



P.V. Sukhatme

(27 July, 1911 — 28 January, 1997)

Pandurang Vasudeo Sukhatme was born of Vasudeo Hari Sukhatme and Satyabhama Sukhatme on 27 July, 1911 in the village Budh, district Satara, 100 miles south of Pune. After completing his school education in Pune he graduated in 1932 from Fergusson College with Mathematics as the principal subject and Physics as a subsidiary subject. During 1933-36, he studied at the University College, London and was awarded a Ph.D. Degree in 1936 and a D.Sc. Degree in 1939 for his work on bipartitional functions. This work was published in the "Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London, Series A", June 1938.

Whilst in London, Prof. Sukhatme came under the influence of such eminent authorities in Statistics as R.A. Fisher, Jerzy Neyman and E.S. Pearson and did valuable research in Statistical Theory of Sampling, his two most significant contributions being, one to bipartitional functions under the guidance of R.A. Fisher and the other to sampling theory entitled "Contributions to the theory of the representative method" under the guidance of J. Neyman and E.S. Pearson. The latter paper laid solid foundations for his subsequent pioneering research in the sampling theory of surveys and improvement of agricultural statistics which ushered in what may be appropriately termed as the Sukhatme era in the development of agricultural statistics in India and the world.

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When P.V. Sukhatme returned to India, while searching for a University job, he had an interview with the Late Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, Vice Chancellor, Banaras Hindu University. Though Panditji was satisfied with the brilliant career of P.V. Sukhatme and agreed to create a Department of Statistics in the University to accommodate him but he wanted to know from Sukhatme how a Chair in statistics would help our poor country-India. P.V. Sukhatme did not know how to answer this question nor did he join Banaras Hindu University. But this question must have moved him sufficiently in determining his future life, particularly his fundamental work on nutrition.

During 1939-40, he was a Professor at the All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health, Calcutta. In 1940 he joined ICAR as a Statistician, and was later appointed as Statistical Advisor to the Council to head its Statistical Unit. On account of his dynamic leadership, following the path and tradition set by him, the statistical branch of ICAR eventually grew to become a full-fledged Institute (Indian Agricultural Statistics Research Institute) exclusively devoted to research in agricultural statistics. In the context of the green revolution the importance of statistical techniques in agricultural research hardly needs any emphasis.

Prof. Sukhatme, as a founder of the Indian Society of Agricultural Statistics, devoted a good deal of his time and energy to the popularization of statistical methods among the practitioners of agricultural, veterinary and related sciences. He served as the First Honorary Secretary of the Indian Society of Agricultural Statistics for a number of years. The Society owes him a lot for his continued valuable guidance as well as for shouldering the responsibility, as its President during 1991 and Executive President since 1970 till his demise. From its inception to 1963 he worked closely with Dr. Rajendra Prasad (Founder President of the Society), the then Minister for Food and Agriculture and later President of India.

In 1951, he was a Visiting Professor at Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, USA where he completed his textbook on sampling. During 1952-70 he headed the Statistics Division of the Food & Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations in Rome. After retiring from the UN in 1971 he served as Regents Professor, University of California at Berkeley and since then, he had settled in Pune, carrying out valuable work on nutrition at the Maharashtra Association for the Cultivation of Science. In addition to the above mentioned book, he authored several other books on the various scientific topics of interest.

Prof. Sukhatme was well known in the field of nutrition for the Sukhatme-Margen hypothesis which in plain language implies the following:

At low levels of calorie intake, energy is used with greater metabolic efficiency and efficiency decreases as the intake increases over the homeostatic range.

He was awarded the Guy Medal by the Royal Statistical Society for his paper on nutrition which he presented to the Society in 1963, the B.C. Guha Memorial Lectureship of the Indian Science Congress Association in 1965 and the B.D. Tilak Lectureship of the Indian National Science Academy in 1982. Among the numerous other honours he had received, mention must be made of the Fellowship of the American Statistical Association, National Academy of Sciences, Allahabad, Indian Academy of Sciences, Bangalore and Indian National Science Academy, New Delhi. He was elected member of the International Statistical Institute, Netherlands and its Vice President in 1969-70. For his outstanding contributions to Science and Human Welfare, he was conferred the Padma Bhushan by the President of India in 1973. He was awarded the Hari Om Ashram Trust award by the University Grants Commission in 1983. For the distinguished service to the cause of Statistics and its application to agriculture and allied fields, he was conferred with the honour of Sankhyiki Bhushan in 1989 by the Indian Society of Agricultural Statistics, New Delhi. He also received the P.C. Mahalanobis Award at the Jaipur Session of the Indian Science Congress Association.

Prof. Sukhatme expired on 28 January, 1997 at Pune. With the demise of Prof. Sukhatme, the scientific community in general and the Agricultural Scientists in particular have lost a great statistician, true advisor, dynamic leader, well-wisher of humanity and a renowned personality of international fame.

He published more than 200 research papers in reputed national and international journals. A list of his publications is appended.

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