

"Triumph and Tragedy of Dalip Saund"

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The world took note when in 1956 Dalip Singh Saund, native of India, was elected to the U.S. Congress from the 29th California District, which then comprised Riverside and Imperial counties. He was the first Asian to be elected to the Congress.

There's no telling how far Saund might have risen in public life if he hadn't suffered a disabling stroke early in his campaign for a fourth term. He remained an invalid until he died in 1973.

Earned Mathematics Degree

Saund was born in 1899 in a village called Chhajulwadi, Punjab Province, India, to an uneducated but industrious and successful family with a background of Sikh reformism and activism he went through a local school which in the absence of public schools. was financed by his father and uncles. 1-3 graduated from the University of the Punjab in Amritsar, earning a bachelor's degree in mathematics.

Like many others of his status Saund was inspired by British promises of independence for India to follow World War I and was chagrined when that promise was abandoned. He was inspired by the writings of Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt He was favorably impressed by the preachments of Mohandas K. Gandhi, the great Hindu exponent of non-violent struggle for independence.

The young Saund persuaded his family to support him in a plan to study food canning in America with the intention of returning and starting an Indian canning industry.

"I assured my family," he wrote in a 1960 book entitled *Congressman From India*, "that I would study in the United States for at least two and not more than three years and would then return home."

At the University of California, Berkeley, where he studied at first in the College of Agriculture, he lived in a clubhouse maintained by a Sikh temple group in Stockton--evidence that there was already a complement of refugees and visitors from India to California, most of them having arrived during World War I as agricultural laborers.

Stockton was the political and intellectual center of the colony. Imperial Valley was one of its concentration areas.

The Hindustani Association of America was active in Berkeley. After two years, young Saund was elected as its national president.

"All of us," he wrote later, "were ardent nationalists and we never passed up an opportunity to expound on

India's rights." Here he learned at least one lesson in tactics. A political science professor was invited to speak. "First," wrote Saund, "I delivered a half-hour talk on the right of India to independence and the inequities of English rule. He floored me with questions that I couldn't promptly answer."

From such defeats smart politicians learn. By the time he had launched his career in American politics, Saund was usually in possession of more relevant facts than were his opponents.

He spent summers working for canneries, for McNeill, McNeill and Libby and for California Packing Corporation (Del Monte), in Sacramento and Emeryville. According to his own later recollection, he was highly rated as a management prospect in canning but downgraded because he expressed a consuming interest in Indian liberation.

Added Master's and Doctorate In addition to technical studies in the College of Agriculture, Saund took courses in mathematics, his major field at Amritsar. The upshot was that, on invitation, he switched to that field, earning both a master's and a doctor's degree.

The doctorate was granted in May 1924. Having over-stayed his intended time limit, he later wrote: "Even though life for me did not seem very easy, it had become impossible to think of life separated from the United States... The only way Indians in California could make a living at that time was to join with others who had settled in various parts of the state as farmers."

Although his later account didn't say so, it seems likely that he changed courses and spent the necessary time to earn a doctorate in hope of a teaching career. He did mention offers from two universities in India but he was evidently determined to stay in the U.S. at all costs. It was a year after receiving the doctorate that he resorted to farming.

Probably Saund had long been in touch with Hindus in Imperial Valley some of whom, despite menial beginnings, had become wealthy farmers. One of them offered him a summer job as foreman of a cotton-picking crew. "And so," he wrote, "in the summer of 1925 I decided to go to the Southern California desert valley and make my living as a farmer. "

He went still wearing a turban but there he launched his political career among the dominant Anglo society.

As foreman of the cotton-picking crew, Saund earned a percentage of the amounts paid to the pickers. "By the end of the season," he wrote, "I had managed to save quite a sum. I borrowed a little more from my friends and ventured into the growing of lettuce.

The crop that year was outstanding in quantity and quality, but because lettuce had been profitable in recent years the crop was over planted and the price was low. He suffered a loss (but lettuce would again be profitable, to him and to others).

I had not heard of Saund until his political campaign in Riverside County was well under way, in 1956, but I was doubly interested because of family background. My maternal grandparents and a host of uncles, aunts and cousins were living or had lived in Imperial Valley. Aubrey Lee, then my brother-in-law, later recalled Saund's role in and around Westmorland in the late 1920s:

Typical Hindu

"He was a typical Hindu at the time, with his turban on, and he dressed with his robe. He was farming maybe two miles north and maybe two miles west of Westmorland. At that time he was raising alfalfa. We called him the wild Indian because he came tearing by in that old Ford of his...Later on, when he was in the Lions Club and getting into politics he said he was going to be the first Hindu congressman in the United States. He had a purpose.

"It was about 1937 when I organized a Current Events Club. Saund was a member. It was strictly liberal people, most of them being Democrats "

Of the local forum organizations, Saund remembered most fondly the Toastmasters' Club of Brawley, where the purpose was not only mutual self enlightenment on current issues but practice in speech-making itself. It was one of a chain of such clubs. He became it's district governor, visiting member clubs in Imperial and San Diego counties and becoming further acquainted and further skilled.

If he was irrigating on Toastmaster nights he would "...take my dress suit in my car to the field with me. At 6 o'clock I would change into my suit, set my water for three hours, go to the meeting, come back to the field, change to my work clothes and go on with my irrigating." A real American hero out of Horatio Alger, Jr.! Strive and Succeed!

Saund often spent time in Los Angeles, especially in libraries and sometimes in speech-making.

Early in his Imperial Valley years he wrote the first of his two books, titled My Mother India. It was a response to one by Katherine Mayo titled Mother India, a negative version of the sordid and poverty-ridden aspects of Indian society.

As a result of a talk he gave at the Unitarian Church of Los Angeles he met the Kosa family, immigrants from Czechoslovakia: Mr. and Mrs. Emil Kosa Sr., Emil Kosa Jr. and Marian. Both Kosa men were artists. Marian was a student at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Saund became a close friend of the family and in 1928 he married Marian Kosa. She gave up her UCLA career (temporarily, it developed) and joined him in Westmorland.

She shared his life in politics and political activity. She became active in women's organizations including, in time, the Parent-Teachers Association. She and Dalip were active tennis players on the courts at the Westmorland school. Within the family she was given (and retains today) the nickname of "Maize" in consequence of a time when she stood guard with a noisemaking gun to frighten birds from their crop of milo maize.

Dalip Jr., first of their three children, was born in 1930, followed by Lulie and Ellie.

Discrimination Surfaces

While Saund had considerable acceptance, he also had rejections. One recollection from the Valley is that of Enoch Gullett, my uncle by marriage, who had arrived in Imperial Valley in

1901, the year of first irrigation there.

He was an associate of Saund in the Westmorland Chamber of Commerce. They and others of that organization went together to the Grand Canyon for a meeting. According to Gullett's daughter, Geraldine Plumb, Saund was denied admittance to the hotel where they had made reservations. Both he and Gullett slept in an automobile.

In 1991 I asked Marian Saund if she recalled that incident. She said he hadn't mentioned it but she did recall a similar incident in Stockton. He was scheduled to speak at a meeting there. She registered in a hotel for herself, Saund and their son, then their only child. When Saund arrived after the meeting he wasn't admitted. All three left.

The family life of the Saunds was altered by what was described as Marian Saund's allergy for the pollen of Bermuda grass. On account of the allergy, as she explained it to me in 1991, she and the three children moved to Los Angeles in 1942 and took up residence in their old neighborhood. The family reassembled frequently in Los Angeles or Riverside.

Effie Lee, my sister, and her then husband, Aubrey Lee, had played tennis with the Saunds and mingled with them socially. She recalled: "Marian told me that she hadn't realized what the prejudice could be and that the children wouldn't be accepted. It was commonly understood that the allergy was expedient and that the treatment of the children in the Westmorland schools was the real reason they moved to Los Angeles. "

Geraldine Plumb agreed and so did her father, Enoch Gullett. At age 90 his recollections were tape recorded. Asked about the treatment of the Saund children, he replied: "Well, they first went over to the Mexican school and they were asked if they could speak English." Here Gullett laughed, presumably at the thought that they couldn't speak English, and continued, "You know that's the thing that ran Mrs. Saund up to Los Angeles."

Theoretically there was no "Mexican school" in Westmorland. Harding School, in the minority-poverty neighborhood, was nominally intended to give special attention to children who didn't speak English but, in fact, it was a school for minorities including Blacks who spoke only English.

In Los Angeles Marian Saund returned to UCLA, earned a bachelor's degree and teaching credential and taught in the Los Angeles schools.

Although my relatives in the Valley had known Saund for some time, I first met him in Riverside early in 1956 during his first campaign in our county seat.

"So you're from Westmorland," I said to him. "I have an uncle there, Frank Lyall. " I didn't know that Frank had been justice of peace and that Saund had defeated him for reelection.

"Oh, Frank Lyall," he replied. "Great friend of mine. Fine man. "

When next I saw Frank, who was a leading Westmorland business man, he was incensed that Saund had professed to be his friend. He considered Saund a shady business man, explaining that he had welshed on a contract for sheep to graze on his alfalfa, making a conflicting lease with another sheep man and taking money from both.

“ Frank's wife, Manha Lyall, may have contributed to Marian Saund's decision to move to Los Angeles. My mother, Effie Lyall Patterson, visited the Valley and later said to me:

"...so I asked Manha,
"Well, what kind of person is Mrs. Saund?" and she said, "'Why Effie, she's as nice a person as you'd ever hope to find. She's attractive; she's educated. But her children are half breeds, and we just couldn't invite her to the book club.'"

Although Marian Saund had belonged to two book clubs, in Brawley and Westmorland, there was another, which was considered the "senior" book club of Westmorland. Martha Lyall belonged to it.

Saund always accented the positive, claiming that his election and his career were demonstrations of American democracy in action. He never complained of, or even mentioned, discriminatory treatment against himself, much less made an issue of it.

In 1991 I asked Aubrey Lee and his second wife, Eileen Kirkpatrick Lee, about Frank Lyall's contention that Saund had welshed on a contract. Eileen Lee had been Frank's bookkeeper.

Both assumed that the accusation was probably true but, said Aubrey: "A lot of farmers--this was during the depression and a farmer needed to plant his alfalfa and he didn't have any money to buy seed. So a sheep man, wanting to feed his sheep, would advance the money. They brought the sheep down from Montana and Wyoming in late September or early October...and then the farmer would sell the feed to someone he didn't owe money to. "

Naturalization Prohibited

Saund campaigned for an end to the restrictions prohibiting the naturalization of India natives as U.S. citizens. His campaign organization became the India Association of America with Saund as it's national head. It became successful in 1946 when the bill was signed by President Harry Truman.*(link to Record for posterity/Setting thescene/Luce-cellar act.)*

One of the earliest applicants under the revised law was Saund himself. He took the oath as a citizen on December 16, 1949. In 1950 he ran for justice of peace for Westmorland Township. He won in the balloting but a lawsuit by Westmorland business men resulted in a court decision voiding the election on the ground that he hadn't been a citizen for the required year. (He was a citizen by the beginning of the term for which he was elected.)

The Imperial County Supervisors appointed Frank Lyall to the position. In 1959 Saund ran again and defeated Lyall by a narrow margin.

Incidentally, Aubrey Lee confessed that in spite of considering himself a friend of Saund he had helped finance the lawsuit that set aside Saund's first election. "I let them pressure me," he said of the other business men involved.

Saund was no ordinary justice of peace. He refused to go along with the longtime tradition of allowing the existence of a notorious Westmorland red light district. Instead of routine fines functioning as license fees, he routinely decreed jail sentences for prostitutes. He suspended the sentences if it appeared they were discouraged from returning. Since they came mostly from Mexicali, across the border, he encouraged the Border Patrol to raid the houses and charge the prostitutes with vagrancy. He gave the stiffest sentence, a fine of \$1,000.00 and a year in the county jail, to the "vice queen" of the town. Her husband, on the same charge, skipped bail and fled. Within Saund's time the red light district had disappeared.

Through the State Judicial Council Saund was assigned to preside over justice courts in El Centro and Brawley when judges there were ill.

By 1951 Saund was chairman of the Imperial County Democratic Central Committee, in which capacity he had a close-hand experience with campaigning for Congress. The Democratic candidate in the 29th District was Bruce Shangle of Blythe, Riverside County. Saund managed the Imperial County pan of the campaign.

It was good exercise in a losing cause. John Phillips, Republican, of Banning in Riverside County, had been the district's Congressman for many years, his reelection becoming almost routine. He won in 1954, but in the following year announced that he wouldn't be a candidate in 1956.

By that time Saund was well known in Imperial County for four major activities. He was an active Democratic politician. He was Westmorland justice of peace and commonly referred to as Judge Saund. He was a major farmer and he also had a distributorship for chemical fertilizer, a business that was said to have grossed \$250,000 per year.

In November, 1955, he announced his campaign for election to Congress by responding to the endorsement of a gathering of Democratic activists, meeting in Indio, Riverside County.

In preparation for the campaign the Saunds rented an apartment in Riverside. All of them, including Fred Fisher, Julie's husband, and Dorothy Saund, wife of Dalip Jr., took part in intensive house-to-house canvassing.

The opponent in the Democratic Party was Karl Kegley, previously an unsuccessful candidate for state attorney-general with the support of one of the series of inflationary pension plans for the elderly. He laid heavy stress on

Saund's foreign-born status and on the fact that Saund had been sued by several creditors.

Having been ardent in praising American democracy since his arrival in 1920, Saund apparently had no difficulty on the "foreigner" charge. He explained the lawsuits as the result of major loss during a bad farming year. It had happened to other Valley farmers at the time, some of whom solved the problem by bankruptcy. He had declined to take that route and eventually had paid off the creditors.

Saund easily won the Democratic primary, enhancing the interest in his unusual candidacy, well beyond California's borders.

The Republican primary winner, Jacqueline Cochran Odlum, had been , operator of a beauty salon in Chicago and was now a noted aviator and wife of Floyd Odlum, financier and organizer of General Dynamics Corporation. The Odlums lived in Coachella Valley, Riverside County. She had won the primary by a rightwing attack on her leading opponent, Fred Eldridge of Corona, concentrating especially on Eldridge's association with the World Federalists, a movement looking toward world government.

Eldridge declined to endorse Odlum for the November election. This, plus the fact that Phillips had not run again, might well have accounted for Saund's margin of victory.

Odlum, too, stressed Saund's foreign-born status and charged that he would be a setback to the district for lack of support for the Republican president, Dwight Eisenhower. She herself, as she emphasized, was personally acquainted with the president.

During a broadcast debate, Saund pointed out that on several issues, including immigration law and the soil bank program, he supported Eisenhower's position while she opposed it. He stressed his support for farm subsidies.

She campaigned by airplane. He and his campaign party traveled by automobile.

He won by a majority of 3,300 votes out of about 115,000. That thoroughly confirmed him as an international celebrity. One consequence of his unusual status and of his knowledge of foreign affairs was his appointment to the House Foreign Affairs Committee, highly unusual for a freshman Congressman.

Throughout his nearly six years as an active Congressman, Saund espoused what might be called a liberal agenda, but certainly not liberalism in extreme. He summarized his position in his book *Congressman from India*, published in 1960 during his second term.

He advocated "adequate national defense," explaining in not very specific terms, "I firmly believe in a balanced budget, but we should never subordinate the security of the United States for any budgetary considerations. "

He wrote that international Communism was spending far more than the U.S. on its effort to convert the world to its position and urged the U.S. government to spend more.

He championed free enterprise, saying that the country's strength lies in the fact that Americans throughout history "have enjoyed equality of opportunity. " The small business man, he wrote, "is the backbone of our business community. "

In his summary, and twice earlier in the book, Saund stressed the need for a "fair shake" for the farmer, explaining that they comprised 13 percent of the population and received only six percent of the national income. For an agricultural constituency, that position was virtually required.

He supported the 160-acre limit, per land owner, for federally subsidized irrigation (a limit that has since been increased to 957 acres although in fact that limit is being evaded).,

He was diligent in service to people and organizations asking solutions for their problems, including flood control and the search for supplemental water for Southern California.

He said he supported civil rights legislation "with all the power at my command.

Triumph Over Prejudice

In short, Saund made a case for himself as a working Congressman, representing constituents efficiently. He was, in fact, a successful Congress man, staying within supportable ideological boundaries and working diligently.

But the best remembered aspect of his career was his remarkable triumph in spite of prejudice against foreign born, especially against those with dark complexions and against non-Caucasians, dark or light. He did it by hard work and evangelism, constantly turning the other cheek. He did it with charisma.

His ideological positions and his charisma were best demonstrated when in 1957, he visited many of the Far Eastern countries including his native India and was acclaimed everywhere. He went as an official emissary of the House of Representatives, accompanied by Mrs. Saund and their daughter Ellie.

They stopped in Tokyo and in Riverside's sister city, Sendai. They visited Taiwan, where Saund expressed approval of that state's program, which was initiated in opposition to the Communist government on the Chinese mainland.

They visited Saigon where he was critical of waste he observed in U.S.-financed contracts. U.S. military involvement hadn't begun in Vietnam, but U.S. financial and political involvement was manifest. Saund wrote that "...you can not win minds and hearts by propping up dictators. " (At the time the U.S. was propping up President Ngo Dinh Diem.)

They visited Indonesia where the flamboyant left-wing dictator Sukarno was in power. Saund cautiously observed that Sukarno "was an intense, dedicated nationalist, the kind of man who wanted power and enjoyed exercising it. " He also noted impatience among students and concluded that "...we should do everything possible to help guide that temper into truly democratic channels. "

He reacted with similar caution to problems he observed in Singapore and the Philippines.

The euphoria was unlimited when he reached his native India. He was cheered by throngs and entertained by the high and mighty in Calcutta, New Delhi and Bombay. The most animated outpouring of enthusiastic people was in Amritsar, where he had graduated from the University of the Punjab, and in Chhajalwadi, his birthplace.

Saund's reelections in 1958 and 1960 were by majorities of more than 60 percent.

Felled By Stroke

He was beginning his campaign for a fourth term when, in May, 1962, he suffered a severe stroke while in an airplane approaching Washington. His family and staff minimized his disability and insisted that he would resume active political life. Despite his absence from public view he won the Democratic Party nomination, but hints of his real condition became widespread. At March Air Force Base Hospital, a Congressional delegation visited him and disclosed that he couldn't stand or speak. The fact was widely reported to the voting public. Pat Minor Martin, the Republican nominee, was elected.

Marian Saund, diligent, able and devoted, resumed her teaching career with the Los Angeles schools. With part-time help she cared for her husband during the last, helpless, decade of his life. Eventually he was able to walk with the aid of a walker, but he never regained his speech. He died on April 22, 1973.

The Saund children did well in school and as adults. Dalip Saund Jr. graduated from California Institute of Technology in mechanical engineering and then earned a doctorate in anthropology at UCLA. He served as a lieutenant in the Korean War. He was killed in a (civilian) sport flying accident. The daughters, Julie Fisher and Ellie Ford, both became teachers after graduation from UCLA. All three have children and grandchildren. Marian Saund lives in San Diego with daughter Julie and son-in-law Dr. Frederick Fisher.

SOURCES

This account grows out of conversations I had with Dalip and Marian Saund during his initial campaign for Congress in 1956 and during his subsequent Congressional service. However, all the statements attributed to him, whether quoted directly or indirectly, are taken from his book, *Congressman From India*, published by E. P. Dutton & Co., New York, 1960.

The Biographical Dictionary of the United States Congress (1774-1989) confirms the major milestones of his life. The files of the Riverside Press, Riverside Enterprise, and The Press-Enterprise contain many accounts that have been helpful on re-reading.

However, the comments of Dalip and Marian Saund in times of their prominence and even current comments of Marian Saund tell only of one aspect of the way they were accepted, and rejected, by their neighbors in Westmorland. Their purpose, no doubt, was to speak only good of their neighbors but it's necessary to discount their giving Marian's allergy as the sole reason she and the children moved to Los Angeles in 1942, where they lived until Dalip and Marian Saund became residents of Washington.

The apparent real story, or a major part of it, was the Westmorland mistreatment of the Saund children, especially in school. For this I have relied on the recollections of my relatives-who lived in Westmorland or visited there--Aubrey Lee, Eileen Kirkpatrick Lee, Effie Patterson Lee, Geraldine Gullett Plumb, Enoch Gullett and Effie Lyall Pauerson. As sources of an antagonistic local view of Dalip Saund there were two other relatives of mine, Frank and Martha Lyall.