

## **The Pakvasa Family :** **History Makers & Preservers**

### **Jason Johns (MA – AIC - Part II)**

The Pakvasa family through its humble roots and beginnings in what was in those times Bombay have gone a long way. These personalities of the Pakvasa family have firstly helped in creating history itself and secondly in the preservation of cultural heritage of India's past. This information has been gleaned from interviews with Mr. Anuj Pakvasa and Mrs. Arti Mehta.

Tracing through oral history the first personality we get is Mr. Mangal Das Pakvasa, born in Bombay in 1882. As a student he used to study under the gas lit street lighting near the steps of the Asiatic Library. From these humble beginnings he rose to be a Solicitor. After a short period of practice, he came in touch with Mahatma Gandhi and under his influence he gave up his practice as a solicitor and joined the freedom movement. He was a member of the Bombay Legislative Council and Standing Committee in 1937. The next year, Mr. Pakvasa participated in the 51<sup>st</sup> Session, Haripura Congress 1938 attending to the delegates, back stage. Post independence, he was appointed Governor of the Central Provinces and Berar; and later of the Bombay and Mysore states respectively. During his tenure as Governor of the Central Provinces, Lord Mountbatten, the first Governor General of Free India wished to visit Wardha in 1948, to meet Gandhiji, and had to pass via Nagpur<sup>1</sup>. Lord Mountbatten halted at the Governor's palace and spent time with the Pakvasa family, gladly respecting their Gandhian way of life.

As regards the centenarian, Mrs. Poornima Pakvasa still alive and active, had participated in the Rajkot branch of the salt Satyagraha in the 1930s, and was jailed. One of her inmates was Mrs. Kasturba Gandhi, whom she had helped to improve her writing skills. She was a volunteer behind the main stage of the Haripura Congress, 1938<sup>2</sup>. Post independence, she had started an organization Shakti Dal in 1954 in Bombay. She was also invited to become the commander –in- chief of a Course at Bhosla Military School, Nashik, that would teach women and young girls to defend themselves by using the lathi, horse-riding, yogasana, defence training and developing their all-round personality. She worked in this capacity for 25 years.

Furthermore, to attain her dream of education for tribal children, a school was set up at the JVPD Scheme, Bombay and at Saputara Gujarat. It was named Ritambhara Vishva Vidyapeeth and Mrs. Pakvasa encouraged the tribals particularly, the Dangs, to send their children to school to enable them to improve their living conditions through education. In 2004 she received the Padma Bhushan and is affectionately called Didi of the Dangs. At 102 she is still alert and crisp in her thoughts. She lives at Saputara still dedicated to her work and her people.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sathe Vasant, Memoirs of a rationalist, Om Books International, 2005, p.37

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 3

Her son also participated in the freedom movement . The male members of the family were progressive thinkers who favoured women's education, their participation in the freedom struggle, and the socio-economic uplift of society. Their sizable collection of coins, stamps, letterheads and coat of arms of Princely States is a treasure trove of history and they can rightly be called preservers of history.

During the recording of oral history it is important to notice human emotions. While recording they can come in the form of positive or negative emotions .Incidences related to positive emotions like the meeting with the viceroy were very happily remembered by the interviewee .Certain details of negative or neutral incidences were either forgotten or couldn't be recollected at that point in time by the ones being interviewed. Also in the case where an emotional memory came up, the interview had to pause till the person was ready to restart the interview. Thus recording of oral history is not easy and can be tricky at times when it comes to memories related to close individuals.

In conclusion the fact that are stated in the interviews as part of oral history , has helped in the great deal for the reconstruction of the history of Pre- Independent India, Undivided India, Princely States of India, Independent India, Provinces of India, etc. Tapping this source of memory a link has been established for dialogue between the past and the present. In this recording of oral history small but vital details of historical events which would be lost forever to history have now been recorded. The whole family has been a part not only of the history making process but also in the history recording process, a small part of which has been documented in this research work.



*George R.*

GEORGE THE SIXTH by the Grace of God of Great  
Britain Ireland and the British Dominions  
beyond the Seas King Defender of the Faith

To Our Trusty and Well Beloved Mangaldas  
Mancharan Pakwasa Esquire Bachelor of Laws

GREETING

I. We do by this Our Commission under Our Sign Manual appoint you the said Mangaldas Mancharan Pakwasa to be during Our pleasure Our Governor of the Central Provinces and Berar with all the powers rights privileges and advantages to the said Office belonging or appertaining

II. And We do hereby authorise and command you to exercise all and singular the powers and duties appertaining to the said Office

III. And further We do hereby appoint that so soon as you shall have taken the prescribed oaths and have entered upon the duties of the said office this Our present Commission shall supersede the Commission under Our Sign Manual bearing date the tenth day of July 1946 appointing Sir Frederick Chalmers Bourne to be Our Governor of the Central Provinces and Berar

IV. And We do hereby further authorise and direct you to cause this Our Commission to be read and published in the presence of the Chief Justice or, in his absence, other Judge, of the High Court of the Province

V. And We do hereby further authorise and direct you to take the oath of allegiance and for the due execution of the Office of Our Governor of the Central Provinces and Berar and for the due and impartial administration of justice, in the form hereto appended, which oath the Chief Justice or, in his absence, any Judge of the High Court shall, and he is hereby required to, tender and administer unto you

VI. And We do hereby further authorise and require you, by yourself or by any other person to be authorised by you in that behalf, to administer to every person appointed by you to hold office as a Minister the oaths of office and of secrecy hereto appended



