

Remembering Kalkat, the farm officer

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Dr Gurcharan Singh Kalkat

The success of Punjab's Green Revolution is well known and, I think today, that Dr Kalkat and others were not adequately recognised.

THE Punjab Agriculture University at Ludhiana was set up in 1960 by Sardar Pratap Singh Kairon. Mr PN Thapar, ICS, was the first Vice-Chancellor. A remarkable institution was created, in association with Ohio State University of the USA. It produced a remarkably bright group of agriculture scientists, such as Dr Khush, Dr Kang and Dr Kalkat. All of them contributed to the Punjab Green Revolution, in wheat and rice, in many ways.

In 1968, I was the Registrar of Cooperative Societies and Dr Gurcharan Singh Kalkat was Joint Director, Agriculture, and SS Grewal, Development Commissioner. I remember those meetings of us three. SS was a man of few words; he gave the directions and left us to get on with the job. As I wrote in Cambridge in 1974, the Punjab Green Revolution was, essentially, a revolution of inputs. Given the Borlaug seeds, Punjab was the first state to make arrangements for chemical fertilisers and more water and for both, cheap credit would do the trick. My job was to ensure that the cooperative banks had enough credit in time from the RBI to purchase the fertilis-

ers (NPK) and store them in Markfed godowns in every district. Dr Kalkat did the calculations on the agriculture side, for the seed credit etc. We would tour the new small Punjab, spending nights out together. Meetings were taken in every district where we both went over the figures from the district agriculture officer, and the heads of the cooperatives, both credit and marketing, to ensure that the stocking had been done and was ready for the sowing. Bringing vast quantities of fertilisers from the ports was a major operation: sometimes the fertiliser was not available, and at other times the railway wagons. Under the crop loan system, the cooperative banks sanctioned loan to the farmer, but he could only pick up fertiliser and seed and not take the cash. In a short cycle of less than one year, the loan taken in October/November was repaid in the next April/May, when the wheat came in. Our recoveries were excellent and this cycle worked perfectly in Punjab. Today, I feel sad at the neglect of the cooperative movement in India.

I do not remember the directors of agriculture of those years, but I do know that the Development Commissioner relied entirely on Dr Kalkat and I worked only with him. The success of those years is well known, and I think today, that Dr Kalkat

and others were not adequately recognised. The Green Revolution was at that time, and even substantially now, only a Punjab revolution. For many years, Punjab gave anything up to 70 per cent of the surplus needed for the deficit areas. Even today, it gives 50 per cent or more. For decades, Punjab prided itself on being the "Ann Daata". In recent years, with greater production across the country, and a foreign exchange reserve of \$410 billion, the Punjab farmer is now given an indifferent push aside by Delhi. If they do not find new ways, Punjab farmers will be in great trouble.

I remember Dr Kalkat as a wise, knowledgeable, cool and soft-spoken officer. He instinctively got the support of all he came in contact with. In Punjab, it was always so. His worth was soon recognised and he was taken to Delhi as Agriculture Commissioner of India. Mrs Gandhi took a fancy to him. The agriculture secretaries were invariably IAS men. I know for a fact that soon Mrs Gandhi began to look to Kalkat for the final word, much to the chagrin of many secretaries. The World Bank quickly spotted his talent and offered him a place in Washington. Mrs Gandhi tried hard to retain him, even offering to make him Agricultural Secretary, India. The pull of Washington was too strong and Dr Kalkat left. He developed

a high reputation in the bank, and was always, listened to with respect.

He served with great distinction as the Vice-Chancellor of the PAU, Ludhiana. For the last many years, he was Chair-

Working towards the Green Revolution

■ In the run-up to the Green Revolution in Punjab, my job was to ensure that cooperative banks had enough credit to purchase fertilisers and store them in godowns. Dr Kalkat did the calculations on agriculture. We would tour the districts and ensure that the stocking had been done and was ready for the sowing.

man of the Punjab Agriculture Commission, a new institution with he created. It has contributed a great deal in efforts to alleviate farmer distress. Dr Kalkat served with many chief ministers. I can say with confidence that all these men, of various shades of politics and predilections invariably found it easy to agree with his advice. He was calm like the Buddha, and never had to enter into an aggressive argument. Public servants like Dr Kalkat are rare to find. Today perhaps they are even less available. Punjab continues to face multiple problems, most of all in agriculture. Dr Kalkat will be sorely missed.