

Fond Tribute to An Ardent Conservationist: H.H. Fatehsingh P. Gaekwad, 1930–88

The former Maharaja of Baroda—Lt-Col. Fatehsingh Pratapsingh Gaekwad, popularly known as 'Jackie' Baroda in the Western World or 'Fateh' to some of his closer friends—passed away in the morning of 1st September 1988 in Bombay. Among many other positions of note he was the Founder-President, Patron-in-Chief, and a Fellow, of the Indian Society of Naturalists (INSONA).

Fatehsingh Gaekwad was a committed conservationist, whose word and experience in industry were highly valued for implementing constructive conservation action-plans in the Indian subcontinent and SE Asia. The numerous achievements of this nature in which he played a prominent part included saving the Nilgiri Tahr (*Hemitragus hylocrius*) from extinction, implementing Project Tiger, founding the Wildlife Institute of India, saving the Silent Valley, protecting Primates, and influencing the decision-makers in enacting legislations such as the Wildlife (Protection) Act and the Forest Conservation Act. He was closely connected with the setting up of the prestigious Delhi Zoological Gardens, donated a pair of tiger cubs to the Regent's Park Zoo, London, and was mainly responsible in helping the Washington Zoo to acquire a white tigress—the first to go out of India. Within the city limits of Baroda, he had preserved a unique habitat for the Blackbuck at Sunderpura.* In India, apart from heading the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF-India), he was intimately connected with the Indian Board for Wildlife, serving on its Standing Committee (which is chaired by the Prime Minister) and heading its Expert Committee on Zoos. He travelled extensively in all the world's normally-inhabited continents and, wherever he arrived, had a standing commitment to himself to visit any zoos in the area.

He had established fruitful contacts with leading conservationists at the global level and especially with the decision-makers and like-minded industrialists, and enjoyed a much-respected position in the environmental-conservation world, which could hardly have had a better ambassador to spread the message of 'conservation awareness' very widely. 'Fateh' was moreover a keen student of the issues and problems on various aspects of conservation for human welfare, and rated human survival as a vital dimension of conservation. In his opinion the conservation movement was not just concerned with the welfare of endangered species of plants and animals but rather with the whole vast problem of saving the world of Nature and Mankind from, basically, too many people.

Although he lived mainly in Laxmi Vilas Palace, Fateh's heart was set to serve the poorest of the poor through saving wildlife habitats—repositories also of unique genetic resources and biotic diversity. The alleviation of Man's and Nature's sufferings, through sustainable development and curbing population pressures—ultimately through limiting human numbers—was the highest target in his conservation concept. With the world in its present, widely deplorable state, he does not now seem to us to have been ahead of his time!

His experience as a former member of the federal Parliament and a former Minister in the Gujarat State Cabinet, was of service in helping him to advise on political and

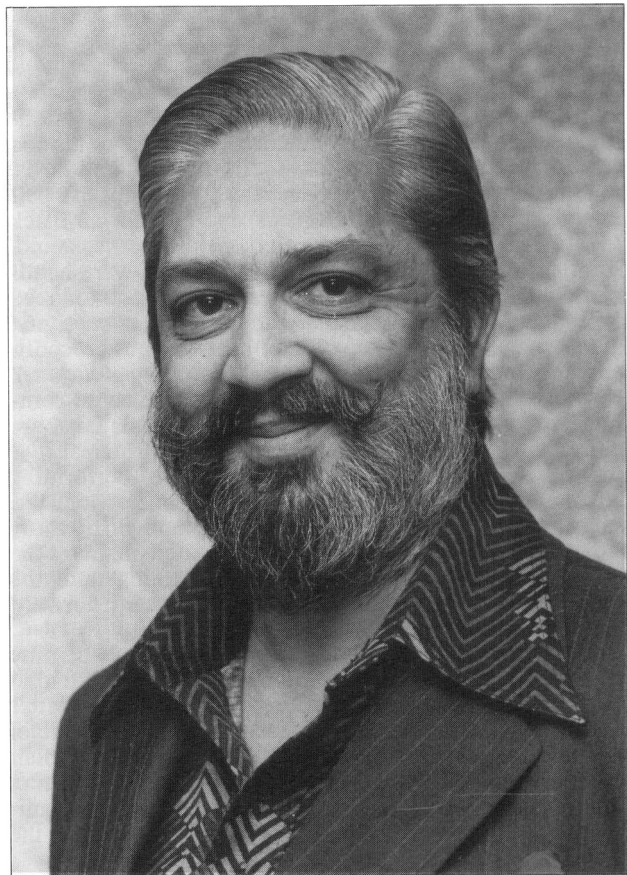


FIG. 1. H.H. Fatehsingh P. Gaekwad in 1987.

socio-economic matters when on the boards of IUCN and WWF, and thus had a significant impact in fostering public awareness on environmental and resource issues linked with development. His qualities of leadership found particular expression in his establishment of WWF-India almost single-handed, and in his founding and Presidency also of INSONA (Oza, 1983).

INSONA is the Indian Society of Naturalists, which was founded in the year 1975 (Gaekwad, 1976) *inter alia* to 'endeavour to prevent the extinction of threatened plants and animals and the desecration of natural ecosystems'. That the common man and the scientist should work together to regulate disturbed environments is a cry of our time; 'to the extent that we achieve this, it will contribute to the lasting welfare of mankind'. 'Conserve Today—Save Tomorrow' is the hall-mark of INSONA's conservation movement. As the President of INSONA, Fateh's efforts fostered the cause of environmental conservation, and the Indian sub-continent owes him a tremendous debt of gratitude for serving this cause so actively and consistently.

'Fateh' was born in Baroda on 2nd April 1930 into a family of traditional hunters, and so shooting and fishing formed part of his early training. However, it was not until the year 1955, when he returned from a two-months' hunting/photographing safari of Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Zaire (then the Belgian Congo), that he transformed himself into a confirmed conservationist. For it was then that the futility and absurdity of killing 'for pleasure' hit him so

* See the illustrated account, by himself and Dr G.M. Oza, of 'An Indian Conservational Success: Saving Habitat for the Endangered Blackbuck', published on pages 167–9 of our preceding issue.—Ed.

hard that he laid down the rifle for good and picked up the camera. The immediate result of this change of heart was the setting up of the Maharaja Fatehsingh Zoo, less than 100 yards from his bedroom in the main Palace at Baroda,* in the form of 'mini Africa' reflecting characteristic habitats.

As Fateh's metamorphosis from hunter to conservationist had taken place in Africa, the first occupants of his zoo were a selection of African mammals, reptiles, and birds. Indian additions to the zoo began with his rescuing of a pair each of Leopards (*Panthera pardus*) and Himalayan Black Bear (*Selenarctos thibetanus*) cubs, only a few weeks old, from a market in Calcutta. Both these pairs were hand-reared by him to adulthood. His was the first zoo to breed the Indian Wild Ass (*Equus hemionus khur*) in captivity. His main species for research had been various crocodilians and Indian Starred Tortoises (*Geochelone elegans*). Also an avid aquarist, he maintained that he could communicate with, and relax among, other animals far more easily than with human beings. One of his principal joys was a (perhaps the only existing) troupe of performing parrots, trained by a special family in his Palace, which did such things as running a model railway and firing a toy cannon, while at his funeral there were nine elephants of the Golden Circus standing and patiently waiting until the oldest female among them (Rani, the queen) came forward and deposited a floral tribute.

Soon after Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands became President of the World Wildlife Fund, he asked 'Fateh' to join its Board of International Trustees, on which the latter served for two 3-years' terms. It was during his tenure of this international trusteeship that 'Fateh' set up the Indian National Appeal of WWF in 1969. Starting as a one-man outfit, WWF-India now has four regional sub-organizations and active branches in almost every State in the Indian Union.

'Fateh' Gaekwad was also a Councillor of the World Council For The Biosphere, a Fellow of the Zoological Society of London, and a member of the Fauna and Flora Preservation Society, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and numerous other learned societies and scientific organizations. He participated actively in, and contributed often impressively to, a large number of international conferences and symposia connected with conservation, being a memorable participant in the first two International Conferences on Environmental Future (Polunin, 1972, 1980). At future meetings of such bodies Fateh's penetrating understanding, superb chairmanship and speaking presence, and exemplary good humour, will be sadly missed, as will be the outcome of his unique experience.

'Fateh' was also, for 37 years—possibly a world record—Chancellor of the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, which he served in an exemplary manner, seeing it

* We recall that the main Palace had about a dozen satellites around it for guests, it being a 'tradition' that only members of the Gaekwad family and their staffs should sleep in Laxmi Vilas Palace though we understand that this stipulation was latterly relaxed for conservationists and Nature-lovers.—Ed.

make rapid and significant strides in the development of higher education, art, culture, sports, and the preservation of wildlife. These were at least as near and dear to him as politics—even when he was serving for three terms in the Lok Sabha (the Indian Lower House of Parliament).

His marriage in 1950 being to a family choice (Princess Padmavati of Jodhpur, who died in 1984), his most passionate pursuits in his middle- and later-life were cricket and conservation, both of which he espoused actively as labours of love. His eminent services to cricket and his country being well documented already in the impressive obituary notices in *The Times* (September 2nd) and *Daily Telegraph* (the next day), we have concentrated in this appreciation on the parts of his life which supported conservation.

Fateh's gift of warm and understanding friendship helped him to win over prominent scientists and laymen alike to that—in our opinion—greatest-of-all modern-day causes. Indeed there can scarcely be any parallel to the former Prince and Maharaja of Baroda who, with no selfish motive whatsoever, poured in millions of rupees and donated much time and tireless effort to saving threatened wildlife and its habitats. For such noble acts he never seemed to wish for any return, let alone personal glory; and paradoxically enough, he never figured in lists of recipients of national honours or international recognition, though it is known that certain elections and expressions of approval in enlightened quarters gave him deep satisfaction. Perhaps that and a conviction of doing the necessary was enough, as it often seems to the undersigned his friends, who share his aspirations for an ongoing world in which Mankind and Nature live in harmony as parts of an ever-viable Biosphere.

GUNAVANT M. OZA, *Reader in Botany*
The Maharaja Sayajirao University
of Baroda
Baroda 390 002;
General Secretary of INSONA & Founding
Editor of Environmental Awareness
Oza Building
Salatwada
Baroda 390 001, India,

&

NICHOLAS POLUNIN

REFERENCES

- GAEKWAD, FATE[H]SINGHRAO P. (1976). Indian Society of Naturalists. *Environmental Conservation*, 3(4), p. 254.
- OZA, G.M. (1983). World Wildlife Fund. *Tigerpaper*, 10(4), p. 20.
- POLUNIN, N. (Ed.) (1972). *The Environmental Future: Proceedings of the first International Conference on Environmental Future*. Macmillan, London & Basingstoke, England, and Barnes & Noble, New York, NY, USA: xiv + 660 pp., illustr.
- POLUNIN, NICHOLAS (Ed.) (1980). *Growth Without Ecodisasters? Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Environmental Future*. Macmillan, London & Basingstoke, England, and Halsted Press Division of John Wiley & Sons, New York, NY, USA: xxvi + 675 pp., illustr.

New Journal on Environmental Policy in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe

Dr Ze'eb Wolfson, more popularly known as 'Boris Komarov', has emigrated from the Soviet Union and is now attached to the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Dr Wolfson is best known in the West for his book *The Destruction of Nature*,

which describes environmental problems in the Soviet Union. It was written in the Soviet Union when he was a Soviet citizen and only later emigrated to the West. It is unclear if the Soviet authorities identified him as the Author of that courageous book before he emigrated.