

## SARDAR DATAR SINGH — *An Institution in Himself*



*Sardar Datar Singh*

*As a father figure of IDA — Sardar Datar Singh was the first President of Indian Dairy Science Association from 1948 to 1955. Since its inception in 1948, the development and progress of the Association to its present position was triggered off to a great extent under the fostering care and able guidance of Sardar Datar Singh.*

*We, have already published a living history of this pioneer dairyman in June 1995 issue of Indian Dairyman and while continuing our effort to revive his memory among readers we got in touch with Mrs. Amiteshwar Anand, daughter of Sardar Datar Singh and arranged a questionnaire session with her and it was all due to her relentless and conceding support that we could clinch something more about a person who is still standing with us as an institution in himself.*

*Here are the excerpts ...*

**Q. What remembrance do you have as a daughter of Sir Datar Singh?**

**Ans.** My father was a very progressive person and in that day and age, insisted that girls receive equal education as boys. As a teenager I represented India at the United Nations and spent a year in America on a Rotary scholarship. The house was always bustling with activities and my parents did a lot of entertaining. It was not uncommon to have the Viceroy over for a meal. As my father grew increasingly close to Mahatma Gandhi, it became a hub for nationalist leaders. Although very busy with his various official responsibilities as well as traveling to represent India at international fora, my father always made time for the family and we could always take our problems to him.

**Q. Tell the readers of the *Indian Dairyman* something about the childhood, and family background of Sir Datar Singh?**

**Ans.** Sardar Bahadur Sir Datar Singh, the son of Hukum Singh Kalyana was born into a very

affluent landed family having over 150,000 acres of land in Machi Singh (named after his grandfather), Kalyana and Arafwala area now in Pakistan. He always had a leaning towards spiritualism and was a very compassionate person. Even as a child, he would stop on his way to school to give alms and help anyone in need. He went to study at Cirencester in England where he earned an N.D.D. Diploma specializing in dairy farming and agriculture. Upon his return he set up India's first dairy farm in Montgomery or Sahiwal as it is now known. For this he received the title of Sardar Bahadur followed two years later by a knighthood from Britain.

The dairy was scientifically planned and managed with the welfare of the animals given top priority. It introduced Jersey cows into India and developed the breed known as Sahiwal. Located 4 km from his residence, the dairy farm was where Sir Datar Singh spent a bulk of his time when not touring his other lands and villagers. Simple in his habits, he would often sit down with his labourers and share their food of plain *roti* and raw onions.

He was a very keen agriculturist with 5000 acres of orchards of mangoes, citrus fruits, and pomegranates. He also had fields of wheat, cotton, sugarcane, and maize.

**Q. He was a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Rajendra Prasad. Do you have any memorable experience of his deep respect for Gandhi's mission of *Go-Sewa*?**

**Ans.** My father had great regard and respect for Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Sardar Patel and K.M. Munshi and had a cross section of friends from *Nawabs* and *Rajas* to industrialists and politicians. But he himself preferred to maintain a low profile.

Their common interest in cattle welfare drew him closer to Gandhi ji, who came to look upon him as a son. In 1946 at Mahatma Gandhi's request he came to Delhi where Gandhi ji told him of the impending partition and requested him to take charge of cattle utilization for the whole of India.

**Q. He was full of deep compassion for animals as in the 1949 Kutch famine, he personally visited the area and made arrangements for the large herds of starved and deserted cattle. Similarly, he did in the 1952 Hisar famine. What made him care for the animals?**

**Ans.** He was a very farsighted and able administrator. A story told about his feeling for animals recounts how as a child, he threw a silver coin into the well because he wanted that the fish should be cared for. As head of cattle utilization, he saw it as his duty to see that cattle were not overlooked during times of famine. He had train holds of fodder sent into the famine areas and got tanks dug to water the animals. He understood the relevance of cattle to the national economy and was driven both by compassion and practicality.

**Q. Do you feel that this compassion for animals is an inherited one or to say Mrs. Maneka Gandhi, his grand daughter has picked up where Sardar Datar Singh left off?**

**Ans.** The whole family is very proud of Maneka's work for animals. Sir Datar Singh would have been especially pleased to know that this grand daughter has carried his work forward and made a name for herself in the field of animal welfare internationally. In Delhi it was at Maneka's instance that the Govt. set up 8 *Gaushalas* to take in the cows off the capital streets. She herself ran one of these *Gaushalas* that took in some 10,000 cows.

**Q. As a man of modern trends he pioneered scientific breeding and dairy farming in India. In his publication 'Re-organization of *Gaushala* and Pinjrapoles in India,' he wrote that modern methods of breeding and management, were essential. In what way he was not satisfied with the then dairy conditions?**

**Ans.** His was the country's first dairy farm. Until then dairy was an unorganized adhoc activity. He studied scientific dairy management in England whose practices he applied here. He learned about food supplements to improve cattle health and milk yield, he brought in Jersey cows to improve indigenous stock. But as unhappy as he was then with disorganized dairies, he would have been more troubled by today's so-called management of dairies where there is a great deal of cruelty to the animals. Young male calves are slaughtered, females are administered hormonal drugs including Oxytocin and suffer from all kinds of diseases including tuberculosis and mastitis. He would also have been appalled at the lack of care for old and dry cows and the increasing amount of illegal cows laughter.



*Sardar Datar Singh at IDRI, Bangalore in 1949 during Silver Jubilee Celebration*

**Q. Walking on her grandfather's footsteps, Mrs. Maneka Gandhi has propagated vegetarianism on the grounds of health and vegetarianism. To what extent do you feel his vision has been realized?**

**Ans.** Maneka has indeed carried his work to unprecedented levels of success by bringing animal welfare onto the national agenda. As a result of her efforts,

India is the first country in the world to have a Govt. department for animal welfare. She herself became the first Minister for Animal Welfare. Although he was not vegetarian, he would have approved for her campaign to promote cruelty free alternatives in food and all other areas. Other qualities that Maneka seems to have inherited from her grandfather are his directness, efficiency, incorruptibility and patriotism.

**Q. What were the standards he had set for himself in his professional and personal life both?**

**Ans.** Although he was an extraordinarily wealthy and powerful person, he remained down to earth

and true to his values. A man of very high ideals, he sacrificed his entire landholdings in Pakistan to serve India. Generous to a fault, he kept an open house and sheltered the entire extended family after it fled from Pakistan. He provided financial assistance to many without ever seeking or expecting return. As a hardworking and entrepreneurial Advisor on Kashmir Affairs, he was responsible for the speedy completion of Leh-Karil road.

Deeply spiritual, he received the blessings of Baba Nand Singhji and other great sages. Once asked by a Saint in Taran Taran to name his heart's desire, he said simply. "I want the friendship of the whole world." His wish seems to have been granted for he was held in high esteem by the Indian govt, royalty and all those who had the privilege of knowing or working with him. He settled in Bhopal at the invitation of the *Nawab* of Bhopal and remained Honorary Advisor to the Govt. of Madhya Pradesh.

In his personal life too he adhered to the same values. There was a routine and discipline which was strictly followed at the home. Yet there was the freedom to pursue our individual interests, no matter how unconventional, with his full backing and support. We all developed excellent reading habits and enjoyed intellectual discussion and debate. He inspired obedience, respect and confidence.

**Q. What was his vision for India in its agricultural perspective?**

**Ans.** Sir Datar Singh was a most progressive planner. He was very much part of the Green Revolution and introduced — seeds to India. His vision for India would have been self-sufficient in food with surplus to export. I do not think he would have supported the current excessive use

of pesticides and chemical fertilizers that is currently poisoning our land, air and water. Instead he would have preferred the modernization of *gobar gas* plants and use of cow urine as pesticide so that dairy could support agriculture and vice versa. They can and should be symbiotic processes.

**Q. Any untouched and unforgettable aspect of your father's personality which you would like to share with the readers?**

**Ans.** Unlike other rich and powerful people, Sir Datar Singh never sought to promote himself or his family personally. He gave us the best of education but never sought undue favours to push us forward. As a result he enjoyed huge respect, not for his wealth but for his principles. He looked after his staff and inspired life long loyalty.

**Q. At last any message you would like to give as daughter of Sir Datar Singh to dairy professionals and *Indian Dairyman* readers?**

**Ans.** In the frenetic race towards modernization, do not forget to keep what is of value from the past. India has a

strong tradition of cattle protection which has kept alive a defenseless animal that is of immense economic value to the country providing milk, manure, pesticide, fuel, pulling power and more. Unfortunately, the dairy profession has become associated with a great deal for cruelty towards animals.

It is for the Indian Dairy Association to assure that cattle are properly looked after during their productive as well as dry Years. We need to give something back to an animal that gives us so much. My father would have wanted The Indian Dairy Association to play a stellar role in strengthening animal welfare in India with special reference to cattle.



*Sardar Datar Singh during FAO Meeting at Rome*