
A tribute to Gurdip Singh (1932-1991)



GURDIP SINGH (1932-1991)

THE palynological world is shocked and grieved at the premature passing away of Gurdip Singh. Born on July 11, 1932 at Katni (India), Gurdip breathed his last on November 9, 1991 at Canberra (Australia). He is survived by his wife Birendra and three daughters Anita, Renu and Tripati.

Gurdip obtained his Master's degree in Botany from the Punjab University in 1955. The same year he moved to Lucknow and joined the Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeobotany which he served in various capacities till June, 1970. Initially he undertook the study of Mesozoic floras from Nipania chert, Rajmahal Hills, Bihar. Very shortly he shifted his interest towards the discipline of Quaternary palynology. With his pioneering and dedicated efforts, he identified several new thrust areas in the valley of Kashmir. He was awarded the degree of Ph.D. by the University of Lucknow in 1961, for his studies on the Post-glacial vegetational history of the Kashmir Valley. This initial but masterly study did accredit Gurdip for entrenching Quaternary palynology on firm footings. To a good extent Gurdip was also responsible for paving a way for its future growth in India. Equipped with the expertise developed at home, Gurdip's academic interest and inquisitive hunger took him to the Queen's University, Belfast (Northern Ireland) in 1961 as a Colombo plan scholar with the objective to widen his global appreciation of the subject. There he had his second doctorate degree on the study of Late-and Post-

glacial pollen analysis in relation to land- and sea-level changes.

On his return to India in 1964, Gurdip embarked on an ambitious plan to study the Post-glacial vegetational history of the N.W. Himalayas, Punjab and Rajasthan. He also directed a research project on the "History of post-glacial vegetation and climate of the Rajasthan desert". This project was funded by the Centre for Climatic Research, Department of Meteorology, Wisconsin University (USA). The magnitude of the total work plan was enormous. Therefore, a sizeable team of scientists and technicians was involved for its execution. Gurdip demonstrated a high quality of leadership and ability in directing this work. He always kept the staff motivated and deeply involved in work. He infused the spirit of learning in each one of them with emphasis to develop a critical mind.

In June, 1970 Gurdip left India to join the Department of Biogeography and Geomorphology, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, Canberra (Australia). There he continued to contribute incessantly in reconstructing the Late Cenozoic history of vegetation, fire, lake levels and climatic change in arid south-eastern Australia besides the studies on fine-pollen resolution analysis and modern pollen rain.

In recognition of his outstanding contributions made to the field of Quaternary palynology and allied disciplines, Gurdip received several awards and distinctions. To mention a few, Gurdip was awarded the Pratul Chandra Bhandari Gold Medal by the Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeobotany for the best piece of research work in 1960; a medal by the Palaeobotanical Society in 1976, and a 'Stillwell Award' by the Geological Society of Australia in 1983 for his distinguished achievements. He was a member of 8 learned societies and an elected Fellow of the Palaeobotanical Society.

The last time I met Gurdip was in December, 1976-January, 1977. He visited the Institute and attended the 4th International Palynological Conference at Lucknow. Gurdip and I studied together from 1949-1955 besides being co-professionists at the Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeobotany from 1955-1970.

As I flash back from my long standing association with Gurdip, I can confidently say that he was totally

wedded to scientific truth. His power of observation was as sharp as his sense of originality and criticality. He was bold and sound in interpreting or re-interpreting accrued data. His creative mind often resulted in producing trend-setting ideas which became legends after having been thoroughly debated. Gurdip was an eager weaver by nature and a perfectionist by accomplishment. To do science was a passion with him and to follow science was his religion. He pursued it to the best of his judgement for the benefit and

progress of science and humanity with a searching mind and an open heart.

Gurdip will ever be remembered for these qualities by his fellow scientists, friends, admirers and critics alike both at home and overseas. In losing Gurdip, I feel, the palynological world has lost a visionary and personally I, an endearing family friend.

HARI PALL SINGH

Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeobotany, Lucknow



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पुस्तकालय
सं. 53995