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Gandhidham: Utopia, Bureaucracy, and the Unwritten History of a Refugee City

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Gandhidham, a planned town in Kachchh, western India, began as an attempt to give displaced Sindhis a new home after the 1947 Partition of India. Conceived by the merchant and nationalist Bhai Pratap Dialdas and developed through the Sindhu Resettlement Corporation (SRC), it joined housing and employment with education and cultural life. Its prospects were closely bound to nearby Kandla, which the Government of India was developing into a major port following the loss of Karachi.

Drawing on correspondence, land agreements, planning records, contemporary journalism, photographs and oral histories, this paper examines the relationship between these two undertakings. Successive land arrangements show how the SRC's authority was redefined within the state's plans for the region. Residents' accounts reveal how families, workers and institutional leaders gave substance to the proposed town, while also questioning how fully its civic and cultural ambitions were realised.

The paper argues that the distribution of credit in Gandhidham's history reflects both changing authority and the purposes for which its records were produced. Contemporary sources offer sharply different accounts of the same achievement; later institutional histories often separate the national port from the Sindhi initiative that helped build the adjoining town and participated in the harbour works. Bringing these accounts together makes visible the connections between refugee reconstruction and national development. Gandhidham's "unwritten history" concerns how the work of displaced people, though documented and remembered, came to occupy so little space in familiar accounts of the city's creation.

Keywords: Gandhidham, Kandla Port, Partition of India, Sindhi displacement, refugee rehabilitation, Sindhu Resettlement Corporation, historical erasure, public history

Introduction

The history of the 1947 Partition of India has been shaped in public memory above all by Punjab and Bengal: by provinces cut in two, by images of violence, and by accounts passed from one generation to the next. Sindh's history is less readily placed within that familiar picture. The province was not divided; all of it became part of Pakistan. Many non-Muslim Sindhis, established for generations in its commercial, professional and civic life, initially believed they could remain. Growing insecurity, and particularly the Karachi pogrom of January 1948, brought that hope to an end for many families.

Those who left Sindh had no corresponding part of their homeland elsewhere in the truncated India. Some found temporary shelter in government camps; others relied on relatives, community associations, and business

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contacts as they sought accommodation and work. Across the newly independent country they established schools, places of worship and other institutions with remarkable speed. Yet dispersal made it difficult to recreate the larger world in which these parts of life had once belonged together. The loss was of a place, but also of the proximity that had sustained a community's language, culture, and public life.

Sindhis had travelled and traded beyond Sindh long before Partition. Within a few years after the British occupation of 1843, merchants based in Hyderabad developed an international network whose members came to be known as Sindhworkis. Its firms helped some displaced families establish themselves overseas after 1947 (Markovits, 2000). But the visibility of Sindhi merchants all across India as well as in many countries around the world today tends to obscure the circumstances in which a far wider population was compelled to leave its ancestral home. Commercial mobility and forced displacement are not the same experience, even if they belong to the same history.

Bhai Pratap Dialdas was both a Sindhworki merchant and a longstanding supporter of the Indian freedom movement. As the scale of displacement became clear, he contributed generously to rehabilitation, both by supporting families known to him with temporary arrangements and help in settling, as well as donations to government rehabilitation efforts.

He also began pursuing a more ambitious answer to dispersal: a new town in Kachchh where displaced Sindhis could build homes, earn livelihoods and establish institutions of their own. With Gandhi's support, he approached the Maharao of Kachchh for land, and the Maharao approved a generous grant of 15,000 acres. In anticipation of securing the land, Bhai Pratap incorporated the Sindhu Resettlement Corporation, a joint stock company through which displaced Sindhis could invest in and build the proposed town. Its prospects were linked to Kandla Creek, where the development of a port could create an economic future for the town and the wider region.

Bhai Pratap's proposal gave a shared future a physical form. Displaced Sindhis would invest in a town of their own, where homes stood alongside places to work, study, and sustain a common cultural life. It was an expansive ambition for people still struggling to find shelter. Its realisation would depend on securing land and water, raising capital and negotiating with governments that had plans of their own for Kachchh and Kandla.

Gandhidham was ultimately made through the efforts of many people and institutions: displaced families, investors, planners, engineers, labourers, and successive governments. Yet accounts of its creation have assigned them strikingly different roles. This paper draws on correspondence, leases, plans, contemporary reporting, photographs, and oral histories to examine how the city was conceived and built, how authority over it changed, and how its history came to be told.

Today Gandhidham stands at the centre of a busy region of ports, trade, and industry. When Bhai Pratap first proposed a settlement there, the site was largely desert scrubland, sparsely inhabited and without the infrastructure needed to sustain a city. The distance between those two landscapes invites a question that runs through this paper: Who made that transformation possible, and whose work can still be seen in the histories we tell of it?

Why Kachchh, and Why Kandla?

The immediate response to the Sindhi exodus came from many quarters. Families already established elsewhere in India took in relatives and acquaintances; merchants and community organisations helped newcomers find

food, accommodation and work, and contributed to government relief efforts. These acts of assistance met urgent needs, but they could not by themselves answer the larger question raised by dispersal. Where might displaced Sindhis rebuild the institutions and shared life they had left behind?

For Bhai Pratap, Kachchh offered a possibility that other destinations did not. It lay beside Sindh and had long been connected with it through movement, trade, language, and culture.

Kandla Creek gave the proposal its economic promise. Its favourable natural conditions had been recognised before Partition, and proposals for a port and railway connections had already been considered. The obstacle lay beyond the harbour: Kachchh was economically isolated, and the area around the creek lacked the population, water supply, transport network, and other facilities needed to support a major port.[1] After the loss of Karachi, overcoming those difficulties became a matter of national importance. India needed a western port capable of serving the trade of its northern hinterland.

Bhai Pratap saw a way of bringing that national project together with the needs of displaced Sindhis. A new town could provide the homes, workforce, services, and commercial activity on which a port would depend. The port, in turn, could create employment and give the town a reason to grow.

The Man Behind the Vision

Bhai Pratap Dialdas had spent his working life in the Sindhworki world of international trade. Firms based in Hyderabad, Sindh, operated in ports and cities far beyond the province. His own stores, product lists, and office photographs offer glimpses of the reach and variety of his business. They also suggest the practical experience behind his proposal: finding partners, moving goods, organising finance, and maintaining an enterprise across distances. Claude Markovits's map shows the extent of the wider network to which Bhai Pratap belonged; the surviving images bring one of its merchants into view.

His public life had given him another set of relationships. Bhai Pratap supported the Indian National Congress and Gandhi's programmes from the 1930s. Gandhi's correspondence refers to his contributions, while accounts of Congress activity in Sindh describe the assistance he gave visiting leaders and workers. His home in Hyderabad, Maitri Bhavan, became a meeting place for the movement. These were sustained commitments, through which he developed relationships of trust with people who would hold influence in independent India.

Neither commercial experience nor political access was sufficient on its own. To establish a town, Bhai Pratap would have to obtain land, attract settlers, raise capital, engage planners and engineers, and secure government cooperation over matters ranging from water to transport. His life had prepared him to bring people and resources together across these different worlds. The purpose to which he now put those abilities was shaped by Partition: He wanted displaced Sindhis to have homes and immediate support, but also work, education, and institutions through which they could determine their own future.

The proposal was thus both an act of rehabilitation and an attempt to create a new urban economy. It required an organisation through which others could invest in and carry out the work. Bhai Pratap would find that vehicle in the Sindhu Resettlement Corporation; first, he needed land on which its plans could take form.

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[1] G. P. Simpson and D. A. Phillips, "Note on the Raniwara-Kandla Project," Jodhpur Railway, 23 May 1946, paras. 3-7 and 12-15, in "Construction—Extension of Railways: Raniwara-Kandla Railway Project," 1946, Rajputana State Agency/Residency, War Branch, file 339-46, National Archives of India.

From Proposal to City

On 26 January 1948, the Sindhu Resettlement Corporation (SRC) was incorporated to undertake the proposed settlement. The following day, Bhai Pratap wrote to Maharao Vijayarajji of Kachchh on its behalf.[2] He began with the predicament of those leaving Sindh, describing Kachchh as close to their former home in geography, climate, language, and culture. His appeal was also practical. The displaced, he argued, needed a town near Kandla where they could live and work, while the development of the town and port would benefit Kachchh as a whole.

The three-page letter reveals how far Bhai Pratap had already thought beyond the acquisition of land. He proposed roads, piped water, drainage, schools, and colleges, and, if it became possible, a residential university. He asked for approximately 15,000 acres on which the Corporation could plan residential, industrial, and agricultural areas and lease plots to settlers. Water was central to the request: The SRC sought control of the Viri Springs and land for a reservoir, permission to lay pipelines, and the means to supply Kandla Port as well as the town. Access to stone, sand, and timber, provision for electricity and relief from customs duties on construction materials were likewise presented as conditions for making the project feasible. This was a proposal for a functioning city, set out in terms of the land, materials, and services required to build one.

The Maharao's order of 29 January accepted the Corporation's principal aims.[3] It recognised the proposed town as a place where displaced Sindhis could settle and where others would have opportunities too. It provided for a grant of approximately 15,000 acres between Kandla and Warsamedi and empowered the SRC to divide the land into plots for different uses. The order did not, however, place the new city entirely in the Corporation's hands. The plan required the approval of the Maharao and the Kachchh Government. The envisaged local authority would include government representation, and provisions for water, land acquisition, and construction materials set out continuing responsibilities on both sides. The Maharao gave the scheme a foundation, while retaining a public interest in how it developed.

These documents show an alliance taking shape at extraordinary speed. They also show why Bhai Pratap needed more than a benefactor willing to give land. The SRC was the institution through which the proposal could be financed, planned, and carried into effect. Acharya J. B. Kripalani, himself displaced from Sindh, and president of the Indian National Congress at Independence, became the SRC's chairman; Bhai Pratap was its managing director. Although incorporated as a joint stock company, it was designed to discourage speculation: The letter describes a limit on the value of shares one person could purchase, a six per cent ceiling on dividends, and the use of profits for public utility works. Shareholders were being invited to invest in the long-term making of a town, not just plots of land.

The agreement was reached at a moment of profound national grief. Gandhi, who had supported Bhai Pratap's proposal, was assassinated the day after the Maharao's order. A portion of his ashes was subsequently brought to Kandla Creek for immersion, and the Gandhi Samadhi at Adipur became part of the settlement's founding memory. The Maharao, too, died before the contemplated title deed could be executed. Kachchh's integration into the Indian Union then changed the authority under which the original arrangements would be carried forward. The project continued, but its legal foundation would be reconsidered as the town grew.

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[2] Bhai Pratap Dialdas to Maharao Vijayarajji of Kachchh, 27 January 1948, copy in author's collection.

[3] Kachchh State, Diwan Office, order conveying Maharao Vijayarajji's approval of the Sindhu Resettlement Corporation's proposal, 29 January 1948, copy in author's collection.

Bhai Pratap's conception joined three places with different purposes. Gandhidham would become the commercial and administrative centre; Adipur would provide homes, schools, and the institutions of community life. Kandla would connect the new settlement to the trade on which its economic future depended. The port's construction required decisions and investment by the Government of India, but the town and port were conceived in relation to each other. The SRC's plans encompassed more than a place to house people working at Kandla: They sought to create the population, services, and enterprise that could help a port develop in a sparsely inhabited region.

That ambition had to be translated into surveys and plans before it could be built. Otto Koenigsberger, India's first Federal Director of Housing after Independence, prepared an early plan for the town; later planners revised it as circumstances and institutional responsibilities changed. The surviving maps relate the proposed neighbourhoods to existing villages, transport routes, water sources, and the port. On the ground, roads were laid, water brought from the Viri Springs, and drainage, electricity, houses, and public buildings progressively provided. Workshops and factories producing building materials supported construction while giving displaced people employment. The physical work of building Gandhidham thus began to fulfil the social purpose for which it had been proposed. The plans, roads, and water supply gave the proposed town a physical beginning. Its future now depended on persuading displaced families to make their lives there.

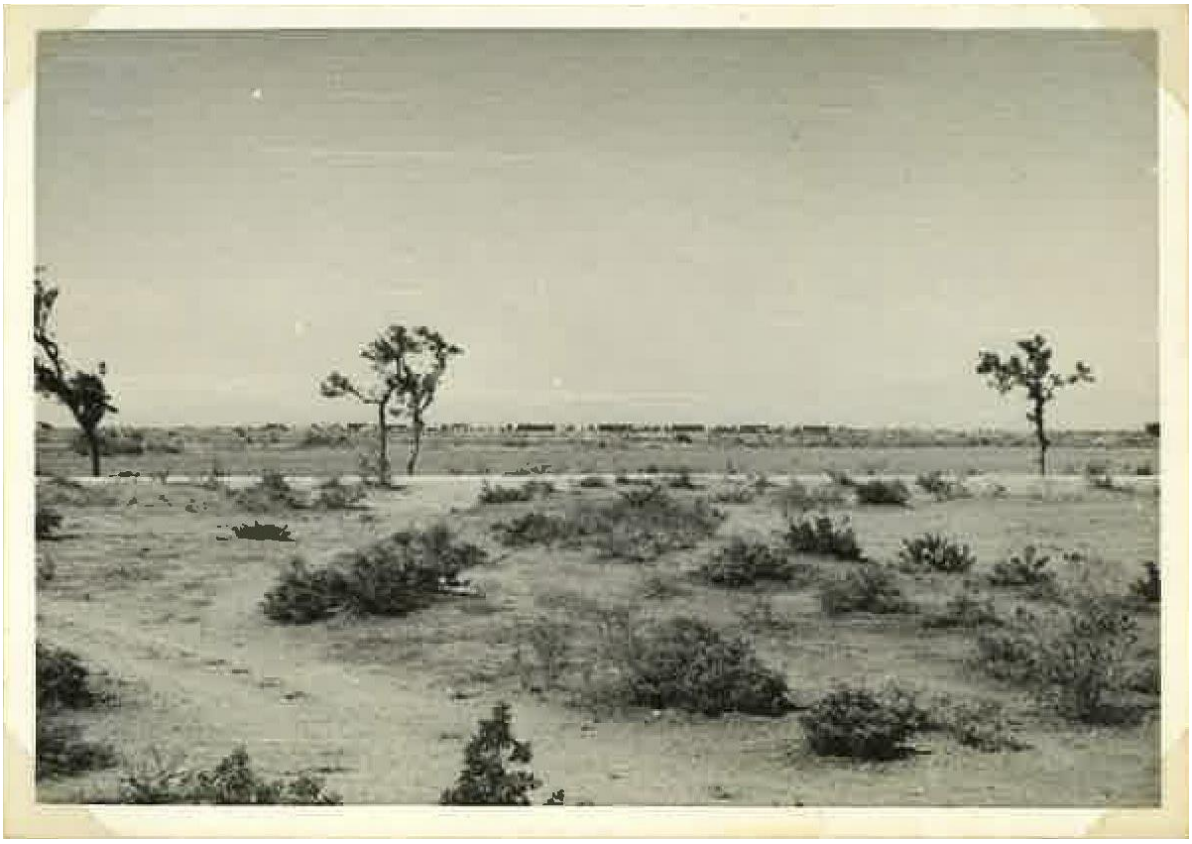

Figure 1. Building Gandhidham in desert scrubland, circa 1950s.
Images courtesy of Pratap V. Kriplaney-Dialdas, Bhai Pratap's grandson,
from the collection of his parents Manjari and Vashu Kriplaney.

Persuading People to Come

Gandhidham could be planned and built, but it could not become a city without people willing to settle there. For families who had already made one difficult journey from Sindh, Kachchh meant another move into an unfamiliar and sparsely populated region. A settlement there would be close to the homeland that had been lost, but proximity alone could neither persuade families to move there nor provide them with livelihoods.

Some had found work or accommodation elsewhere in India and were reluctant to risk what little security they had regained. Bhai Pratap had to persuade them that the new town offered a future, rather than ask them to trust in a plan whose success lay years away.

He first hoped that established Sindhworki firms might bring their Indian headquarters to Gandhidham. Their capital and international connections could have given the town an immediate commercial base. They did not come. The SRC consequently began systematically reaching out to people living in refugee camps and settlements across India. Poet-singers, community leaders, and emissaries travelled to tell them about Gandhidham; prospective settlers were invited to visit and see the work for themselves. In one account, approximately 120 representatives of refugee settlements in Delhi travelled to Kachchh at Bhai Pratap's expense before deciding whether their families should follow (Sujan, 2022, p. 151).[4]

[4] Shyam Sujan, interviews with the author, June 2022.

The invitation was accompanied by practical help. Employment and housing were offered to those prepared to move, while Bhai Pratap sought people in the range of occupations a town would need: doctors and teachers, but also barbers, cobblers, bakers, printers, and mechanics. Shops, workshops, and services had to develop alongside residential neighbourhoods. The SRC's factories served a similar double purpose. Its pipe factory and its Besser plant produced materials for construction; making those materials locally also created work for displaced settlers. The Besser plant manufactured hollow concrete blocks in a variety of forms for use in the new buildings. The city's construction was itself one source of livelihood.

Oral histories show how the plans were experienced by those who came.

Poet Vimmi Sadarangani, professor at Tolani College of Arts, recalled her family's account of houses and shops available to rent, including premises where a shop occupied the ground floor and the family lived above it.[5] Her relatives found different kinds of work in Adipur and Gandhidham: Her grandfather was a railway guard, her father a stationmaster, and her maternal grandfather the postmaster. Their story gives a sense of how a town was populated household by household, through employment, affordable premises and the prospect of a more settled life.

Teertharaja Bhatia came to Gandhidham as an adolescent to join his elder brother who had started working there.[6] Their mother and younger brother had died in the years following Partition, and their father had reopened his radio repair business in Poona (now Pune). At Kandla, Bhatia earned two rupees a day recording the sacks unloaded from ships and taken into the warehouse. He later became a dispatcher, but was never made a permanent employee. He also joined the Home Guards, where training in firefighting, night exercises, and defence gave him a part in safeguarding his town, close to Sindh and therefore close to the new international border. He remembered that service with pride. Long after leaving Gandhidham, he volunteered as a traffic warden in Pune, drawing on the discipline he had acquired there, which he continued to do into his late eighties.

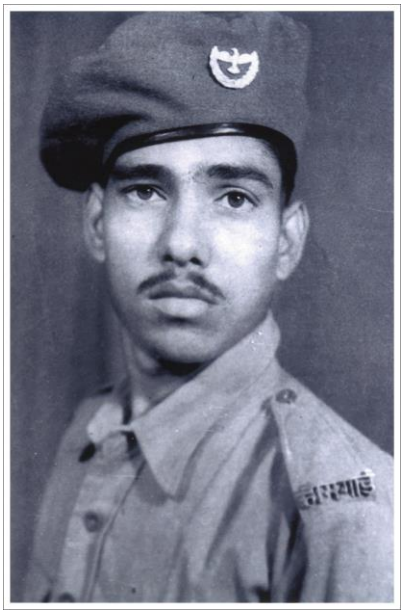

Figure 2. Teertharaja Ramchand Bhatia (1939-2023) in his Home Guard uniform in Gandhidham. Image Courtesy of Teertharaja Ramchand Bhatia.

[5] Vimmi Sadarangani, recorded interviews with the author, 7 September 2025.
[6] Teertharaja Bhatia, recorded interviews with the author, 1 June 2012.

Along with schools, Bhai Pratap also built workshops and technical institutes. Bhai Pratap persuaded the engineer and writer Hari Daryani, known by the pen name Dilgir, to relocate to Gandhidham to set up and lead the technical institute. His son Ram remembered it as a place intended to train young people for work in the growing town and port.[7]

Bhai Pratap drew writers, poets, and teachers to the settlement. The aim was to create work and institutions for displaced people of modest means, but also a place where Sindhi thought, literature, and performance could continue after the dispersal from Sindh. Vimmi Sadarangani remembered her mother, Vidya Sitlani, studying and later teaching at Maitri School, and taking part in a performance of *Umar Marui*.

Suresh Malkani's family came because Bhai Pratap invited his father, Dr. Shersing Gulabrai Malkani, to work in the new township.[8] Suresh, a little boy at the time, remembers open spaces, birds and dairy farms, neighbourhoods in which Sindhi could be heard everywhere, and German engineers from the port teaching the children to swim. He also remembered learning about the plants, water, and animals of Kachchh from the people who lived in the surrounding villages. His account reminds us that the newcomers were entering an inhabited landscape with knowledge and communities of its own.

Figure 3. Suresh Malkani poses with the board of the Gandhidham Hospital, where his father was the first doctor with the designation Port Medical Officer. Circa 1952.

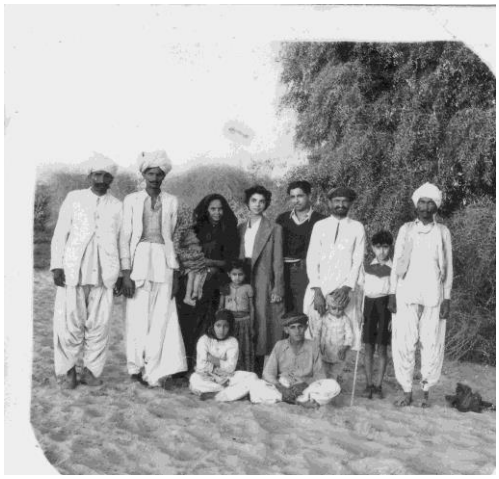

Figure 4. On an excursion to the Bani, with family members and helpers from nearby villages. Image courtesy of Suresh Malkani (b. 1945).

[7] Ram Daryani, recorded interviews with the author, 25 October 2025.
[8] Suresh Malkani, recorded interviews with the author, 22 October 2025.

Other memories preserve Bhai Pratap's attention to the small beginnings from which urban life grows. A barber whose father had neither a shop nor a chair recalled Bhai Pratap stacking four concrete blocks, sitting on them, and asking to become his first customer. Settlers remembered him bringing saplings to newly occupied homes and asking families to care for them; paying residents to clear snakes and scorpions. While such episodes do not explain the making of a city, they do show how encouragement, work, and personal relationships helped turn an uncertain venture into a place people could call home.[9]

Gandhidham was populated through more than the allocation of houses. Its first residents brought different skills, suffered different losses, and made different kinds of lives there. Some continued to depend on modest wages and insecure employment, as Bhatia's account shows; for others, the town became a family base from which the next generation pursued opportunities overseas. Its planned neighbourhoods became a city through the work of teaching, trading, repairing, planting, caring, and raising families.

Kandla: A National Port and a Local Enterprise

While Gandhidham took shape, the Government of India was undertaking a project of national importance nearby. Karachi's loss had left the trade of northern and northwestern India without its former outlet to the sea and increased pressure on Bombay. Kandla already possessed a small jetty and recognised advantages as a harbour site. The task after Partition was to transform it into a major port connected to the hinterland it would serve.

Kandla's promise predated Partition. A 1946 account headed "Kutch State: Kandla Port" described the creek as a natural harbour with deep anchorage and room for expansion, and called the port's geographical position "ideal." Jodhpur Railway officers examining a proposed link to the hinterland noted that it was sheltered and could be used throughout the year.[10]

Kandla was already a working, if modest, port: its concrete pier could accommodate two steamers, and it had godowns, a railway terminus and a passenger service. One person interviewed for this paper recalled arriving there by ship from Karachi as a child during Partition.[11] The task after Partition was to develop the existing port, with the connections and facilities needed to serve a much larger region.

The Government appointed the West Coast Major Port Development Committee in 1948. Its recommendation in favour of Kandla was followed by surveys of tides, currents, and the ground beneath the creek, necessary before harbour works could be designed. The Union Government took over the existing minor port for development in 1950. Plans for deep-water berths were prepared, international tenders invited, and a large programme of public expenditure committed.

Rail connection was essential to the same project. A harbour could not replace Karachi as an outlet for trade unless goods could reach it economically from the interior. The metre-gauge link was completed and opened in 1952, while proposals for further connections continued to be examined. The port's development thus depended on works extending well beyond the waterfront: railway lines, roads, water supply, storage, and accommodation for those who would build and operate it.

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[9] Desert Blooms Here, An Account of the Development of Kandla Port and the twin cities of Gandhidham and Adipur by Mohan Gehani, published by Indian Institute of Sindhology, 2016 Gehani, M. (2016) page 116.

[10] Simpson and Phillips, "Note on the Raniwara-Kandla Project," para. 11 and Appendix B, "Kutch State: Kandla Port," paras. 1 and 7.

[11] Among the many accounts of journeys by sea out of Sindh in 1947 recorded by the author, only one interviewee (Sushil Kumar Somaya, recorded interview with author on 17 May 2026) recalled arriving at Kandla from Karachi as a child. Most recalled disembarking at Bombay; a few named ports in Gujarat. The Kandla recollection seemed surprising when the port was understood chiefly as a creek with a small jetty. The 1946 account of its existing facilities, encountered later, made that journey easier to understand.

On 10 January 1952, Jawaharlal Nehru laid the foundation stone of the new major port at Kandla. The ceremony signalled national commitment, but it was not the completion or inauguration of the harbour works. Kandla was declared a major port in 1955. Its first two new cargo berths entered service in March 1957, with two more opening later that year. Keeping these stages distinct matters, because the town was already being built and inhabited while the major port remained under construction.

Figure 5. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru lays the foundation stone of Kandla Port, Bhai Pratap looks on. Kandla, 1952.
Images courtesy of Pratap V. Kriplaney-Dialdas, Bhai Pratap's grandson, from the collection of his parents Manjari and Vashu Kriplaney.

The SRC's part in the construction of Kandla is easily lost when port and town are treated as separate projects. The Government of India commissioned and financed the major port, awarding the principal harbour works in 1953 to a reconstituted Indo-German contracting firm, subsequently identified in contemporary reporting as Sindhu Hochtief-Butzer (India). The same reporting states that the SRC was associated with its German partners in the company; the SRC's later account describes its role in the port works as that of a contractor. The Corporation was thus involved in building the harbour as well as the neighbouring town.

The SRC also undertook associated works, including roads and railway buildings, alongside its responsibilities within the township. These different activities do not collapse into a single claim of authorship. They show how a national infrastructure project and a refugee-led urban project became entwined in practice, even when later accounts credited them separately.

The relationship ran in both directions. Kandla offered employment and commercial prospects to people settling in Gandhidham, while the growing town supplied housing, services, and an economic base near the port. The two were beginning to develop together, as Bhai Pratap had envisaged. Yet building the town and port in relation to each other did not settle who would control the land and infrastructure on which they depended.

Figure 6. By 1954, the port was operational, ships were docking. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, Vice President of India, visits. Bhai Pratap is seen behind him.
Photo by Udho Motiram Mangharmalani, aka M.U. Pearl, official cameraman of SRC Ltd from 1948.
Image courtesy of his nephew Ranjit Lalvani (b. 1934).

Land, Leases and the Changing Balance of Authority

Construction had proceeded while the precise division of land, powers, and obligations between the SRC and successive governments remained unsettled. The leases show how those questions were addressed as the town took shape.

The Maharao's order of January 1948 gave the SRC the prospect of land and powers on a scale equal to Bhai Pratap's proposal. 15,000 acres were envisaged for a city whose residential, commercial, industrial, and agricultural areas could be planned together. The order permitted the Corporation to lay out and allot plots, subject to approval of the town plan, and provided for a future local authority in which the Kachchh Government would be represented. From the beginning, then, the SRC's initiative rested on an agreement with a public authority, rather than on unrestricted control of the land.

The constitutional setting in which that agreement was made soon changed. The Maharao died before the proposed *lekh*—the formal deed that would have given effect to the land grant—could be executed. Kachchh's subsequent integration into the Indian Union changed both the legal standing of the Maharao's order and the authorities responsible for carrying the project forward.[12]

The Government of India had growing responsibilities in the region, most visibly at Kandla. Land that Bhai Pratap had sought for a connected town and port now had to be considered alongside national plans for the harbour, railways, and other public works.

The 1951 arrangements appeared to give the SRC extensive room to proceed. The government lease, executed in May with effect from April, described an area of roughly 17,500 acres and provided for the

[12] For an analysis of the Maharao's death, the unexecuted lekh and the effect of Kachchh's integration on the SRC's grant, see Shahani, 2027, Chap. 8, forthcoming.

Corporation to plan development and grant long leases to settlers, subject to government oversight. This was a substantial authority for a company formed by displaced people. It was also an authority exercised within terms set by the state. Questions of approval, land use, and the eventual administration of the town were therefore part of the project's legal structure, even while the SRC was carrying out much of its daily work.

The surviving files then record a prolonged renegotiation. By the middle of the decade, a new lease placed approximately 2,600 acres with the SRC for township development. The figures—15,000 acres in the Maharao's order, roughly 17,500 in the 1951 arrangements, and about 2,600 in the later lease—cannot be read as though they were three measurements of the same parcel under identical terms. They belong to successive agreements made by different authorities for different purposes. Yet the change in scale was unmistakable. The Corporation's place within the larger regional scheme had narrowed, and the division of responsibility between the SRC and government required fresh definition.

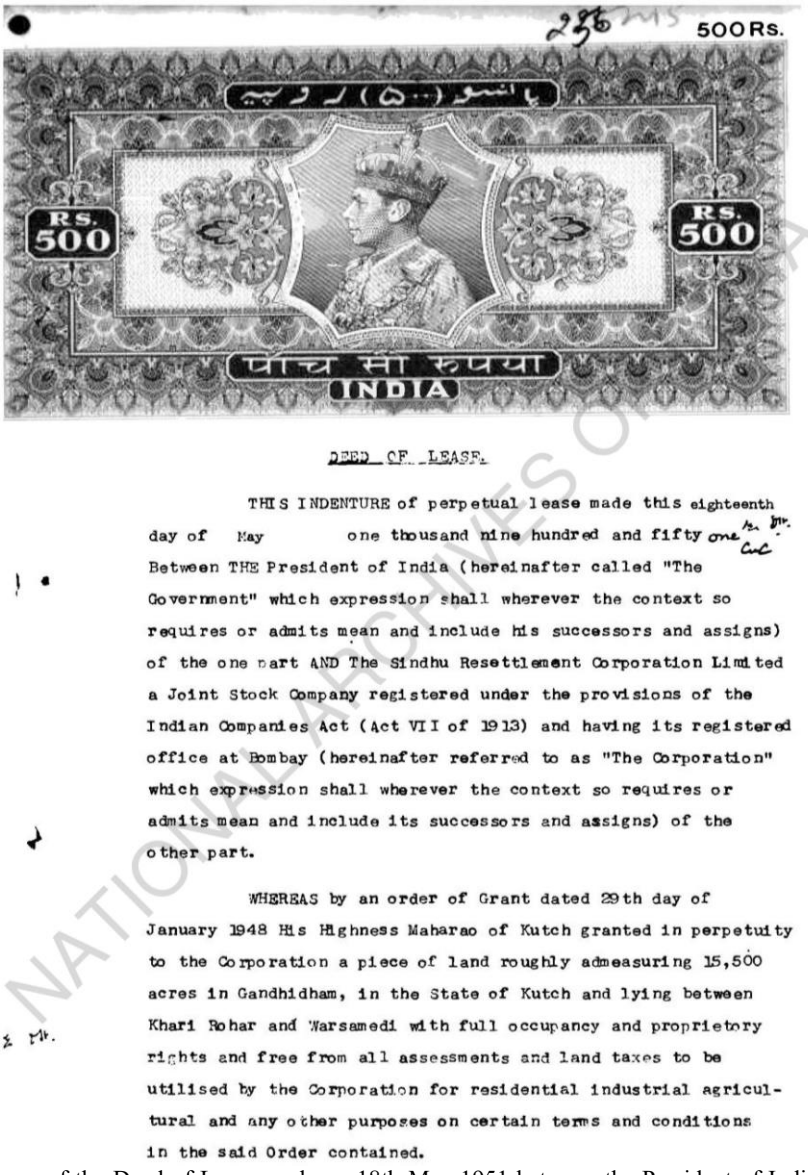


Figure 7a. First page of the Deed of Lease made on 18th May 1951 between the President of India and the Sindhu Resettlement Corporation.

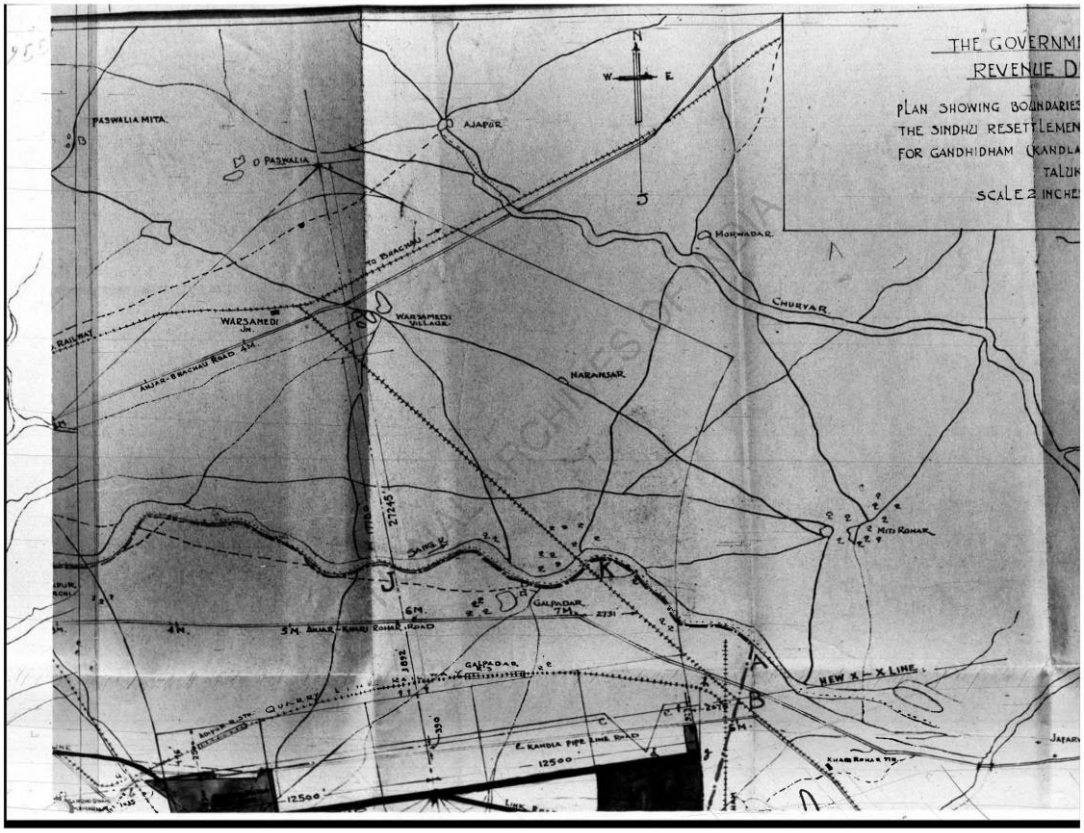
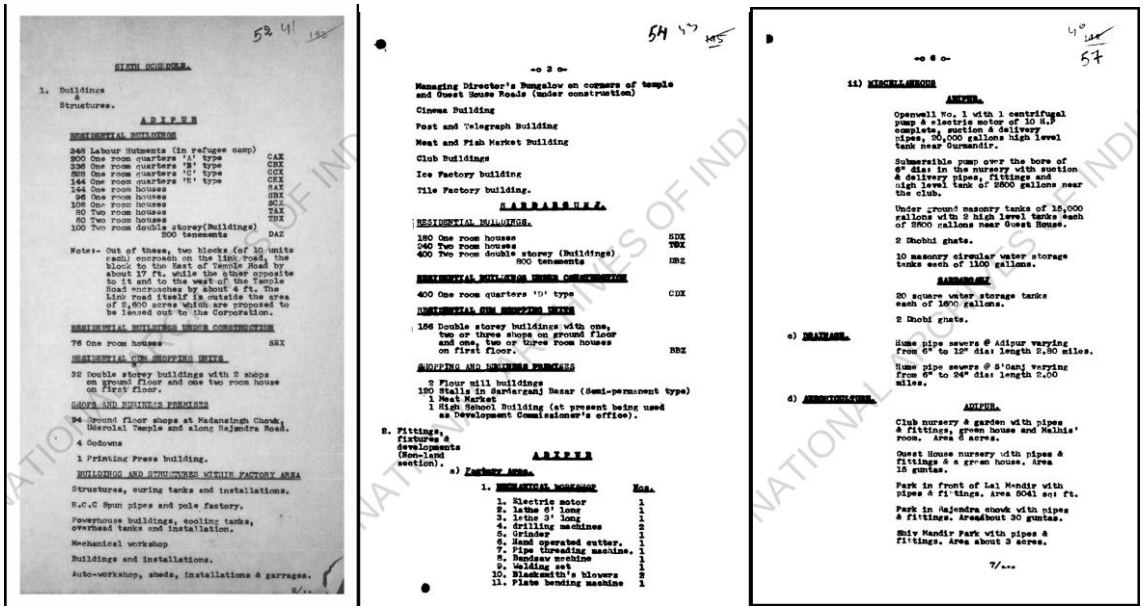


Figure 7b. Plan showing the boundaries.



SIXTH SCHEDULE.

1. Buildings & Structures.

A D I P U R

RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS

348 Labour Tutments (In refugee camp) CAX
200 One room quarters 'A' type CBX
336 One room quarters 'B' type CCX
288 One room quarters 'C' type CDX
144 One room quarters 'E' type CEX
144 One room houses SAX
96 One room houses SBX
108 One room houses SCX
80 Two room houses TAX
60 Two room houses TBX
100 Two room double storey(Buildings) 200 tenements DAZ

Note:- Out of these, two blocks (of 10 units each) encroach on the 18M. Road, the block to the East of Temple Road by about 17 ft. while the other opposite to it and to the west of the Temple Road encroaches by about 4 ft. The 18M. road itself is outside the area of 2,600 acres which are proposed to be leased out to the Corporation.

RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS UNDER CONSTRUCTION

76 One room houses SBX

RESIDENTIAL CUM SHOPPING UNITS

32 Double storey buildings with 2 shops on ground floor and one two room house on first floor.

SHOPS AND BUSINESS PREMISES

94 Ground floor shops at Madansingh Chowk, Oderolal Temple and along Rajendra Road.

4 Godowns

1 Printing Press building.

BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES WITHIN FACTORY AREA

Structures, curing tanks and installations.

R.C.C Spun pipes and pole factory.

Powerhouse buildings, cooling tanks, overhead tanks and installation.

Mechanical workshop

Buildings and installations.

Auto-workshop, sheds, installations & garrages.

-o 2 o-

Managing Director's Bungalow on corners of temple and Guest House Roads (Under construction)

Cinema Building

Post and Telegraph Building

Meat and Fish Market Building

Club Buildings

Ice Factory building

Tile Factory building.

S A N D A R G H U F F.

RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS.

180 One room houses SDX
240 Two room houses TBX
400 Two room double storey (Buildings) 800 tenements DBZ

RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS UNDER CONSTRUCTION

400 One room quarters 'D' type CDX

RESIDENTIAL CUM SHOPPING UNITS

156 Double storey buildings with one, two or three shops on ground floor and one, two or three room houses on first floor. BBZ

SHOPPING AND BUSINESS PREMISES

2 Flour mill buildings
180 Stalls in Sardarganj Bazar (Semi-permanent type)
1 Meat Market
1 High School Building (at present being used as Development Commissioner's office).

2. Fittings, fixtures & developments (Non-laid section).

a) Factory Area.

A D I P U R

1. RESIDENTIAL WORKSHOP	Nos.
1. Electric motor	1
2. Lathe 6' long	1
3. Lathe 3' long	1
4. Drilling machines	2
5. Grinder	1
6. Hand operated cutter.	1
7. Pipe threading machine.	1
8. Bandsaw machine	1
9. Welding set	1
10. Blacksmith's blowers	2
11. Plate bending machine	1

-o 6 o-

ii) MISCELLANEOUS

A D I P U R.

Openwell No. 1 with 1 centrifugal pump & electric motor of 10 H.P complete, suction & delivery pipes, 20,000 gallons high level tank near Gurwandir.

Submersible pump over the bore of 6" dia: in the nursery with suction & delivery pipes, fittings and high level tank of 2500 gallons near the club.

Under ground masonry tanks of 15,000 gallons with 2 high level tanks each of 2500 gallons near Guest House.

2 Dhobi ghats.

10 masonry circular water storage tanks each of 1100 gallons.

S A N D A R G H U F F

20 square water storage tanks each of 1600 gallons.

2 Dhobi ghats.

c) DRAINAGE.

Hume pipe sewers @ Adipur varying from 6" to 12" dia: length 2.80 miles.

Hume pipe sewers @ S'Ganj varying from 6" to 24" dia: length 2.00 miles.

d) AFFORESTATION.

A D I P U R.

Club nursery & garden with pipes & fittings, green house and Malhis' room. Area 6 acres.

Guest House nursery with pipes & fittings & a green house. Area 15 guntas.

Park in front of Lal Mandir with pipes & fittings. Area 5041 sq: ft.

Park in Rajendra chowk with pipes & fittings. Areaabout 30 guntas.

Shiv Mandir Park with pipes & fittings. Area about 3 acres.

Figure 7c. Schedules of inventory, clearly showing the extent of infrastructure already created by SRC while the 1951 lease was still being painstakingly negotiated in 1954.[13]
Archival images courtesy of National Archives of India.

[13] Sindhu Resettlement Corporation Draft New Lease Deed to be Executed by the S.R.E. Ltd, Year 1954, Rehabilitation Department, File no. RHB/21(11)/54, p. 1-278, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

This was no longer a negotiation over an empty tract of land. Schedules and inventories prepared during the discussions record roads, wells, reservoirs, pipelines, drainage, and other works already undertaken for the township. Houses, schools, health facilities, and places for public and religious life had begun to give the plan its physical form. Water was particularly consequential. The sources near Viri, the land needed for reservoirs, and the routes of the pipelines had to be secured if Gandhidham was to function, regardless of how the boundaries of the lease were redrawn. The documents show the SRC acting in many respects as the town's builder and civic administrator while the legal extent of its authority was being reconsidered.

The Government of India, for its part, was investing in the port and retaining responsibility for central amenities and wider regional infrastructure. Its claim to direct development cannot be dismissed as an intervention from outside a completed refugee enterprise. Nor can the SRC be reduced to a recipient of government land and loans: it had organised settlers, built services, and invested labour and capital before the eventual division of responsibilities was settled. The negotiation was over how a growing city, initiated by a refugee corporation but bound to a national port project, would be owned, developed, and governed.

The leases are consequently more than a sequence of acreage figures. They reveal an experiment in self-rehabilitation coming into contact with the powers of the postcolonial state. As the town acquired roads, water, and residents, the documents increasingly had to decide who could allot land, maintain services, approve plans, and speak for Gandhidham's future.

Competing Accounts of the Same Achievement

The documents that survive from Gandhidham's early years do not tell a single, settled story of its creation. They were produced for different audiences and purposes: to attract shareholders, report a national ceremony, describe construction, assess refugee rehabilitation, or account for government expenditure. Each makes some part of the undertaking visible. Read together, they also show how easily its other participants could fall out of view.

An early SRC announcement presented Gandhidham as a "Homeland for Sindhis". It invited displaced people to invest in a place where they could live together, find work, and rebuild institutions that dispersal had put at risk. The promised port, water supply, industry and agricultural possibilities gave the appeal its economic force. This was promotional material: Its purpose was to win confidence and capital, and its projections cannot be read as achievements already secured. Yet it is direct evidence of the scale of the Corporation's intention. The founders were asking people to help create a city, not merely to purchase a house in a refugee settlement.

A *Times of India* report of Nehru laying Kandla's foundation stone in January 1952 began the story elsewhere. The port appeared as a national answer to the loss of Karachi, a new gateway for India's trade. Gandhidham entered the account chiefly as a nearby refugee colony. Sindhis were present at the ceremony, but principally as businessmen seeking opportunities; one speaker was identified only as "a prominent Sindhi" (The Times of India, 1952, p. 1).[14] Neither Bhai Pratap nor SRC was named. The report captured the importance of the government's undertaking, while leaving the initiative behind the neighbouring town largely unnamed.

[14] Quoting Bhai Pratap on the project while identifying him only as "a prominent Sindhi" would be rather like quoting J. R. D. Tata on Jamshedpur and identifying him only as "a Parsi businessman".

The contrast becomes more striking in two articles published by the same newspaper on 31 October 1956. "Kandla Port Project Surveyed" follows the work of government committees, surveyors, engineers, and the Development Organisation. In its account, building a port in a sparsely inhabited region created a need for a township. The SRC appears "by a happy coincidence" as a private corporation already developing one. Bhai Pratap is not named. The phrase makes the relationship between the two projects sound incidental, though the article acknowledges that the SRC had obtained land from the Maharao and was building on part of the planned township area.

Elsewhere in that day's paper, "Excellent Progress at Gandhidham" tells almost the reverse story. It credits Bhai Pratap with conceiving the scheme in 1947 and recognising that the proposed town and port could sustain one another. It describes displaced Sindhis as initiators, details the SRC's housing, industries, and services, and identifies its association with German engineers in the company constructing the harbour. The account is warmly approving and should be read with the same care as the Corporation's own announcement. Even so, its existence alongside the port article matters. In a single newspaper issue, the SRC could be presented as central to an integrated project and as a fortunate adjunct to a government one (The Times of India, 1956a, A8; 1956b, A43).[15]

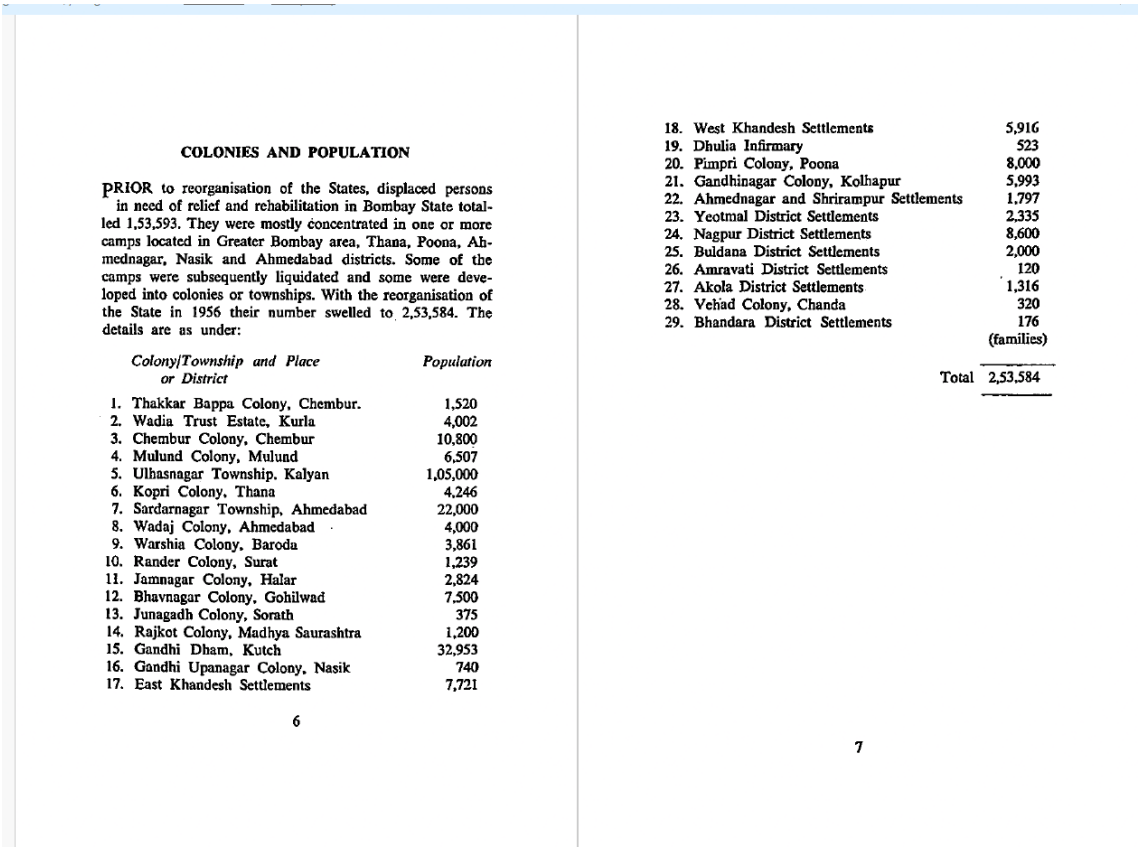
In fact, writing eighteen months earlier, Kandla's Development Commissioner, M. Ganapati, gave a more precise account of the SRC's role. He reported that difficulties between the original Indian and German contractors had delayed construction. Following a reorganisation of the firm, the SRC became a 50 per cent partner, while the German company Hochtief joined Heinrich Butzer as a sub-partner. (The Times of India, The SRC's participation in the harbour works was thus substantial, although Ganapati's account also makes clear that the government commissioned, financed and supervised the port project.

Walter D. Friedenberg, an American journalist travelling through India on an Institute of Current World Affairs fellowship, visited Gandhidham in 1957 and wrote about it in a report on the rehabilitation of people displaced by Partition (pp. 2-5).

He found a town created "not only for refugees but by them too": Government assistance had been substantial, he wrote, but the initiative came from displaced Sindhis. He toured the town with an SRC official, visited Kandla, and spent an evening with Bhai Pratap. His report gives us both an observer's account of the settlement and an unusually full record of how Bhai Pratap explained its purpose to a visitor. Friedenberg also identified the SRC's part in the combine building the port. His account is especially valuable when read with an awareness of whom he met and whose explanations shaped it.

In a Government of India retrospective published in 1958, Gandhidham becomes "Gandhi Dham, Kutch", one entry in a table of rehabilitation colonies and townships, with a recorded population of 32,953 (Directorate of Publicity, Government of Bombay, 1958, p. 6). The classification was reasonable for the report's administrative purpose. It could count those who had been settled and place Gandhidham beside other centres of rehabilitation. A table could not convey the negotiations, investments, labour, and competing ambitions through which this particular settlement had come into being.

[15] The articles appeared in the same issue but gave markedly different accounts of the relationship between the port and the township. Whether they were written by the same correspondent cannot be established from the available attribution.



COLONIES AND POPULATION

PRIOR to reorganisation of the States, displaced persons in need of relief and rehabilitation in Bombay State totalled 1,53,593. They were mostly concentrated in one or more camps located in Greater Bombay area, Thana, Poona, Ahmednagar, Nasik and Ahmedabad districts. Some of the camps were subsequently liquidated and some were developed into colonies or townships. With the reorganisation of the State in 1956 their number swelled to 2,53,584. The details are as under:

Colony/Township and Place or District	*Population*
1. Thakkar Bappa Colony, Chembur.	1,520
2. Wadia Trust Estate, Kurla	4,002
3. Chembur Colony, Chembur	10,800
4. Mulund Colony, Mulund	6,507
5. Ulhasnagar Township, Kalyan	1,05,000
6. Kopri Colony, Thana	4,246
7. Sardarnagar Township, Ahmedabad	22,000
8. Wadaj Colony, Ahmedabad	4,000
9. Warshia Colony, Baroda	3,861
10. Rander Colony, Surat	1,239
11. Jamnagar Colony, Halar	2,824
12. Bhavnagar Colony, Gohilwad	7,500
13. Junagadh Colony, Sorath	375
14. Rajkot Colony, Madhya Saurashtra	1,200
15. Gandhi Dham, Kutch	32,953
16. Gandhi Upanagar Colony, Nasik	740
17. East Khandesh Settlements	7,721

6

18. West Khandesh Settlements	5,916
19. Dhulia Infirmary	523
20. Pimpri Colony, Poona	8,000
21. Gandhinagar Colony, Kolhapur	5,993
22. Ahmednagar and Shrirampur Settlements	1,797
23. Yeotmal District Settlements	2,335
24. Nagpur District Settlements	8,600
25. Buldana District Settlements	2,000
26. Amravati District Settlements	120
27. Akola District Settlements	1,316
28. Vehad Colony, Chanda	320
29. Bhandara District Settlements	176 (families)
Total	2,53,584

7

Figure 8. Camps for Displaced People Bombay State 1958: Table showing camps for "displaced people" in Bombay State in 1958, Directorate of Publicity, Government of Bombay, in the publication *Rehabilitation of Displaced Persons in Bombay State: A Decennial Retrospect* (Bombay, August 1958), 6-7.

None of these accounts needs to be dismissed in order to recognise its limits. The state chose and financed a major port; the SRC organised and built a town; displaced families made their lives there; and engineers and workers constructed the infrastructure on which both depended. The sources differ over where the story begins and which of these actions deserves emphasis. Their differences are themselves part of Gandhidham's history. They show how an achievement created through several forms of initiative could, depending on the record consulted, become either a Sindhi homeland, a government port with an adjoining township, or one more colony in a rehabilitation ledger.

The institutional histories available online carry these differences in emphasis into the present. The Gandhidham Development Authority[16] begins its account with the master plan prepared by the American firm Adams, Howard, and Greeley, its approval by the Government of India, and the legislation establishing the authority. It does not include the earlier Sindhi proposal, the Maharao's grant, or the early plans or the SRC's work in founding the town. The port is now administered by the Deendayal Port Authority[17]. Kandla Port was renamed in 2017 for Deendayal Upadhyay, a leader of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh and a proponent of *Integral Humanism*, at the close of celebrations marking his birth centenary. The government's explanation honours his wider public life; it identifies no role for him in Kandla's development. The Authority's history reaches back to

[16] https://gda.net.in/.
[17] https://www.deendayalport.gov.in/port/brief-history.

the Maharao's jetty and follows the port's development as a national undertaking, without mentioning the SRC's foundational connection to the harbour works. Each website describes the history relevant to its institution. Read as accounts of how Gandhidham and Kandla came into being together, however, they leave out the relationship that Bhai Pratap and the SRC sought to build between them.

What Became of Bhai Pratap's Vision

Gandhidham's first decade did not bring its founding work to an end. The houses, roads, schools, and industries created by the Sindhu Resettlement Corporation gave the settlement a basis for growth. As Kandla developed, the town's commercial life extended beyond its original purpose as a home for displaced Sindhis. Its population became more diverse, and authority over its development passed increasingly to public institutions. The town Bhai Pratap had envisaged was taking shape, though its governance and its inhabitants were changing.

The Kandla Free Trade Zone, established in 1965—Asia's first Export Processing Zone[18]—marked a further stage in the development of the town and port together. It was intended to encourage exports, investment, and employment, and to generate business for Kandla. In an Indian economy governed by stringent controls on imports and foreign exchange, the zone created unusual scope for international trade. Bhai Pratap, whose business had connected Sindh to markets across the world, understood those possibilities. His plans envisaged Kandla's transformation "from creek to port to free trade zone". While the zone's establishment came remarkably close to that vision, the available record does not, however, establish the extent of his contribution to securing its creation.

The connections between Kandla, Gandhidham, and trade overseas can also be followed through individual histories. Peter Dhalwani's life carried Gandhidham's story into an older world of Sindhi trade overseas.[19] He left school early and found occasional work at Kandla Port, climbing oil tankers to measure their contents before they were sealed for transport to the storage facility. At the first opportunity, he left to work overseas, first for a Sindhi firm in Manila, and then joining his uncle's mail-order business in Hong Kong. On a visit home, he put his savings into a plot near Gandhidham and began building a house for his family. From Hong Kong he went on to sell suits across a circuit that included East and southern Africa, eventually establishing his own business and prospering on a considerable scale. He later settled in Pune, but Gandhidham remained the place where his family had begun again and where his first earnings abroad helped them build a more secure home. In Kampala, he built a temple that serves free meals to devotees and local visitors—a philanthropic undertaking made possible by the business he built over those years.

[18] kasez.gov.in: Kandla Special Economic Zone (KASEZ) is Asia's first and India's largest Export Processing Zone (earlier), established in 1965 in Kutch District of Gujarat, near Deendayal Port (earlier Kandla Port). It was later upgraded to a Special Economic Zone in November 2000.

[19] Peter Dhalwani, recorded interviews with the author, March 9, 2018 and September 14, 2024.

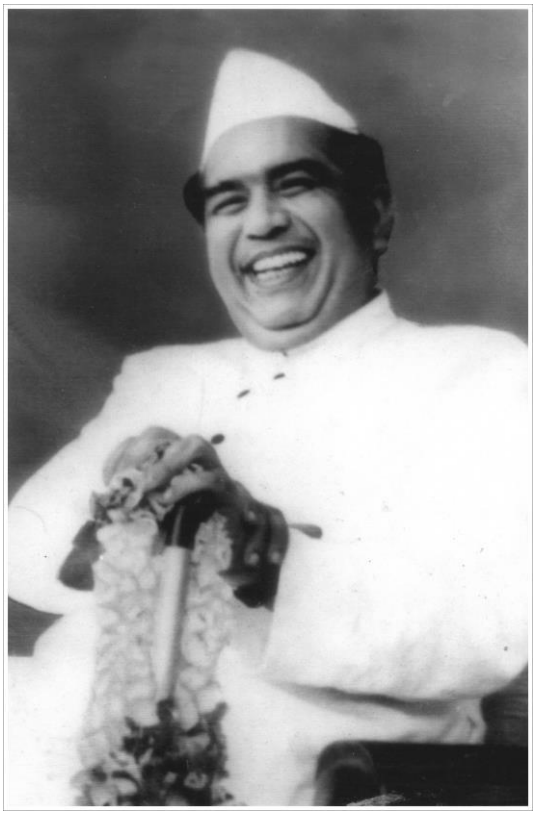


Figure 9. Bhai PratapDialdas 1908-1967.
Image courtesy of his daughter Aruna Jagtiani.

Bhai Pratap's later years were overshadowed by a prosecution concerning imported goods. He was convicted and sentenced to five years' rigorous imprisonment. On 30 August 1963, Governor Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit granted him a free pardon under Article 161 of the Constitution.[20] Writing after Bhai Pratap's death, lawyer Ram Jethmalani stated that documentary evidence held by the prosecution had not been produced at trial. He argued that it contradicted the principal prosecution witness and had subsequently been examined by government secretaries (Jethmalani, 1967, p. 8).

Bhai Pratap returned to Gandhidham to a jubilant welcome. Ram Daryani remembered someone bursting into his college classroom with news of Bhai Pratap's release. Classes were dismissed, and when Bhai Pratap returned to Adipur, Daryani joined the large procession that greeted him.

Bhai Pratap resumed public life and pursued his interests in Egyptology, ancient scripts and the Indus Civilisation, although imprisonment had damaged his health and spirit. He died in London on 30 August 1967, aged 59, exactly four years after the pardon. His body was brought to Adipur for cremation; his samadhi stands beside the Gandhi Samadhi.

The surviving record is uneven. Extensive state archives preserve the government's decisions, negotiations, and disputes concerning Gandhidham and Kandla, while Bhai Pratap's own papers have not been accessible to researchers. We can follow much of what the SRC proposed and built, and hear something of his thinking through letters, public statements, and the accounts of visitors. We cannot yet reconstruct his own account of every later

[20] Government of Maharashtra, Home Department, order granting a free pardon to Bhai Pratap Dialdas under Article 161 of the Constitution of India, 30 August 1963, copy in author's collection.

decision, including the establishment of the Free Trade Zone, with the same confidence. That imbalance has consequences for how the history is told: The institutions that assumed authority over Gandhidham and Kandla left extensive records of their work, while the founder's account of his changing place in the undertaking is much harder to recover.

Gandhidham's later history also belongs to people who came without any part in the founding proposal. The town grew through the work of successive generations, including residents for whom Sindh was a family history rather than a remembered home, and others with no connection to Sindh at all. The earthquakes of 1956 and 2001 brought very different tests to the buildings and communities that had taken shape there. Rebuilding changed the city's appearance again, making its beginnings harder to read from the present landscape. Oral histories allow us to follow some of those changes through the lives of residents, rather than treating the town's founding decade as its whole history.

The lives built in Gandhidham did not end with its founding generation. H. K. Kripalani came there as a child in the 1950s, studied at its schools and colleges, and went on to teach and administer the educational institutions that grew from the town's early ambitions.[21] His account follows an idea present in Bhai Pratap's proposal—education as part of a lasting settlement—through the people who sustained it after him.

Vimmi Sadarangani's life traces another of the town's early ambitions across generations. Her mother had studied and taught at Maitri School; Vimmi herself later worked on dictionaries, an encyclopaedia and other language projects at the Indian Institute of Sindhology. Established after the town's first schools, the Institute gave a lasting home to work on Sindhi language and literature in a community separated from Sindh.

Devendra Kodwani, who directed the Tolani Institute of Management Studies from 1997 to 2004, remembered how prominently women figured in the leadership of the town's educational and charitable institutions.[22] He recalled Nirmala Gajwani, Dadi Krishna of Maitri Mandal, and the women of the Tolani family who sustained its educational work. So many were affectionately addressed as Dadi that he joked that Adipur should be called "Dadipur." His recollection brings into view another part of the city's making: the women whose leadership sustained institutions beyond the founding generation.

Parth Vyas, growing up in Lilashah Nagar in the early 1990s, knew a different Gandhidham: A town of Sindhi, Jain, Lohana and Muslim neighbours, where Hindi—not Gujarati, not Sindhi—was the language used with street vendors.[23] Visitors to his home were sometimes served dal-pakwan, and as a child Parth thought of it simply as a local dish, not one associated with Sindhi food traditions. Children took pride that theirs (like Chandigarh) was a planned city. Yet Parth did not know why the town had been built or who Bhai Pratap was. He remembers acting in a street play at Pratap Chowk without knowing the history behind its name. The founding vision had helped shape the place both men called home; knowledge of that founding had not travelled as securely from one generation to the next.

Looking back, Parth sees the 2001 earthquake as a turning point in the city's life. He describes new investment, construction, and professional opportunities, but also heavier traffic and a loss of the order he remembers from childhood. His account cannot stand for every resident's experience. It does, however, show how the settlement became a home for people beyond its founding community—and how traces of that founding could remain part of everyday life even when the story attached to them was no longer widely known.

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[21] H. K. Kripalani, recorded interviews with the author, 9 October 2025.
[22] Devendra Kodwani, recorded interviews with the author, 17 and 22 September 2025.
[23] Parth Vyas, recorded interviews with the author, 10 October 2025.

Devendra offered a more critical assessment of the relationship between prosperity and the town's public life. He remembered substantial private wealth alongside poorly maintained roads, and lamented the lack of a good general bookshop and the inactivity of the public library behind the Gandhi Samadhi. His admiration for the educational institutions and Sindhology did not prevent him from questioning how far their ambitions had entered everyday life. In his view, Bhai Pratap's vision remained only partly realised: responsibility lay both with public administration and with the community itself. His account introduces a question that economic growth alone cannot answer—how fully the city sustained the civic and intellectual life envisaged for it.

Conclusion

Gandhidham began with a proposal that joined a displaced community's need for a home to the economic possibilities of a port. Bhai Pratap and the Sindhu Resettlement Corporation gave that proposal an organisation, raised support for it, and began building a town where people could live and work. The Maharao's approval made the undertaking possible; public investment, government decisions and the work of planners, engineers and labourers carried it forward. Families who chose to settle there made a city of what had been plans, roads, and unfinished buildings.

The transformation was neither the fulfilment of a single man's design nor simply the outcome of a government rehabilitation scheme. Gandhidham and Kandla grew through cooperation, negotiation, and changes in authority that altered the terms on which the SRC could act. The leases reveal those changes with particular clarity: As the Corporation built the settlement, the land and powers originally envisaged for it were reconsidered within a larger state project. The founding ambition endured in the town's homes, institutions, and economic life, even as the city passed beyond the purposes and population for which it was first conceived.

Its history has also been shaped by the records through which it is known. A port report, a rehabilitation table, an SRC appeal, and a resident's recollection each answer different questions. None can stand for the whole. Reading them together restores the relationship between a national port and a town built through Sindhi initiative, while making room for the workers and residents whose lives gave both projects substance. Gandhidham's history was written in government files and public accounts from the beginning. What remains to be written more fully is how those accounts fit together—and how a displaced community's work came to occupy so little space in the most familiar versions of the city's creation.

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