

# 75 years of Amul

The birth centenary of Verghese Kurien, the first death anniversary of F C Kohli, the 50th birth anniversary of Maruti Suzuki, these were all among the major game-changers of the Indian economy. Of course, even more important is the Green Revolution brought about by C Subramaniam in the mid 1960s. IE had the privilege of close interactions with these game-changers, the circumstances and their bringing about the revolutionary change. Reminiscences:

**TO COMMEMORATE THE** major transformation brought about in 75 years of independence, IE shares its rare privilege of close interactions with these tall leaders. We start this with Verghese Kurien who brought about the milk revolution not just for the sheer size of its catapulting India, which was struggling to handle widespread shortages, as the world's largest milk producer. I presented Kurien first at the Madras Press Club and later under the aegis of Industrial Economist Business Excellence Award and at the College of Engineering, Guindy. At each one of these occasions Kurien set the Cooum on fire with his wit and wisdom!

## THE REFRAIN: BRUTUS WAS AN HONOURABLE MAN!

I provide the curtain raiser quoting from his address at a conference organised by the then Milk Commissioner of the state, Louis Menezes at the Kalaivanar Arangam before a large audience:

"I was in New Zealand; the whole bloody place was full of milk." Kurien turned towards Menezes and continued: "I investigated the reason and found there was no Milk Commissioner in New Zealand." Kurien continued: "I had occasion to visit Denmark. The country again was full of milk. I enquired; again I found, there was no milk commissioner!" He continued this narration pointing to Netherlands, France... and concluded with the moral: "If we need milk in plenty, we should not have Milk Commissioners!"

Kurien firmly believed that milk production can be left to farmers' cooperatives without interference by the government. He provided me the opportunity to observe first hand the formation of milk cooperatives at the village level in Erode district. His strong lieutenant Dr E Madhavan passionately built such cooperatives literally brick by brick. I accompanied him in the early hours, around 3.30 a.m, in a jeep driven by him, moving from village to village. There was the

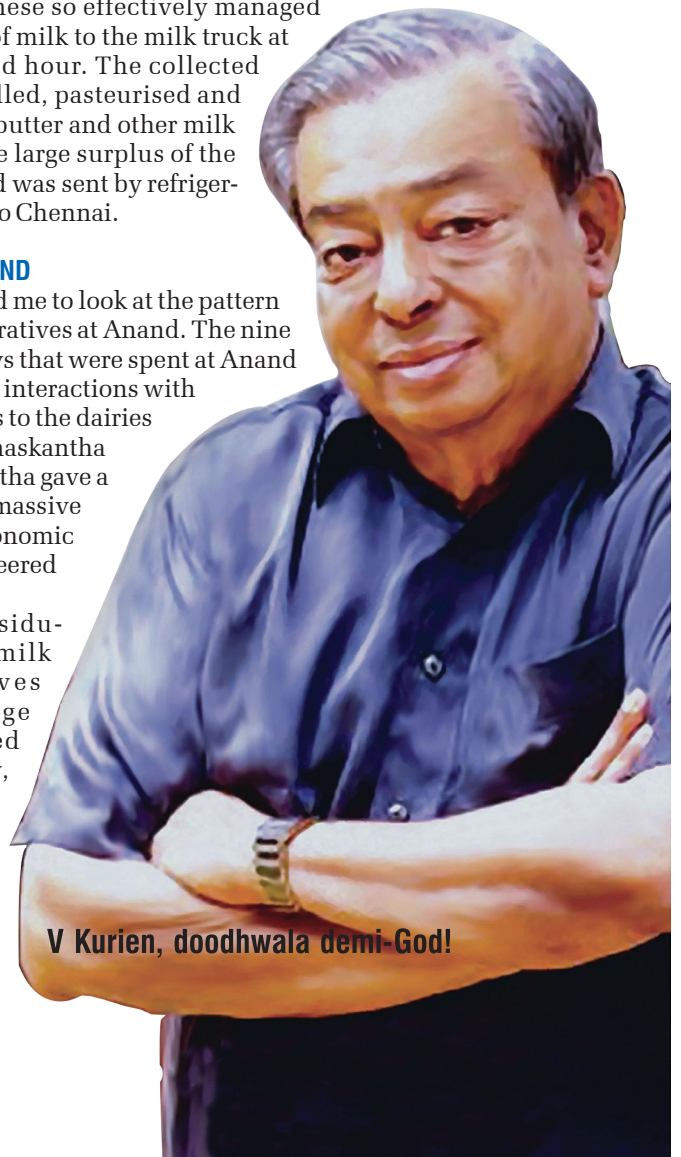
added surprise of Madhavan, hailing from Kerala, struggling to converse with local farmers in broken Tamil, who owned an average of '1.5 buffaloes' to form the cooperative.

With painstaking efforts hundreds of village level cooperatives were formed which were united to form a union of cooperatives at the district level. These so effectively managed the delivery of milk to the milk truck at the scheduled hour. The collected milk was chilled, pasteurised and converted to butter and other milk products. The large surplus of the milk collected was sent by refrigerated wagons to Chennai.

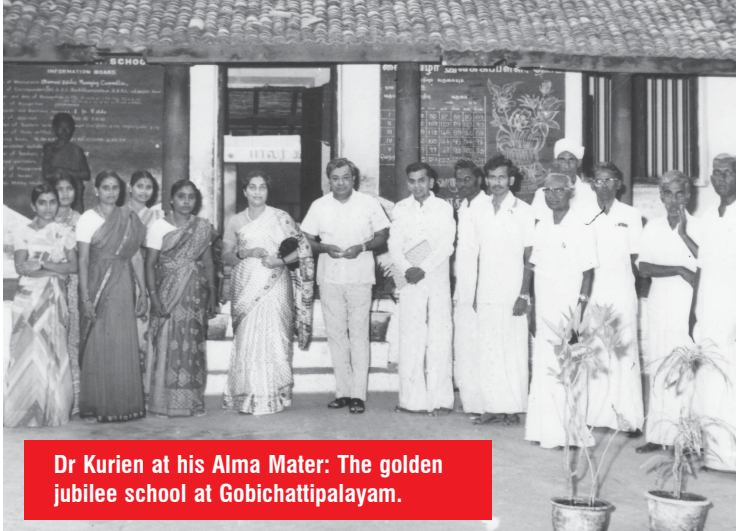
## AMAZING ANAND

Kurien invited me to look at the pattern of milk cooperatives at Anand. The nine delightful days that were spent at Anand with frequent interactions with him and visits to the dairies at Anand, Banaskantha and Sabarkantha gave a measure of a massive social and economic change engineered by Kurien.

Kurien assiduously built milk co-operatives at the village level, assured them steady, fair price and full procurement of whatever was offered at prices related to the fat content.



**V Kurien, doodhwala demi-God!**



Dr Kurien at his Alma Mater: The golden jubilee school at Gobichattipalayam.



C Subramaniam, Union Finance Minister at a milk cooperative.

He created a system to collect the milk offered from these co-operatives twice a day and transported milk to chilling centres and thence to processing centres. Payments were fair and quick. By standing in single file every morning and evening irrespective of class and caste to deliver milk, villagers overcome the caste barriers. They appreciated the values of punctuality, of improving the quality of cattle and hence of milk.

The veterinary section of the Kaira District Cooperative Milk Producers' Union was a beehive of activity. Every morning several vans with a veterinarian and fully equipped with medicines leave on regular visits to the village cooperatives – the societies were visited once a week. Another fleet of vehicles along with teams of doctors attended to emergency calls –all the 24 hours in a day and on all the 365 days a year! These vehicles were fitted with wireless communication equipment.

**THE LEAD OF TRIBHUVANDAS PATEL...**

In the initial years of independence, with the poor quality of the livestock, yields were low and milk shortages continued through the next couple of decades. The seeds for the milk revolution were sown in Gujarat under the lead

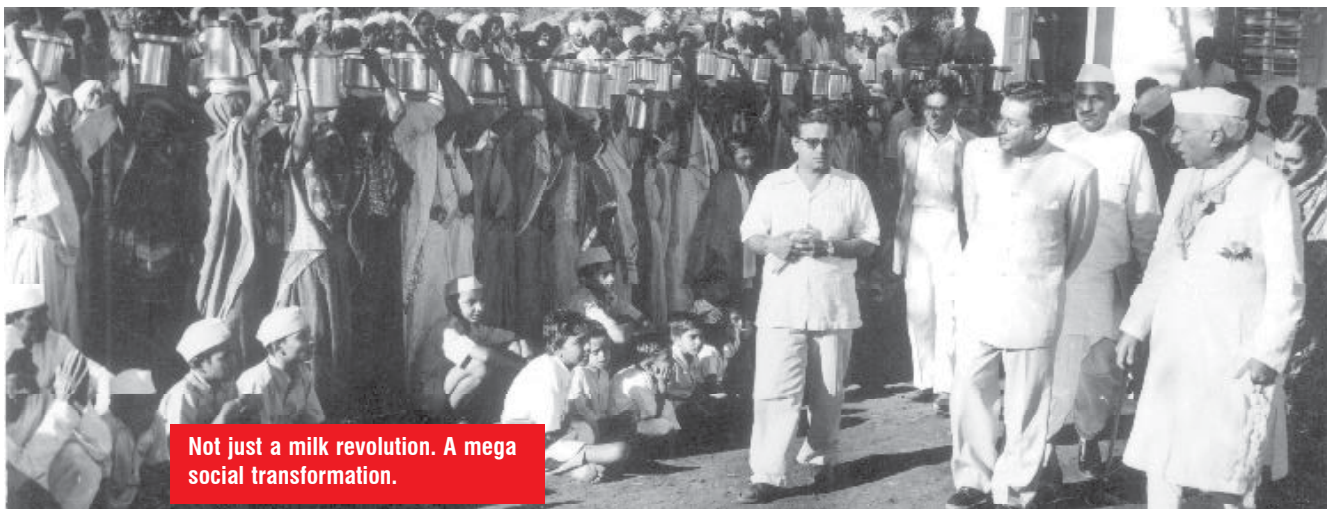
of Tribhuvandas Patel at Anand.

At the end of the contract period of less than a year Kurien planned to leave Anand. The technical wizard Dalaya was also planning to quit. Tribhuvandas persuaded them to stay on. This proved to be the most important for the turnaround of the cooperative.

Kurien brought about significant changes in the collection and processing of milk which helped meet the competition from the private company of Polson which enjoyed the solid support of the then British government. He took on multinationals including Polson and Nestle successfully making milk powder out of buffalo milk, a technology not known till then. Remember, the west was not familiar with the buffalo and all development centred around cow milk!

**THE JOURNEY CONTINUED**

Lal Bahadur Shastri as Prime Minister and C Subramaniam as Minister of Agriculture lent enormous support to the efforts of Kurien. Shastri even stayed in a village in Kaira district and was deeply impressed by the revolution taking place. His visit paved the way for the setting up of NDDB and the launch of Operation Flood.



Not just a milk revolution. A mega social transformation.

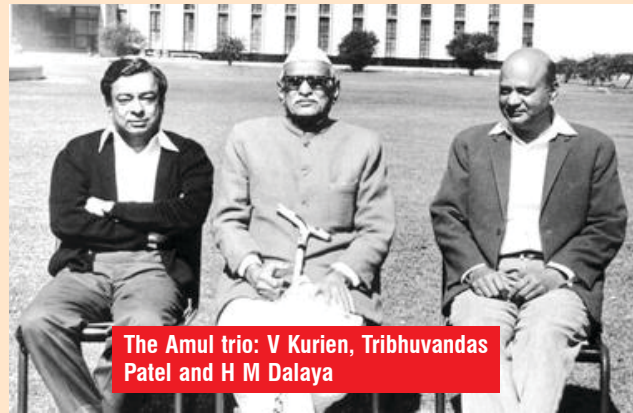


## THE TAMIL NADU CONNECTION

**DR KURIEN ATTAINED** his degree in B.Sc in Physics from Loyola College, Madras. He also studied engineering at the Tata Iron and Steel Company in Jamshedpur and undertook training in dairy engineering at the National Dairy Research Institute, Bangalore. Kurien received a government scholarship to study at Michigan State University, where he received a master's degree in mechanical engineering. When he returned to India, he was required, as a condition of the scholarship, to work at the Government Research Creamery in Anand, Gujarat state in 1949. The subject allotted to him was dairy technology. He also managed to get another US educated dairy scientist H M Dalaya to work along. The duo made a mark building the cooperative with the focus on engineering and technology.

### ABOUT MANTHAN

Kurien showed me Shyam Benegal's Manthan Hindi movie based on his life and times. Manthan won the National Award for best Feature Film in Hindi and the Filmfare Award for best female playback singer



The Amul trio: V Kurien, Tribhuvandas Patel and H M Dalaya

by Preeti Sagar for the acclaimed 'Mero gaam Katha parey' which was also incorporated as the background score in the documentary and ads made for Amul. This movie was crowd funded by half a million farmers who were members of the Gujarat Milk Marketing Federation Ltd., who paid Rs 2 each for the making of the movie and also contributed to its success.

## AMUL, AMUL EVERYWHERE...

Amul Dairy uses automatic milk collection system that makes the collection of milk from farmers seamless and quick. The company daily collects 3.3 million litres of milk from 2.12 million farmers from various villages across India. All these farmers are paid while delivering the milk. Amul has 31 plants in India, with 13 of these in Gujarat. The cooperative has four plants in Delhi NCR; two in UP; four in Maharashtra; three in Rajasthan; and one each in Chhattisgarh, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Jammu and Kashmir.

India managed to secure an export value of Rs 1358.29 crore of dairy products for 2020-21. UAE remains the biggest market for Indian dairy products, accounting for US\$ 35.43 million worth of dairy products followed by



Bangladesh, the US, Bhutan and Singapore.

According to a NITI Aayog report, India's milk production is set to nearly double over the next decade, with the increase in supply far outpacing the demand. The government is trying to set up village-level dairy infrastructure under the National Action Plan on Dairy Development to increase the share of organised milk handling.

Kurien made use of milk powder donated by the European Union to extend the Operation Flood programme that was so successful in Gujarat, across the country. It made India a milk surplus nation and the largest milk producer in the world. As the founding chairman of the Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation, Kurien



Lal Bahadur Shastri with Kurien at Anand.

was responsible for the creation and success of the Amul brand of dairy products.

To meet the need for experts in rural management, Kurien set up the Institute for Rural Management (IRMA) in Anand to churn out management graduates in a vast gamut of subjects on the rural economy. He assembled rich academic talent to make IRMA a prestigious institution.

Under his chairmanship the Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF) soon evolved a giant with a turnover of around Rs 13,000 crore (Current FY 2021 turnover is Rs 39,200 cr.). GCMMF, along with the National Dairy Development Board, spearheaded India's milk revolution and enabled India to emerge the largest producer of milk in the world.

His approach was holistic and comprehensive: he had great faith in cooperatives, in technology, marketing, communication and constantly publicising the achievements.

The birth of an idea at Amul grew fast and is being replicated with ease in dozens of other dairy projects including three massive World Bank aided ones at Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. ■

- With inputs from Vijaya Durga and Dr K Narayanan