

Haldane at 125

Preface

J. B. S. Haldane (1892–1964) was a polymath and among the more colourful figures in the annals of science. He made fundamental contributions to physiology, biochemistry, genetics and evolutionary theory; he was one of the founders of population genetics; and he was a populariser of science *par excellence*. Arthur C. Clarke said of him that he was ‘one of the finest intellects it was ever my privilege to know.’ No wonder that in dedicating their book *Intelligent life in the universe* to his memory, Iosif Shklovskii and Carl Sagan referred to him as ‘a local example of what this book is about’. *The unity and diversity of life*, the title of Haldane’s 1957 Sardar Patel Memorial Lecture (it captivated those who heard it at the time, as much as it did those like us who read the text later), could well be a theme that applied to him.

Haldane spent the last seven years of his life in India and became an Indian citizen. In 1992, spearheaded by one of us (PPM), Haldane’s birth centenary was celebrated in India at the Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta, where he had worked from 1957 to 1961. Now, 25 years on, the three of us felt that it was worth taking a re-look at his life and contributions. We thought of doing so by putting together a set of essays that might offer fresh insights on Haldane the person as much as on Haldane the scientist. We hope that the articles that follow will offer something new for those who are already Haldane aficionados like us, and will make others go to his writings and become ones themselves.

This special issue begins with an autobiographical fragment by Haldane himself and ends with an account by Veena Rao of his long engagement with *Journal of Genetics*, which ran almost from his student days to his death. An attempt has been made to roughly order the remaining pieces in a sequence that might be described as ‘Haldane the person’ (Naomi Mitchison, N. A. Mitchison, M. S. Swaminathan, P. P. Divakaran), ‘Haldane’s scientific work’ (Stéphane Tirard, James Crow, Walter Bodmer, Anthony Edwards, Sahotra Sarkar, Veena Rao and Vidyanand Nanjundiah, Brian Charlesworth, John Edwards, Areejit Samal and Olivier Martin, Patrick Bateson), and ‘Haldane’s life and wider interests’ (Ramachandra Guha, Sarah Wilmot, Vinita Damodaran, William deJong-Lambert, Gordon McOuat). To our immense sorrow, we learnt of the passing away of Prof. Patrick Bateson as this issue was in its final stages. A distinguished behavioural biologist himself, Prof. Bateson was related to William Bateson, cofounder of this journal (see <http://www.ias.ac.in/article/fulltext/jgen/081/02/0049-0058>). Besides contributing a lively account of Haldane’s engagement with the evolution of behaviour, he helped with comments and suggestions on several of the other pieces. We offer our condolences to his family and would like to think that both the content and the combination of associations that this special issue has would have pleased him.

Advice and information provided by Saul Dubow, Michel Morange and Donald Forsdyke helped a great deal in putting together this collection; we express our thanks to them. In addition, we would like to acknowledge the help, guidance, support and approvals received from the Indian Statistical Institute, Plenum Press/Springer, Indian Academy of Sciences, and the Chief Editor of this Journal. Most of all, we are grateful to the friends and colleagues who responded so readily to our request to contribute.

PARTHA P. MAJUMDER
VIDYANAND NANJUNDIAH
VEENA RAO

Editors

E-mail: ppm1@nibmg.ac.in, vidyan@alumni.iisc.ac.in, aneev52@yahoo.co.uk.