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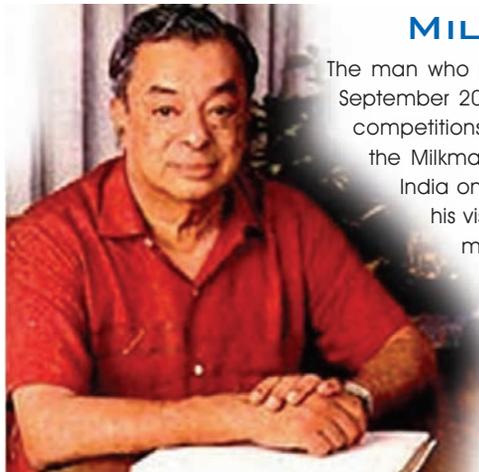
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MILK WAS HIS MISSION



The man who made milk his mission in life passed away on 9 September 2012 at the age of 90. Often remembered in quiz competitions as the Father of the Milk Revolution in India or the Milkman of India, Dr Verghese Kurien's efforts firmly put India on the world milk map almost fifty years ago. It was his vision and his mission that transformed India from a milk-deficient nation into a milk surplus country.

Born on 26 November 1921, Kurien was a graduate in Physics from the Loyola College, Madras after which he did B.E. (mechanical engineering) from the College of Engineering, Guindy. After completing a course at the Tata Steel Technical Institute, Jamshedpur in 1946, he was off to the United States on a government scholarship and earned his Master

of Science in metallurgical engineering (with distinction) from Michigan State University.

In 1949, he came back on a deputation to the Government Research Creamery in Anand, Gujarat but not satisfied with his work there Kurien joined the Kaira District Cooperative Milk Producers' Union Limited.

Indian dairying had always been beset with several problems. There were high seasonal fluctuations of milk production due to the breeding cycle and also feeding practices. Indian dairy owners mostly fed crop residue to the animals, the availability of which varied from season to season ultimately impacting the production of milk leading to milk scarcity at certain times and a glut at other times. The unpredictable supply of milk often pushed the farmers into the clutches of middlemen who exploited the annual glut to their advantage.

But after the setting up of the milk cooperative, farmers carried their milk to the dairy rather than going to the middlemen. However, as more and more villages joined the cooperative there was a problem of plenty. Dr Kurien, who was the general manager, suggested setting up a plant to process the milk into butter and milk powder. He set up the Amul dairy processing plant that started producing sweetened condensed milk in 1958.

Until then, multinationals possessed the capability of manufacturing baby food from cow's milk. They refused to either part with the process or set up plants in India. They had also made everyone believe that baby food could not be made from buffalo milk, which was in plenty in India. However, very soon the Central Food Technological Research Institute (CFTRI), a part of the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR), came up with a process to spray-dry fat-rich buffalo milk. This technology was transferred to the Amul Dairy, which soon demonstrated for the first time anywhere in the world that infant food could be made from buffalo milk on a commercial scale. When Amul baby food hit the market, it was an instant success.

Impressed by the success of Amul, then Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri established the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) to replicate the Amul model across the country and Kurien was made its chairman. While at the helm of affairs at NDDB, Dr Kurien launched 'Operation Flood' whose objective was to create a nationwide milk grid. Today, thanks to efforts of a visionary like Verghese Kurien, India is the world's largest milk producer.



Hasan Jawaid Khan

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