never gives up. He is a struggler. He struggles until the end. And in most cases he succeeds. And when he succeeds he shares with others. Not only his family but with the whole community. Not only his own community but with all mankind.

When I reflect on myself as a Sindhi, I rightly get a sense of fulfillment, a ticklish feeling of pride that we have done well. We have done well inspite of the odds against us. We were called "Refugees" in our own country. Still Sindhis, wherever they went,

proved an economic boon to the local scene. They built schools and colleges, hospitals and clinics, much larger in size and number than the ethnic population itself. They created employment opportunities by setting up industries. This has been offered by Sindhis to the local ethnic population without discrimination of caste and creed. All this stands testimony to the rare power of resilience of the community.

I am indeed a proud Sindhi and so should all of us be, wherever we are, and so also our future generations, wherever and whenever they are born.

When I sit and think of Sind and Sindhis, I feel proud that my great forefathers belonged to that ancient Sind Valley Civilization of Mohan-Jo-Daro, next only to the Pyramids in Egypt and the Great Wall of China, and I am a proud inheritor of a rich, well planned civilization, where no war weapon was found but small statues of a dancing girl fully adorned, and a priest, a chariot and of course a script on the stones which has not been correctly deciphered so far.

When I look back and reflect on life, I feel proud being a member of Sindhi community because as a community it possesses certain unique features like resilience and adaptability, essential qualities for human survival and progress. It is not an exaggeration to say that we are a class apart. Look at the way it adapted over time. They belong to the Hindu faith but Sindhis do not subscribe to its caste system. The very fact that the community rejected or ignored this feature of Hinduism speaks volumes for the farsightedness of its leaders, who saw the harshness of the caste system and realised that the caste system wasted so much talent in the community. The Sindhi psyche loathes wastage. I agree there were social divisions in the community, but even such distinctions were obliterated when the country was partitioned and people migrated to India and other parts of the world.

In a democracy, and ours is indeed world class, representation is inevitable for any segment of inhabitants to grow fairly. And that

is what the community is lacking. And has suffered because of that. Sindhis, generally, shy away from politics. Several parties have cashed upon that political acumen of Sindhis who have made themselves national heroes. We have L. K. Advani, a real prime ministerial product with us. We have Ram Jethmalani, who endears himself in every difficult situation. We had Acharya Kripalani, K. R. Malkani, Jairamdas Daulatram! All national leaders. None of them identified himself as a community leader. And Sindhis have never adopted any of them.

Sindhis have tried to use them but never come forward to own one. It is high time that landless constituency of Sindhis adopted and sent some representatives to law making bodies and demonstrated their economic potency by looking after such individuals so that Sindhis are recognized and their voice heard at the national level. Without it the economic power and the philanthropy of Sindhis will just be hollow bubble. We need to seriously reflect on this issue.

Let me end by recalling a quote from the American writer and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson: *"Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."* Yes, that is what we as a community have done. **I define Sindhi as a Self-confident, Intelligent, Nationalist, Diligent and Hard-working Individual.**

