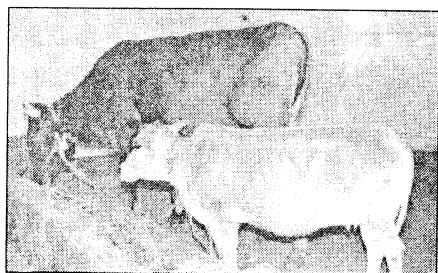


The Challenges to Animal Protection – Part II

In the last issue, JIVA published the text of a speech by Smt Vandana Siva- "The challenges to Animal Protection." It referred to the Vechur cattle and its qualities and alleged that the Roslyn Institute of Edinburg has surreptitiously obtained the embryos of this rare Indian breed. This text was used by "Mathrubhoomi" and raised doubts on the research on the Vechur cattle. Almost all the newspapers and magazines in Malayalam and English carried the story. There were allegations and counter allegations. TV channels ran stories and interviews. Even questions were raised in the State Legislative Assembly. The Kerala Agricultural University was forced to come out with a "White Paper" on the entire happenings. Meanwhile, the IVA has awarded Sri George Podippara, who initiated the episode in "Mathrubhumi", an award for the best article related to the animal husbandry sector published in 1998. This also created further allegations and some scientists questioned the very integrity of the office bearers of both IVA and JIVA. Recently, Dr Sosamma Iype who had been unnecessarily victimized was courteous to talk to me on the issue. The facts revealed are to be shared with the readers of JIVA.

Following the news reports, the Roslyn Institute was contacted by the Kerala Agricultural University to get the true picture on the allegations on bio piracy. Prof. Grahame Bul Field, Director of the Roslyn Institute informed the Dean, Veterinary College, Mannuthy that they have neither the patent nor the germ plasm of Vechur cattle. Vandana Siva desperately trying to defend came out again with the statement that Roslyn has an application with the number EP 765390 for the patent. (Mathrubhumi Aug 27 1998). The article "The Vechur cow controversy" by

R Krishnakumar appeared in Frontline (1999 April 9) had published an interview with Harry Griffin, the Act Director, Roselyn Institute. On the patent number, (EP765390) Mr Harry Griffin clarified that the patent application entitled



Alpha lactalbumin gene construct was submitted by BPL Therapeutics. The application refers to the use of gene constructs for the targeting of the expression of human alphasalactalbumin to the mammary gland of transgenic cows. The aim is to provide milk with enhanced nutritional value for premature infants. There is no connection with any specific breed of cattle, Indian or otherwise. It is the introduction of human genes into cows.

Dr. Shyamsundaran Nair, Vice-Chancellor of the Kerala Agricultural University meanwhile expressed confidence that no Vechur germplasm has gone out from the project and that he would give full support to the scientists of the university on this. Dr. P.G.Nair, former Director of the National Bureau of Animal Genetic Resources described the controversy as "ridiculous." The trend world over is to produce milk with low fat. The suggestion that the Vechur germplasm has been smuggled out especially because of the alphasalactalbumin found in the Vechur cow's milk is absurd because this protein is found in the milk of many mammals including humans. Dr A.L Madan, Deputy Director General of ICAR said that ICAR has no issue at all as facts are clear to ICAR. And the official "white Paper" also was brought out by KAU.

We salute the good work and dedication of the scientists behind the conservation of the rare breed. JIVA had no intention to destroy their morale or to tarnish their image and reputation. And the speech of Smt Vandana Siva was first published in 1997 in "Animal Citizen" a national journal, and this was only reprinted in JIVA. The controversies that followed helped in bringing out the efforts and commitments of the scientists on the conservation of livestock resources and the growing concern of the ever-watchful environmentalists over the conservation of the bio diversity. This issue could also generate interest among public, media, non-governmental organizations, and the Government on the implications of GATT, patenting laws and conservation of India's own flora and fauna. And so I have no regrets.

Editor, JIVA