

The 'white' revolutionary

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While India remembered the horrific four days of terror attacks by 12 Pakistani terrorists in Mumbai on November 26, 2008, which left around 170 killed including 18 security men and over 300 injured; another important part of history was forgotten. November 26 happened to be the birthday of India's most well known entrepreneur Dr. Verghese Kurien, who made 'Amul' the household name across India. He was known as the "Father of the White Revolution" in India. Dr Kurien was a social entrepreneur whose "billion-litre idea", Operation Flood, made dairy farming India's largest self-sustaining industry and the largest rural employment sector providing a third of all rural income. In Anand, Gujarat, Dr Kurien created wealth for thousands of farmers involved in milk business. His bold ideas enabled these poor farmers to sell their products at a profit through the co-operative movement and helped transform India from a milk-deficit country to the world's largest producer of milk. The Co-operative movement in Gujarat is a shining example for the entire India. For decades 'AMUL' or Anand Milk Union Limited, has hogged the Indian landscape with its famous 'utterly butterly delicious' Amul butter. Today Gujarat has been totally transformed in the rural areas and the state continues to lead and dominate the milk sector. The co-operative union in Gujarat is in itself like a giant multi-national industry worth Rs.36,000 crore and churning out dairy products that reach almost every part of India. Kurien launched 'Operation Flood' that propelled Gujarat to the pinnacle of the dairy state of India. However, despite being the most successful Indian entrepreneur of several decades, Dr. Kurien was elbowed out by powerful foes in the form of those whom he groomed to run the successful private cooperative movement. Sometimes when persons in responsible positions set certain standards and expect those below them to meet such expectations, problems arise. Newspaper reports say that Kurien's exit came over differences in strategies with his one time protégé Amrita Patel head of the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB). Whether the fall out on matters of strategy or other reasons is a matter of debate. One thing is clear, that Kurien had proved his mettle for at least four decades and his objective of protecting the farmer has been the base through which milk farmers in Gujarat have prospered and progressed. It is said that all that glitters is not gold and so with all new things. It is said that Kurien was unmoved to fast changing market environment. His detractors wanted to pursue a capitalist strategy where the onus is on profit. This objective may sound reasonable but it exposes the autonomy of the milk farming community to the market forces. In other states, the co-operatives have fallen prey to the dictates of the powerful market forces and as a result of which, the farmers who toil the land, are denied their dues. Kurien laid a strong foundation for AMUL in Gujarat and today it thrives because of what he left behind. Market economy is about mergers and buy outs but hopefully the co-operative in Gujarat would be able to withstand these forces. It was a sad end to India's most successful story. Kurien was a unique personality and his achievements will go down in history as the man who brought hope and prosperity to thousands of milk farmers in Gujarat.