

# 'Karachi under the Raj 1843-1947'

Dawar  
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Karachi

THE beautifully restored Mohatta Palace is housing an exhibition as of November 27 — the theme, 'Karachi under the Raj 1843-1947'.

Mohatta Palace was built between 1933 and 1935 by Shivratan Chandratan Mohatta, a proud Marvari citizen of Karachi, as his home. Much of the stone used was brought from as far away as Jodhpur. My memories of Shivratana date back to the early 1940s when our paths crossed each evening — he walking to his house and I returning to my home after my evening horseback ride on the beach. In those far off days, what is now the main Clifton Road, right from the hideous monstrosity known as Glass Towers up to Bhutto's Two Talwar roundabout, was more or less a causeway, a double-track road running through a vast pool of water.

Shivratan left for India just before partition, never to return. His house was sequestered by the government of Pakistan — 'enemy property' — and used and abused for various odd purposes by various odd departments. When the government had no further use for it, in 1964 Fatima Jinnah moved in and lived there until she died in 1967.

Karachi, even now, in its state of filth, chaos and architectural degradation, owes much to its former governor, General Sir Charles Napier (1843-47), and to its commissioner, Sir Bartle

Frere (1851-59) who later become governor of Bombay. Napier was the man who gauged the potential of Karachi.

He ensured that a regular supply of water was conveyed to the city from the Malir River, he developed housing and roads, drainage and sanitation facilities, all of which served the city well until Pakistan came into being. He installed a powerful lighthouse at Manora Point, and planned to make Karachi a free port by widening the entrance to the harbour, constructing docks, and connecting the island of Keamari to Karachi.

He introduced into Sindh a police system far in advance of any other in India, which became the model for most of what was good in subsequent reforms of the Indian police. In 1847, his health failing, he tendered his resignation as governor of Sindh and sailed away home to England where he died in 1853.

The city also owes a great deal to the first presidents of the municipality and to the mayors who followed. We should remember them with gratitude. When in 1911, the presidency of the municipality was handed over to the elders of Karachi, it was decided between them that it would be headed in turn by men from the three main communities — the Muslims, Hindus and Parsis — and so the pattern was set, right down to 1947 with one hiccup in 1945 when, unanimously, a Christian was elected in place of a Parsi:

(Hindu) Harchandrai Vishindas, October 1911 to April 1921; (Muslim) Ghulamali G. Chagla, May 1921 to April 1922; (Parsi) Jamshed Nusserwanji, April 1922 to October 1933, and November 1933 to 19 August 1934;

(Hindu) Tikamdas Wadhmal, August 1934 to May 1935; (Muslim) Kazi Khuda Bukhs, May 1935 to May 1936; (Parsi) Khan Bahadur Ardeshir H Mama, May 1936 to May 1937;

(Hindu) Durgadas B Advani, May 1937 to May 1938; (Muslim) Hatim A Alavi, May 1938 to May 1939; (Parsi) R K Sidhwa, May 1939 to May 1940;

(Hindu) Lalji Mehrotra, May 1940 to May 1941; (Muslim) Mohammed Hashim Gazdar, May 1941 to May 1942; (Parsi) Sohrab K.H. Katrak, May 1942 to May 1943;

(Hindu) Shambonath Mulraj, May 1943 to May 1944; (Muslim) Yousuf Haroon, May 1944 to May 1945; (Christian) Manuel Misquita, May 1945 to May 1946;

(Hindu) Vishramdas Devandas, May 1946 to May 1947; (Muslim) Mahommed Ahsan, May to August 1947.

Needless to say, under the British Raj, law and order ruled in Karachi, and such was the case for the first year after partition until the death of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, when things swiftly fell apart. Hordes of refugees descended upon a Karachi not equipped to handle a sudden massive increase in population.

The government of Pakistan and of Sindh was headed and run

by corrupt and inept men, out to line their pockets and grab lands and properties left behind by the Hindus who had fled over the border. The rural areas fell to the feudal elements, the local administrations barely able to rein them in.

Now, we need to be reminded of what Karachi once was, and our children need to learn of its past splendours, embedded as they are in the consumerism and rat-race of our present age. It should be made compulsory for all the schools in Karachi to organize outings and ensure that all the children in their care get to Mohatta Palace so that they may realize how the city of their fathers has vanished and, to quote Hameed Haroon, curator of the Raj exhibition, "with it some of the values and institutions that made it significant."

Forgetting is always a bad thing to do. For only when armed with knowledge and pride of what Karachi did achieve will its citizens of the future be able to begin to even conceive of what they can do to make their city again assume a larger significance. It is time to remember, to pay tribute to Karachi city and to understand what it was about Karachi that made Sir Charles Napier say: 'You will yet be the glory of the East; would that I could come again, Karachi, to see you in your grandeur'."

How he would weep were he to come back today. He would have missed the bus by almost 60 years.