

Book Review

The Sindhis: Selling Anything, Anywhere

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The book 'The Sindhis: Selling Anything, Anywhere' is written by Mark-Anthony Falzon who is currently professor at University of Malta and book's introduction is written by world renowned Indian Author, commentator and public intellectual Gurcharan Das. This book is part of the series 'The Story of Indian Businesses' which is edited by Das.

Falzon is a social anthropologist and currently he is a senior lecturer as well as Head of Department at University of Malta, which is the highest ranked university in Malta. For Doctoral work in Cambridge University, he did his fieldwork in Malta, London, and Mumbai to study the business of Hindu Sindhis. He is also a lifetime member of Clare Hall, Cambridge which is constituent college of University of Cambridge, England. His Keen interest lies in Cosmopolitanism, diasporas and migrations. The author worked as a consultant for International Organisation for Migration (IOM) which is a body of United Nations that looks after the migration issues around the world. Additionally, he works as weekly columnist at the leading newspaper of Malta, *The Sunday Times*¹.

Falzon's research interest lies in Malta, Sindhi Traders, Human: nonhuman interaction, Environment and conversation. He has authored books like *Cosmopolitan Connections: The Sindhi Diaspora, 1860-2000*, *Multi-Sited Ethnography*, *The Examined Life: Writings in honour of Guido Lanfranco* (Lanfranco was a famous Maltese writer on natural history and folklore), *The University of Malta and Birds of Passage: Hunting and Conservation in Malta*. All of his books reflect his keen interest in research. His lot of publications are published by Routledge, British multinational publisher. He has authored several notable publications, including "Immigration, Rituals, and Transitoriness in the Mediterranean Island of Malta" published in the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies in 2012. Another significant work is "Ethnic Groups Unbound: A Case Study of the Social Organization of Cosmopolitanism" released in 2016. In addition, he has contributed to "Multisited Field Studies" in 2015. Among his other publications, one stands out as "God Protect Me from My Friends: Prelates, Politicians, and Social Welfare in Contemporary Malta" published in 2007, showcasing his extensive research

and knowledge in the field. These are just a few examples of his diverse range of scholarly works.

Editor of series 'The Story of Indian Businesses' Gurcharan Das studied philosophy at highly recognized Harvard University and then he continued his studies at Harvard Business School. Das is the former CEO of Procter and Gamble (P&G) India and South-East Asia as well as he was Managing Director of P&G Worldwide (Strategic Planning). He took early retirement at age of 50yrs to become full time writer. His bestselling books are *India Unbound*, *The Difficulty of being good* and *India Grows at Night: A Liberal Case for a Strong State*. *India Unbound* is translated in 19 languages & is also filmed by BBC. He has written a novel as well, *A Fine Family*, a book of essays named *The Elephant Paradigm*, & an anthology, *Three Plays*. Additionally, he is columnist for Times of India, & other five Indian Vernacular language newspapers. Das also writes for *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Foreign Affairs* & *Financial Times*.

There are a total of 7 chapters in this book whose summary is as follows:

1) Who are the Sindhis?

In this chapter a detailed information about Sindhis is given like their religious beliefs in god and author has always referred Sindhis as Hindu Sindhis as Sindhi Sikhs also exist who are devotees of Guru Nanak and other Sindhis also devoted to Sufi Saints. In Sindh people were recognized from regionality and there was no caste system unlike other parts of India. The annexation of Sindh by Britishers from Talapur Mirs (Muslim rulers) in 1843 is also mentioned and how the British era helped Sindhis to widespread their business globally which was earlier restricted to Indian Subcontinent. Author, in the beginning of this chapter, has also cleared that although Sindhis are renowned as business community but there is also notable number of Sindhi doctors, lawyers, teachers, civil servants, and salaried employees in state institutions and private companies. Story of world-renowned Sindhi business family Hinduja Brother's father Deepchand Hinduja and stories of several other businessmen not only from India but from London and Africa are mentioned. Sindhis migrated from several countries during war periods is also mentioned like India's Partition in 1947, 'Africanization' in 1960s in Africa and moved to Australia, Canada, UK, and USA. During 90s also Gulf countries especially Dubai became a favourite destination for Sindhis to settle down. Author clearly mentions that he is not going to ask about why Sindhis always succeed because they always don't succeed. Rather he will ask that how histories have come together to make Sindhis synonymous with business and entrepreneurship irrespective of country.

2) The Beginnings

This chapter is all about the commencement of Sindhi business at global level as Britishers came to rule. References of several explorers, traders are taken to describe the way Sindhis were. Seth Naomul Hotchand's example is taken that his great-great grandfather owned properties around 500 places in Sindh and legacy was continued but Naomul started working

as gumashtas (agents) of British and his grandson left the business but continued the same thing (work of agent). Three occupational types that were present in Sindh are also described like landed elites (Talapur Mirs themselves were owner of large agricultural lands), Waderos (kind of Zamindars) and third one consists of merchants, traders, moneylenders and shopkeepers. Karachi became prime port of Sindh as per a British Army officer. Shikarpuri's (people from Shikarpur) used to trade a lot earlier and were dominant especially in moneylending. Trade itineraries included Bombay, Muscat (Oman's capital), Surat, Kutch, Malabar and Basra (Iraqi city). Many goods were imported from the west are mentioned and goods like saltpeter (potassium nitrate), ghee, rice, oil and many other were exported from Karachi port. A Dutch trader mentioned Sindhis in 1747 as 'very parsimonious, suspicious and wary people'. Durrani's empire is also mentioned that after it ended Shikarpuris business were ruined in Kandahar. During Britishers Hindus flourished more as earlier they became victims of Mirs cruelty.

3) The Sindhworkis of Hyderabad

This is the main and important chapter of the book as per the author himself. It describes about how the Hyderabadis found a scope to sell 'Sindhwork' to Europe. Earlier Hyderabadis used to sell it to Mirs as they were fond of luxury and embroidered goods. Hyderabadis made swords, spears and embroidered lungis. British started developing infrastructure at Karachi port and also set up the railway lines from Karachi to Delhi. This infrastructural development played a major role in flourishment of business of Hyderabadis. By the latter half of 19th century Hyderabadis spread their Sindhwork business in Africa, Singapore, China, Hong Kong, Japan and Arabia as well. Malta is focused more in this chapter. Many Sindhis set up their business in Malta of curios and later on they imported several things like brassware, Japanese Ceramics, silks etc. from Japan and sold in Malta. Three C's Chellaram, Choitram, and Chanrai are mentioned in this chapter as they were very famous in Sindh for their business empire. Sindhis also formed several clubs like Rotary Club, Bhaiband club, and others in Sindh. There is little mention of effect of World great depression on Sindhi business in Malta. Employees of Sindhi firms were mainly Sindhis as they were recruited directly from Sindh.

4) An Enduring Legacy

In this chapter, the story of some Sindhi employees in firms of Sindhis in Hong Kong, Nigeria, Malta, Singapore and other countries who started their own firms is given. Also, the information about Gibraltar is mentioned like acts were passed there in 1923 and 1934 affected the Sindhi business and it was about restricting the number of Indians in Gibraltar but Sindhis found a way out of it and they did partnerships with local Christians and Jewish businessman and continued their business successfully. Sindhis diversified and changed their business in Malta like from Sindhwork and curios business they shifted to textiles and then readymade clothes. In 90s they also started selling electronics goods and in clothing business they became wholesalers as they imported clothes from Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore due to their network. Chanrai, Chellaram, and Harilela business group's example is given that how they diversified

their business and Chanrai even shifted their headquarters to Singapore in 1996. These business families also contribute a lot in charity in India. Information about businesses of well-known Sindhis in Malaysia like Rupchand Binwani and Utamal Valiram is mentioned.

5) Sindhi Business in India after Partition

This chapter is about the poor socio-economic condition of Sindhis in India after 1947 Partition. After partition in Mumbai Shikarpuris commenced business of moneylending mostly to the Sindhis who wanted to establish their new business. They used to give credit without any much guarantee but they used to keep 'keen eyes' on their business and loan was usually repaid by debtors. Unbelievable poor conditions of Sindhi refugees in Ulhasnagar is also mentioned. Refugees asked camp in Mumbai but government denied and daily 10,000 refugees moved to Mumbai during that time. Government established a Technical training center for refugees and Sindhis learnt from that then started their own business and small factories. *Falzon (2022)* "Sindhis transformed the place from dilapidated army barracks into a thriving and busy industrial & commercial township" (pg. 95) writer mentions in chapter. Story of Hiranandani Group in Mumbai in the business of Real Estate is also given and Sindhis also started commission agents work as occupation in Mumbai. Textile was also a business in which Sindhis jumped in Mumbai and Ulhasnagar. Goods manufactured in Ulhasnagar were proudly labelled as Made in USA in which 'USA' means Ulhasnagar Sindhi Association!

6) The Culture of Business

This chapter is about the Mobility, exploration, innovation which are the pillars in success of Sindhi business. It also mentions the huge migration of Sindhis from various African countries like Uganda (in 1970), Kenya (in 1967), Tanzania (1970). A total of 28,600 refugees moved to Britain by 1972 from Africa due to government restrictions for business and commerce. Sindhis faced discrimination and racism in UK so they preferred to work only in Sindhi firms. Sindhis in London also established confirming house which used to pay on behalf of importers who don't have money to pay. Story of Chandru and his son Alex is also interesting. Chandru in 1978 visited Andaman and he thought to do business at Port Blair, Andaman, as his business was very low in Mumbai. He started selling pens and then his son Alex joined him and they started selling all the stationary items. Example of Chandru is perfect to show the readiness of Sindhis for Mobility.

7) Biographies of Unknown Sindhis

In this chapter Falzon has narrated biographies of 10 unknown and less successful Sindhi businessman from different countries and he has used the pseudonym throughout the chapter. Story of Sham Daswani is given as he leaves family business in Japan and settles in London with empty pockets and after struggle, he sets up his own export office in London and in struggle time he started by selling rugs and then clothes (especially Bangladeshis). Similarly, Mohan Raheja also has watch-strap wholesale business in Mumbai after a lot of struggle and failures. Ram Nandwani who changed two Indian cities (Gwalior and Lucknow) went to

London in Chellaram's firm and then he left and after some other jobs and business he bought a store of Sindhi firm where he was a manager. Arun Moolchandani who was born in Hong Kong then came to Bombay and then finally settled in UK and did export of stationary items in Liberia to his family business. Suresh Kirplani who went to Dubai along with 50 cousins but eventually settled in Mumbai as they didn't get UAE passport even after 50 years and his father was also there before them. Currently Suresh owns a 4-star hotel in Mumbai. Manish Bharwani whose family business was in Uganda but he went for higher studies in London and after his father's death they lost their business to their cousins and Manish settled in London as an employer in a firm. Another biography is of Sabu Rupani who came to Ahmedabad then to UK and then from a firm he went to Nigeria to handle a matter and then returned back to London and he changed 8 jobs and retired from his last job in 1989 at Sindhi real estate business. Jagdish Balani, a Sindhi who wanted to become rich after leaving LIC job and then brother's shop went to UK and worked for Chellaram and started importing rugs from India from a Punjabi and then he left that Punjabi and started importing from other parts of Asia as well as Romania. Last biography is of Gope Lalwani who spend his childhood in Hyderabad (Sindh), Bombay and Nairobi. After partition, reorganization and relocation of family he finally settled in UK as he had British passport in Nairobi. There he started his import-export business with his brother & their experience of doing business in Africa helped them to do business in UK.

Epilogue

Epilogue covers the journey of Sindhis in Indonesia especially in the T.V. industry. Sindhis started the soap opera traditions in Indonesia. They managed the money through their connections and some loans from banks (part-owned by Sindhis). To fill the creative gap, they hired artists from Bollywood again through their connections.

The title of Book 'The Sindhis: Selling Anything, Anywhere,' I believe is fine to describe the Sindhi community residing in countries of several continents. 'Anything' is perfect here because Sindhis after partition used to do such business which can't be digested easily by anyone. Sindhi sources of writer told him that one of his friend use to take some part of the train ticket's price from the traveller and if the Ticket Collector (TC) caught them without ticket then the agent whom they paid some part of total ticket's price will pay the fine on behalf of that person. This kind of business are really strange and hard to believe but Sindhis did them successfully. After the British annexation of Sindh in 1843 scenario changed and especially Hyderabadis contributed a lot in making Sindhi a global diaspora. It's mentioned in book that Sindhis started competing with local Maltese shopkeepers at one time and Sindhis were considered as quality goods seller. But one aspect is that writer itself mentions in the very first chapter of book Sindhis as Hindu Sindhis and they are different from Sindhi Sikhs but title is kept general and not particularly Hindu Sindhis. I didn't find anything about Sindhi Sikhs in the book so there was no meaning of generalizing the title to Sindhis instead it can also be Hindu Sindhis. But rest I think is fine.

Title of the Chapters

a) *Who are the Sindhis?*

I believe this title for the chapter works because here basic information & the beliefs pertaining towards the Sindhis are given. Writer has also given his opinion that he doesn't believe that Sindhis are only businessman but also, they are in many other professions which creates an actual identity of Sindhis in reader's mind. History of Sindhis in Sindh, occupation and religious aspects about them are also covered so this title is completely fine.

b) *Beginnings*

Beginnings chapter is more around Shikarpuris and especially Seth Naomul Hotchand and his son followed by grandson. It also covers the import-export of goods from Karachi port. Shikarpuris were mainly moneylenders but they also contributed in trade so I believe that name of this chapter can also be kept around Shikarpuris and the kind of the business they carried. Beginnings is very general kind of.

c) *The Sindhworkis of Hyderabad*

This chapter is the most important and lengthiest chapter of book. It mainly talks about the Hyderabadis that how they flourished in business all over the world and they didn't keep their business restricted to Sindhwork although Sindhwork business was a gateway for them in Europe, Africa and gulf countries. The writer also notes that despite not being directly involved in the business of Sindhwork, they were still regarded as Sindhworkis because their ancestors were Sindhworkis. This aspect could serve as a significant factor in choosing the title of this chapter "Sindhworkis of Hyderabad." This title fits as it focuses on Hyderabadis residing in Hyderabad.

d) *An Enduring Legacy*

In this chapter author mentions the Sindhi employees who were in Sindhi firms which were outside India like Hong Kong, Nigeria, Sierra Leone & other nations. These employees after learning the business they started their own business thus enduring the legacy of Sindhi business and wide spreading it. Also, Sindhis diversified their business in electronics, textiles, hotels and real estate. Therefore, this title justifies the chapter.

e) *Sindhi Business in India after Partition*

Condition of Sindhis was severe after Partition and they migrated to India mostly with nothing in hands except the clothes they were wearing. Shikarpuris dominated the moneylending business in Bombay after partition & they also invested in Bollywood films but later on they faced strong competition from banks & their moneylending business became redundant. Then Sindhis entered in Real Estate, manufacturing and trading of textiles and other daily requirements products. Ulhasnagar was the place where highest number of Sindhi refugees

settled and they started their small business and factories. This title generalizes Sindhi Business in India but actually chapter focuses on Mumbai and its surrounding towns as mentioned above in this paragraph. I believe author should have covered other cities of India as well to justify the title.

f) *The Culture of Business*

This chapter tries to explain that wherever the Sindhi reside they master the business of that place. Some examples of London are taken to support the argument. Mobility, exploration, innovation and strong global network is the base of Sindhi business which helps them to spread the business. Mobility is the culture of Sindhi business and how they travel all over world from 19th century till date is unbelievable. So, I believe this title works for the chapter as it explains the culture of business.

g) *Biographies of Unknown Sindhis*

This chapter covers biographies of not well-known Sindhis instead they are a kind of common man who are involved in business. Only differentiating factor is they are Sindhis! Biography of Sindhis in London, India and Africa is mentioned and they are not very successful and rich but point to be proven is whether they are successful or not but they are involved in business. So, this title fits this last chapter of book.

“No matter how desperate a Sindhi is but he will never beg in his life”. The author described some apocryphal stories about the kind of business Sindhis were doing especially in Ulhasnagar. Like one story was about a Sindhi guy who used to sell insurance to passengers of trains and he would tell that they don’t need to buy the ticket and if they were caught by TC (Ticket Collector) then that Sindhi guy will pay penalty on their behalf. I believe this kind of stories metaphorically describes how poor the condition was of Sindhis in Ulhasnagar as they weren’t given any shelter in Mumbai so that they can earn penny.

In very first chapter of book the author breaks the myths about Sindhis that they only do business, but they are also involved in other professions like lawyer, doctor, artists, teacher & others.

Topic of this book mainly focuses on the ingredients behind Sindhi business success. Author believes that there’re four reasons behind success of Sindhis, which are a.) the compulsion to strike out on one’s own; b.) the will to succeed and bouncing back; c.) readiness for mobility; d.) spreading trustable persons in business like relatives, friends and family at distant places. In this book the kind of business Sindhis do from Talapur Mirs to British then after partition in India is given in detail as well as their business in other countries of the world is also given with real life stories.

Author has taken many stories of Sindhis from UK, India, Africa to support his argument of mobility as a differentiating factor for Sindhis from other business communities like Marwaris, Punjabi and Kachchis. Author has also taken statements and direct interviews of Sindhis spread all over the world but mainly focused on London, Mumbai and Malta. Author has also taken help of research papers published on Sindhis to present his point in a convincing way. He has also taken govt. records (Indian, Pakistani and British East India Company) not only for mentioning population but also to explain the kind of business communities Sindhis were and how governments have described them. Books, research paper and the notes of international travellers and traders who visited Sindh. Astonishingly, he has also taken the petition done by Sindhis in Malta. Reports released by Indian government also were considered by author.

Book was mainly based on the practical fieldwork done by Falzon in Mumbai, London, and Malta. For describing Sindhi business at other places, he highly relied on his Sindhi sources and the interviews he conducted. Method adapted for this book is research as it is based on field work of author. Hard work for getting the proper information and interviews from the Sindhis is reflected in this book. This book and writer's approach is quite convincing for the reader and makes it easier for reader to grasp the book as support of real-life stories is taken. Author has made a positive approach as he clarified that he is not going to talk about the success of Sindhi business instead he is going to tell the factors which are responsible for their success not only in earlier centuries but also in present times. Mobility is key and unique factors of Sindhi community which author has proved through real life stories. From Talapur Mirs to present times Sindhis are the community who trust more on people of their community and they keep their family, relatives and friends at important positions in business. Author has also clarified with his approach of not only presenting the Sindhis as business community, but they are also salaried persons, civil servants, lawyers, doctors, and professionals. Sindhis usually tried to stay away from politics which is also told by author and he has tried to convince it through the migration of Sindhi community from various countries of Africa due to political instability.

Critical Evaluation of book

Uniqueness of book

There are a lot of books on how to make money and especially, on how to make successful business empire. There are some books also on business communities like Marwaris, Gujaratis etc. But this book is unique, as it not only talks about why Sindhis are a global business community, but it also talks about less successful Sindhi businessmen. It focuses on the dedication of Sindhis to do business. It also draws attention to factors that differentiate the Sindhis from other communities.

Merits and demits of book.

This book doesn't only talk about Sindhis in general, but it magnifies its observation of different communities in Sindhis like Shikarpuri, Bhaiband, Hyderabad, etc. It not only

discusses a particular period of Sindhi business, but it starts from pre-independence till the 21st Century which is appreciable. Whatever is stated in this book are facts because the author has conducted extensive research and interviews in London, Mumbai and Malta. The author has adopted this approach which is good.

Overall, this book is good and the only missing point I feel is it didn't talk about stories of Sikh Sindhis or Muslim Sindhis. There might be a possibility that the author didn't find them because there is a negligible percentage of Sikh and Muslim Sindhis. (Muslim Sindhis are seen in Pakistan).

Personally, this book has helped me to know history of my community that how they became world renowned as a business community. Sindhis maintained the business during Talapur Mirs rule then British and then the independent India after partition. After so many socio-political instabilities and even the world great depression the Sindhis are still successful in business. A legacy that has been created by our ancestors are still carried forward by the Sindhi youths and hopefully it will never end and it gives a belief to us that 'Business is in our veins'. I am a Hyderabad Sindhi so it was really proud moment for me to read the greatness of Hyderabad and how courageous they were. It immensely filled courage in me too to travel around the world to learn new things, to explore the opportunities (not only business) and to establish a strong network and to take help of that network whenever required. I will also apply the laws of Sindhis like exploration, mobility and grabbing opportunity whenever they arrive. Persistence power of Sindhis of bouncing back even after having loss in business is really awesome and they never lose hope instead they change business not their motive which is very important aspect to learn.

I believe the mobility which is the kind of USP of Sindhis will be very helpful for me in professional life. As I am in the field of Journalism and Mass Communications so mobility is also an important aspect of it as you have to travel a lot which ultimately helps you to create a strong network which can be used whenever used. Smelling the opportunity is specialty of Sindhis therefore, its mentioned in book that 'they are always at right place at right time to do the business'. This quality is very important for professional life as a lot of opportunities will come towards you and only thing is you have to smell it that that opportunity is yours and you have to grab it before anyone can especially in this present competitive world. To create an opportunity if it doesn't exist is proved by Sindhis as they do business in African countries like Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, Zanzibar, Mauritius & many others. These are the countries where someone can hardly find an opportunity to do business as political instability prevails in such countries but they are ready to take the risk. Professional life also there will be a lot of situations where we have to take risky decisions and I believe the learning from book will be helpful for me that Sindhis are always ready to take the risk and they create the opportunity if they don't exist. Ulhasnagar is an excellent example; it was a small town with no hopes, no opportunities but Sindhis established it as a business city. Products manufactured there are famous as Made in USA (Ulhasnagar Sindhi Association). This kind of courage will be extremely helpful for me in difficult situations.

Currently, the wave of *entrepreneurship* is going on in India. Especially, youngsters are moving towards doing business so I believe these types of books about how the business community mastered the business can be learned by youths. Ideologically, also this book becomes important because before beginning any business one should know what kind of mindset to keep and what tactics should be used. Presently, Government of India (GOI) is supporting financially to MSME. Hence, the Ease of Doing business has increased in recent times. The book teaches how the Sindhis grew their business by getting finance from their connections so, the youngsters should grow connections with VCs & NBFCs to get the finance.

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