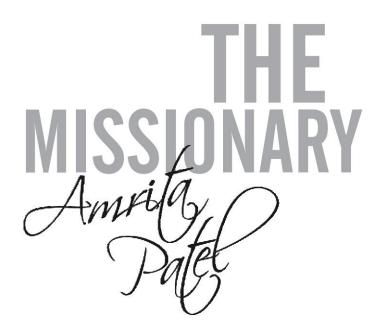
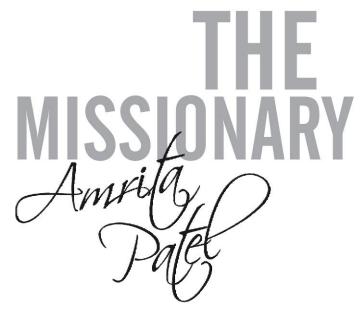
McGraw-Hill Professional Leadership Essentials Series





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Shrinivas Pandit Leadership Counsellor



Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing Company Limited

NEW DELHI

McGraw-Hill Offices New Delhi New York St Louis San Francisco Auckland Bogotá Caracas Kuala Lumpur Lisbon London Madrid Mexico City Milan Montreal San Juan Santiago Singapore Sydney Tokyo Toronto



Published by Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing Company Limited, 7 West Patel Nagar, New Delhi 110 008.

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This edition can be exported from India only by the publishers, Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing Company Limited

ISBN-(13 digits): 978-0-07-065678-9 ISBN-(10 digits): 0-07-065678-9

Head—Professional and Healthcare: *Roystan La'Porte* Publishing Manager: *R. Chandra Sekhar* Manager—Sales & Marketing: *S. Girish*

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Typeset at The Composers, 260, C.A. Apt., Paschim Vihar, New Delhi 110 063 and printed at Rashtriya Printers, M-135, Panchsheel Garden, Naveen Shahdara, Delhi 110 032

Cover Design: Kapil Gupta, Delhi

Cover Printer: Rashtriya

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То

My grandfather Late Gopal Vaman alias Kakasaheb Pandit, Pleader, Deorukh, was the founder chairman of Deorukh Shikshan Prasarak Mandal, which established the first secondary high school in Deorukh, headquarters of Taluka Sangmeshwar in District Ratnagiri, Maharashtra. Kakasaheb and his colleagues went door-to-door to persuade parents to enrol their daughters in the school; a pioneering drive in the beginning of twentieth century!



Preface

Probably the most visible and dramatic shift from old to new paradigm thinking for corporations today has been in the area of environmental protection. Public outrage and governmental regulation have accelerated an increasing sense of social responsibility in the business community. Most policy has now changed from reactive to preventive.

Suzanne Gauntlett

My focus in studying effective business leaders has been on a broad range of questions: What is the background of these people? What key challenges they faced? How did they succeed? What are the techniques they used? And what can managers learn from them to become effective chief executives?

One of the important finding of my studies: The outstanding chief executives do not possess any superhuman qualities or mystical powers. They follow simple common sense practices in the daily grind of business to rise to the top.

Effective executives learn by developing innovative strategies for managing change. They study change management programmes of other organisations thoroughly so as to understand the elements that give them competitive advantage. They adapt them to suit the particular requirements of their organisations.

Their competency in dissecting ideas and grasping themes behind effective strategies gives them an edge over run-of-the-mill executives. What helps them turn out outstanding performance year after year is their disciplined execution.

NDDB's Chairman Amrita Patel is one such successful chief executive. Her performance provides sound guidelines on designing innovative, yet simple strategies. Her intuition, insight, grit, and listening-leadership style enables her to lead teams by example.

Amrita's incisive thinking inspires listeners. Her deeply held value system about the role of cooperatives has the potential to empower them to become more effective.

Read her profile with complete concentration, absorb the message, implement the techniques with suitable modification to suit your situation; and you are bound to develop unique insights on the phenomenon of managing change in the cooperative sector.

Shrinivas Pandit



Acknowledgements

In spite of her extremely busy schedule Amrita Patel spared time for my study of *Exemplary CEOs*. She answered all my questions with professional precision and clarity. It was a significant learning experience for me—million thanks.

Amrita's Executive Assistant, popularly known as Bala (Mr. T V Balasubramaniam) was quite helpful in arranging meetings and providing information. Many thanks.

The ever helpful Chandani Palshetkar, our neighbour in the society, worked on my computer to make a significant contribution in the completion of this project. Thank you.

My family members ignored me completely to give me my space for this book. I am grateful to them for this non-vocal support.

Thanks to all others whose names may have been inadvertently left out.

Shrinivas Pandit



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Introduction

THIS BOOK IS about a thought leader and how she questions existing assumptions and lays down new paradigms, which power fundamental changes in the direction of business. You will find that such leaders give more to the organisations than they take.

Do a reality check on your business paradigms and thinking pattern before you venture into expansion, diversification, or new businesses. In Management Goals through Poetry Satish Kakri says, "Your core objectives, will give you tough time, force you to review your own paradigm."



Assumptions Make the Difference

ALTHOUGH MANAGEMENT IS associated with business management, it is found all over the world in organs of governance and in societal institutions. Society is run on assumptions about life, living, aspiring, growing, its potentials and its limits. Basic assumptions about this multifaceted reality are called paradigms.

The practice of management is grounded in paradigms concerning aims, objectives, people, processes, businesses, and the results expected from the concerned institution. By definition, organisations are social systems with some shared norms, beliefs, and value systems, which determine the way things are done. The management conducts its business on what is right or wrong, and what is legitimate or not. The practice of benchmarking against the best practices of comparable companies has led to organisation behaviour becoming more normative; yet the individual personality of each organisation is scrupulously guarded.

Although management's scope is legally defined and circumscribed by national boundaries, technologies, markets, and end users, cataclysmic changes outside its scope have altered the reality. Management must now make meaning of mind-boggling global changes to identify the *paradigm shifts*—the basic assumptions on which its business edifice is built. If the assumptions are wrong, decisions based on them are bound to go wrong.

The Jain Group of Jalgaon provides an illustration. Without assessing the in-house core competencies, they diversified into areas unrelated to their main business strengths and courted failure. The group has learnt a lot from that misadventure and bounced back to strength when they returned to expand into their niche area in agro and pipes business.

Over the last decade (1994–2004), the world has become a smaller place. Speed has become of paramount importance. Processes matter as much as the quality of products and service. Economies are locked in do-or-die battles with ecology. Internet and markets are dictating the paradigm script.

Our inadequate knowledge about passion and humility, learning and listening, emotions and spirituality, connectivity and symbolic language, quarterly results and daily scorecard, individual and team scores, standards and models, needs to be refreshed and sharpened because it can profoundly change the postulates of management.

The science of management is embedded in its tools and techniques, the art in its human ensemble. In the knowledge management era, the emphasis has shifted fundamentally to the art of leading people because the people–knowledge asset has acquired a new meaning. From the 20th Century of Taylor's scientific management, the world has moved to the 21st Century of Six-Sigma team management of Wipro, and Mumbai's famous *Home Tiffin Box Carriers—Dabawallas!*

The 21st Century management is facing many challenges. It is not about information, technology, or productivity alone. The sum of all three leads us to think, that we have to manage institutions as "result producing" organs of the society. The investments are so high that no society in the world can afford to remain complacently by its old norms of work, attitude, and behaviour.

The context has changed the fulcrum of management. The character of its asset base has been unequivocally altered. It is no more *fixed*. It is a *flow*. If knowledge is the greatest asset, then one must remember that 'knowledge' is not static, it has a flow. Management must look after all its stakeholders, not only the shareholders, and provide equitable returns. The knowledge formulae have limited value and patent validity and are subject to brutal market forces operating on their true value and expiry dates.

Management has therefore to think anew, which means it must test its policies and measure results against the touchstone of a new paradigm:

Management must responsibly husband the resources within its domain control and also those beyond its legally defined boundaries, because both affect its performance and results.

Such changes challenge management's competence in providing new direction. In *New Thinking for the New Millennium* Edward de Bono states that the analysis of the past will not help one design the future. Even if you have a roadmap you cannot construct new roads.

In sculpting the future, leaders must move from beyond traditional judgmental thinking, to the 'water logic' of patterning systems, where "movement" is of essence. It is only when one

embraces the larger reality that affects one's resource inputs that one begins to invest in husbanding them; and that is thoughtful management.

In this catabolic process of change, people cannot be just managed anymore. They need to be led.



New Paradigms Lead to New Thinking

N EW PARADIGMS TEASE the management into imagining alternative scenarios. In the relatively stable socialist past, management occasionally checked its paradigms to see if they accurately reflected the reality. Today's digitised world coaxes management to do a reality check almost hourly because of its increased fluidity.

Managers have to cultivate the habit of constantly doing reality checks to keep their ships on course. Such vigilance will allow the managers to make midterm corrections. It is said that desire always misreads fate. It follows: *If managers play up fate, and play down efforts, preparation, and planning, they are in fact abandoning all attempts to sculpt their future. They are becoming irresponsible.*

Governments are slowly removing the legal sheath around jobs, thereby considerably diluting unions' stranglehold, and freeing 'work' from their clutches. Now, management's responsibility does

not end with declaring voluntary separation schemes and providing outplacement services to employees. It has to go out and persuasively communicate the paradigm shift in economy from "guaranteed employment" to available "remunerative work". Changing the mindset and creating the required ambience would, to some extent, reduce the pressure on management towards creating more jobs which it can ill afford.

If management contributes to managing the expectations upstream, it would be attuning the mindset of its employees and culture to new reality of the organisation. Thus, the purpose behind advance spotting of trends and patterns, and constructing new paradigms, would achieve its stated purpose-to show that the old set of assumptions no longer hold true, the new ones do. And the thought leaders provide us with the new insights.

Management has therefore to think anew, which means it must test its policies and measure results against the touchstone of new paradigm. Management must responsibly husband the resources within its domain control and even those beyond its legally defined boundaries because they affect its performance and results.



The Hallmark of Thought Leaders is Giving

LN THE 21ST Century, certain shifts in consciousness are symptomatic of the new paradigm:

- From "seeing is believing" to "believing is seeing". It has led to recognising that the inner experiences of the subconscious of an individual play a role in ushering new reality.
- The data based shared belief system anchored beyond speculation in the realm of centrality and causality of consciousness accepted among scientists, artists, environmentalists, and businessmen has increased our sensitivity about global connectedness, creativity and compassion for all living things and environment.
- There are some constants of the change process, like economy and community, visualisation and vision building, cooperation and co-creation, transformation and turnaround, alignment and empowerment, and learning potential

connected to individual development, which need serious husbanding.

• The institutional context invariant like disappearance of hierarchy to team thinking, benefits to bonuses, seniority to performance and results indicate that there is no static template of criteria but an evolving process of TQM that matters in providing customer friendly products and services.

The World Business Academy (WBA) considered the issue of control, competition, cooperation, and co-creation in the context of new business paradigms. Its objective was to enhance business leaders' awareness about situation specific choices they could make in operations both under their control and beyond. It became abundantly clear that unless there was appropriate resource allocation, commensurate to the ecological and psychological needs of the community, the desirable results could not be achieved. As Drucker says, "All results are on the outside. The inside is only about cost and effort".

The Latin roots indicate competition means *striving* together, cooperation is *working* together, and co-creation is *creating* together. The togetherness is unavoidable because ecology and economy are interdependent.

If one sees the process of globalisation in a limited context within the zero-sum game, then there will be winners and losers. Since competition is based on the assumption, "winner takes all", the CEOs' pay packages of bonuses, stock options, what have you, are sky high. In fact, the remuneration of those working in such affluent pastures becomes an eyesore when compared to that of employees labouring in unorganised sectors of the economy.

If the paradigm shift is towards team scores, then the rules of equitable sharing must apply because the process-oriented, cooperative mode provides more balance. It is not the same for all, but the differentiate must maintain a balance between providing scope for individual motivation and team synergy. Ideally, the same principle must guide corporations and nations towards sharing global wealth; at least the direction must be set for achieving some harmony.

In cooperation, different parallel forces operate, while in cocreation there is a fusion of forces. To face today's competitive world, management builds strong flexible working groups, like project teams to create the ambience required for cooperation. In this exercise, the TQM device has become a strong binding force for each company.

In many instances, organisations favour joint ventures where the balance of advantages gives an edge while competing against giant MNCs and other conglomerates. It is an arrangement of limited cooperation to fight the Godzillas of global market forces.

In this context, Drucker noted that political jurisdictions had ceased to be sovereign in controlling alliances, partnerships, joint ventures, and all kinds of multilateral relationships which cause business growth. Political and legal aspects are separated from economic reality in many such transactions; it is a question of interpreting law, bending it, seeking exemptions, or lobbying for change with the governments.

However, when a corporation aims at complete synergy, it must operate on the principle of total fusion, i.e. the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It has to move beyond its boundaries to embrace the factors of ecology, which directly affect the roots of its business.

However, the total sell-out of production assets to exploitative market forces unleashed by globalisation has the potential to uproot earth's ecological infrastructure. The networks of small village cooperatives therefore, have to rise above the local political frays to protect their natural resources through co-creation.

In *Sur/Petition*, de Bono points out that those organisations that focused on value creation did well while those that concentrated on competition did badly. The business leaders have the competence to create value monopolies. They also have the clout and financial muscle to provide leadership. This is the clarion call of the 21st century that they must take (de Bono, E., 1993).

Creation is envisioning a piece of art, a product, a service. It is bringing forth something that did not exist before. You produce something that gives you divine satisfaction. If working together is a difficult process, creating together is still harder.

When you create together, you have to assign proper roles to group members by identifying their strengths. Some, as collaborators, are good at defining reality, forming a concept, and evolving a vision. Some are good as amplifiers—they add to the power of creation by making it louder and stronger. Technicians provide technical expertise, and supporters the necessary support. Different role players are required for different types of enterprises.

Furthermore, the role players need guidance, direction, and practice in the process of creation. They have to stretch beyond their current accomplishments into unfamiliar, new territories. It is an exploration where you focus on creation and not on your identity as creator.

Said Ricky Ponting, the Australian cricket captain, "We focus on making scores, which will raise the level of the game to new heights". This means the players, the artists, and the leaders, learn to expand their capacities. Such men and women question

previously held assumptions. They set new goals for themselves and others in their teams, because they envision a better future. They immerse themselves in the act of creating. The exemplars of the new paradigm in games, art, philanthropy, social work, business are already functioning for the rest to emulate.

Says Robert Fritz in Creating, "Most people have not been taught to create, consequently they do not do well when working in a group. Is it any wonder that many people end up loving humanity but hating people?" (Fritz, R., 1991)



Exemplars Show the Way

PRODUCTION AND MARKETING of milk, and milkbased products, is a business on its threshold. Amrita Patel, and the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB), are now at that critical juncture where they have moved from competition to cooperation: they have made a joint venture with Mother Dairy. Amrita Patel's next move seems to be, to align NDDB and milk cooperatives with the new paradigm of business-co-creation. It is to expand the scope of milk cooperatives: to look after water, forests and other elements of ecology. It means an upstream integration of resources.

In *The New Paradigm in Business*, Michael Ray and Alan Rinzler note:

The business of business is no more only the business...but it has to be responsible for the whole creation, for the well-being of the earth and all its creatures...The raw resources of the business await the hand of the sculptor to "chip away" excess materialistic practices...

Islands of relative opulence surround a large number of new organisations. We are witness to the peculiar problems leaders face in building new infratitude (infrastructure of attitudes) in such organisations. They require creative leadership to catalyse new thinking habits, and initiate actions that will percolate belief in the rediscovered value system.

Globalisation and technology are driving NDDB and milk cooperatives to the Gandhian model of authentic co-creation at the grassroots. To push them on, committed leaders, and exemplars, are needed who can read the paradigm correctly and move on. Amrita Patel is one such.

Organisations require creative leadership to catalyse new thinking habits, and initiate actions.



The Missionary– Amrita Patel



India's most successful cooperative venture, the giant National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) with assets worth Rs 2000 crore, is the Number One milk producer (84.6 million MT in 2001–02) in the world. It has 170 milk unions, and covers 1,01,000 village level societies, which are owned by nearly 11 million farmer members. Leading the mammoth operation of NDDB is its chairman, Dr. Amrita Patel

FTER THE PUBLICATION of my book Thought Leaders in January 2001, I met Dr. Kurien at Taj in Mumbai. He was in a relaxed mood. While discussing my new book on leadership, I asked him if he knew of any leader who might be included in it. Promptly he said, "Miss Patel", and proudly added, "I recruited her, groomed her, and installed her in my position. I know it is difficult to succeed me, but I think she is doing a good job". It is rare to hear such praise for one's successor from a boss. And here I was listening to it from none other than our idol of the "milk revolution", Verghese Kurien who has any number of achievements to his name.

It took quite some time to get Amrita to meet me. Relentless persuasion worked. My admiration for Amrita grew as I heard the story of this ideological fighter. The master strategist Kurien and his protégé Amrita are currently at odds over issues of marketing policy and farmers' cooperatives. Their differences include strategies against MNCs like Nestle and Britannia. The MNCs' mighty distribution networks and capacity to engage in long drawn brand wars, are a threat of grave magnitude to NDDB and its network of cooperatives.

The farmers and their cooperatives are helplessly watching the sordid drama between National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) and Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF). The town of Anand (joy) is grieving that a place of national pride might fall into the rut in which the rest of the cooperatives and government institutions have been languishing for decades.

Many people have asked me, "Why don't you write on why smart executives fail, or on those that have faced severe adversity?" However, I know many successful leaders who have faced obstacles, hazards, and inimical circumstances, and in this book I have decided to feature such leaders. Amrita is a person who fits this bill admirably. One who, at the time of writing this profile, is embroiled in a combat, where the end is nowhere in sight. Before we understand how Amrita is negotiating the perilous passage of her career and concomitantly that of the cooperatives and NDDB, let us look at her background to see how she grew.

If cooperatives are not functioning, my faith in God is driving me to do something about it.



The Making of a Tough Woman

AMRITA IS THE youngest of ex-finance minister and excabinet Secretary H. M. Patel's five daughters. From Delhi, she moved with him to Vidyanagar, Gujarat, where he relocated after retirement. There, he was Chairman of the Charutar Vidya Mandal, which runs a rural educational institution.

Said Amrita: My father was my greatest mentor. He inculcated in me ethical values, like social service, integrity, intellectual honesty, hard work, and a free independent spirit. My mother developed my competence at housekeeping, as mothers do. My sisters brought me up; they nurtured in me a sense of aesthetics.

When the NDDB bill was being introduced in the parliament, Dr. Kurien was confined to bed with pneumonia, and so as Managing Director I had to take full responsibility. I had to meet a number of ministers and members of Parliament, to follow it through its passage. It was tedious. At one point I really gave up, but my father who was also a Member of Parliament said, 'No, you can't give up, you have to take it to its logical conclusion. Unless you get it passed, all your efforts will have

been in vain'. This gave me the boost I needed to continue work on the unfinished task. Finally, the bill was passed. Even Dr. Kurien was surprised. I breathed a sigh of relief. That was practical training in how painful but meaningful work, ultimately leads to achieving historic milestones. To the oft repeated quote *No Pain No Gain*, I add a rider: *while traversing from one to another however, the only lasting gain you derive is the meaning*.

A trusted friend of mine shared his insights and perspectives on a number of issues: on the management of institutions, political interface, societal concerns; but most importantly, his concern for nature conservation and environmental protection. He helped shape my personality. Without his caring guidance I would perhaps have developed into a skewed person under a powerful boss—as an overbearing and domineering leader.

A vet used to visit the house to treat our three dogs. His job, he once told me, was to go out into the villages and treat the buffaloes of the cooperative members. I asked him to take me along one day, which he did, and that was when I saw how useful and satisfying it was to be a vet; because his patients—the buffaloes—were a source of livelihood for so many poor farmers. In fact, for most of them, their lives depended on their one buffalo. That is when I decided that I would study to be a vet, and come back to Anand and work for the cooperative, "Amul".

After graduating in veterinary science and animal husbandry from Bombay University, Amrita approached Kurien for a job. He told her bluntly that there were no jobs for women since the work was to be carried out in remote villages. Amrita was equally up front in telling him that she was not scared and was prepared to go to such places to gain experience, even if she was not paid a salary.

Coincidentally, a Scottish woman deputed to Anand by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) needed a woman at that time, and Amrita was hired on a temporary basis. Luck cleared the path. One after another, the male Nutrition Officers who were appointed left. Amrita was asked to stay on. She worked for six years as the Animal Nutrition Officer with the Kaira District Cooperative Milk Producers' Union's cattle feed factory at Kanjari, the largest in the country.

Her work there was very impressive. Said Kurien, "The FAO Assistant Director General, on a visit to Anand, asked me about this brilliant girl and offered her a scholarship for advanced training in animal nutrition at the Rowett Research Institute, Aberdeen, UK, under a FAO fellowship. I was pleased to send her immediately". Amrita had to sign a bond for Rs 30,000 for that training.

In 1967, Amrita returned from Scotland and was appointed Nutrition Officer at the cattle feed plant. Her mark showed in everything she did; but she did not like the working atmosphere of the place.

A: If papers were wanted from me, the concerned person would wait for me to leave the lab. The papers would then disappear from my desk. I felt they were spying on me. I conveyed my feelings to Dr. Kurien, and my desire to quit. He told me that if I quit, then I would have to pay the full bond money although I had finished two years and nine months. So I stayed on for the remaining period. In the meantime my mother died, and I wanted to shift to Delhi to be with my father there. He had just become a Member of Parliament. He was also recovering from a mild stroke, and I did not want him to be alone.

I quit Amul and accepted a job with the NDDB. Dr. Kurien gave me an assignment in Delhi. It was to organise the

International Dairy Congress. It was the largest international conference held in India in 1974; when Vigyan Bhavan, the only venue available, was not all that well equipped to handle a gathering of over 2000 delegates.

S: What do you mean?

A: For example the garden was unkempt. I wanted the garden to be in full bloom. I called up the director of horticulture and told him that all the flowerbeds had to flower on December 4th, the first day of the Congress. When one flower was visible a week before the conference date, I called him up again and said, what is this? He said, "Madam what can be done, this is nature". I replied that I didn't care—every flowerbed had to be in bloom on the appointed day.

S: Did he do it?

A: He went round Delhi, got pots with plants which had flowers, and stuffed them up to the pot-rims in the ground. I watched him do that. It worked. We had a colourful garden. This is just one example. In fact I put into business many entrepreneurs who are now thriving in their businesses. I had to galvanise people into action. It was not easy by any means. I am a perfectionist, but I was not a very confident person then.

S: And now?

A: (*laughs*) I was not given any staff. People kept leaving, and finally I was made Secretary General for the event. Dr. Kurien said, "I am giving you nobody; you appoint your own staff on a temporary basis for this event". What was my experience? I had gone straight from cattle feed factory to Delhi, to manage this enormous event. A huge amount of work was involved.

S: You demonstrated your organising skills.

A: Obviously, I seem to have had some innate skills. The event is remembered for being the best organised Dairy Congress, which no one expected; as that was the first time the Dairy Congress had been organised outside a developed country. It was the last Congress to have its proceedings made available in English, French, and German. No Congress thereafter has done it.

S: Could you reflect on what made those innate skills flower when the challenge was thrown at you?

A: The most important factors were my determination and commitment: my desire for perfection, and care for every detail. There was also a looming threat. It was such an important event; we were putting India on the world dairy map. I couldn't afford to go wrong. I was therefore forced to think for all twenty four hours of the day and look into every little detail. I had to motivate everyone, and encourage them to make it the best event ever. It was motivating people, which enabled me to manage the event successfully.

S: Do you think your caring personality and persuasive manners helped you do that? It was not the ordering, bossy style?

A: Yes, I think so. It's not my nature to order. Even at the Dairy Board I am persuasive. It is an advantage. *It is not just working with people but caring for them.*

S: Did you take any unusual steps?

A: Yes, many. I had the audacity to put up a notice that nobody should get married for two years, i.e., until the event was over! Dr. Kurien said it was unconstitutional. I said, I couldn't help it, sorry. Everybody had to give me twenty four hours attention. Falling ill was not allowed either–a fellow went around every day giving malaria pills and vitamins to the employees.

S: Sounds outrageous. In order to obtain that quality of commitment, I suppose you became quite demanding. One can appreciate that successful accomplishment of great tasks is not possible without uncommon measures. Motivation works wonders within the strictly implemented ground rules of any management activity. How many people had you to manage in your office?

A: About twenty in the office, but a number of activities were outsourced. There were no computers in those days. I had a big board on my wall where we recorded each day's activities and progress. Even duties like changing the toilet rolls and soaps in the bathrooms were listed and specifically assigned! I was a vet but my housekeeping ability, picked up from my mother, came in very handy. Managing this major event was a turning point in my career.

S: Were there any other turning points, which made a deep impact in your career?

A: The turning point was what I believe made a man, so to speak, out of me. It came about when we were setting up India's largest foot and mouth disease vaccine plant at Hyderabad. We had to get the best know-how available in the world. After talking to the French and British, Dr. Kurien and I decided that we should obtain it from The Welcome Foundation of UK. We had to negotiate terms and enter into a Foreign Collaboration Agreement. Dr. Kurien said to me, "You have to negotiate with them". I said, "I have no experience". He added, "That is what I am offering you. *There is a first time for everything*. I will provide you with a lawyer".

S: So, how did you fare?

A: The negotiations were to be completed in four days in Delhi. Dr. Kurien stayed at a hotel. I had to shuttle between our office and the hotel at lunchtime and each evening, to keep Dr. Kurien informed of the progress. He would fire me—how did you agree to this, that, and the other. Everyday I would come close to tears while eating my lunch.

S: This is rather unsavory.

A: On the third day it became unbearable. The British company was behaving as though India had no capabilities at all. At one point the discussion failed and there was a long silence when the British said, "Well I don't have anything very pretty to look at, so then what do you want to do?" I said, "Mister, the best thing is for you to go home".

S: And then?

A: I told Dr. Kurien that there was no point in going ahead with such collaboration. After a few days Dr. Kurien said, "Look, the Prime Ministers of the two countries, Mr. James Callaghan and Mr. Morarji Desai, have agreed in principle to collaborate on this project. We can't just drop it. So let's go to London and meet the chairman of The Welcome Foundation".

S: Who was the chairman, and how did the meeting go?

A: Sir Alfred Shepherd was the chairman. We met, and I told him that his representatives were treating us like brown natives who knew nothing. It was humiliating, particularly the statements made by their representative. After hearing me out, he apologised and said, "I would never have let this happen to my daughter".

S: What action did Sir Alfred take?

A: He withdrew that person from our negotiations, and told me to choose from two other gentlemen to whom he introduced

me. He said, "Decide whom you would like to work with. The choice is yours". I chose one to head the project. It was smooth sailing from then on.

S: It was a toughening exercise!

A: Yes, it made me realise that one couldn't just accept being bullied or allow others to make one feel inferior. I had to hold my ground and be more demanding. My antennae had to be up to make out what was being said, and why?

These two events toughened Amrita. The first one brought into play her organising skills; the second compelled her to take the bull by the horns. Brett Butler, American actress and author, said, "Most of the time, endurance is not an option. . . often we can look back at that space, that second, and know that living through it has made us stronger". Amrita drove out the unwanted partner and chose another partner for the project. With the support of the boss she fought the battle, and stayed on the project on her terms.

I learnt that I had to treat people differently, understand their background, objectives, intentions, ulterior motives, and why they interact the way they do.



Kurien the Icon

AMRITA'S BIODATA IS impressive, and Dr. Kurien's contribution in providing her with integrated experience from the grass roots—in working at a cattle feed factory, in village cooperatives, and in project management, staff and administration—to regional management, and then to general management is quite exemplary. He also exposed her to the international environment, where she was required to interact with the who's who of the international dairy world.

Kurien is a no-nonsense executive. He would not have taken such interest in Amrita were he not impressed with her outstanding performance in each assignment. As Amrita said, "He started relying on me heavily as he trusted my judgement". He sincerely believed that experience is the best guide. Said Albert Camus, "You cannot create experience, you undergo it". Sometimes, you pass through an experience involuntarily. Subsequently, how you process, derive meaning, and respond to that experience is important.

S: Kurien played a role in toughening you, didn't he?

A: Undoubtedly. He beat me into shape. Had he not given me that verbal thrashing, I might not have been sensitive enough to understand the nuances. That's why I said, this was an exercise that made a man out of me. There was a process of growing up professionally, in which he assisted me.

S: Although initially he had reservations in hiring you because you were a woman, he did take interest in you.

A: Yes, he did. The FAO expert found me the most competent amongst all the people she interacted with. Once I asked him, "Did you take me because I am my father's daughter?" He quickly responded, "Of course because you are H. M. Patel's daughter. But that wasn't the reason for your continued stay. You remained because of your own competence".

S: He was honest enough to admit that you had gained his confidence because of your performance.

A: Dr. Kurien rounded me off professionally. He provided me with all round experience. He had the vision to make a businesswoman out of me. From Delhi, he brought me to be Director, Administration and Commercial, NDDB, at Anand. Thereafter, he again transferred me to Delhi as Director, Northern Region. I was responsible for implementation of the 'Anand' pattern cooperatives in North India and other allied activities. In 1986, he made me Secretary, i.e. Chief Executive of the Dairy Board; in September 1988, Managing Director (Operations); and in 1990, Managing Director.

Amrita was ready to take charge as Managing Director of NDDB at the age of 47. As MD, she became responsible for planning and implementation of the third phase of Operation Flood, the world's largest developmental project with assistance from the World Bank and EEC. A total investment of approximately Rs 1000 crore was made during those eight years, 1990–98. Additionally about 20,000 village level societies were formed, bringing the total to 100,000 societies, and one crore members. The processing capacity increased from 158 litres per day (llpd) to 240 llpd. What a massive task! Amrita was appointed Chairman, NDDB, on November 27, 1998.

Kurien was adamant as far as the choice of his successor was concerned. The Government was ready to depute one of its IAS officers who had a veterinary degree, but Kurien was not ready to entertain any such nominee from outside. He fought with them over this issue, and finally got the nod for Amrita after the intervention of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. How Kurien convinced the PM is worth recounting.

K: The PM happened to hold temporary charge of the Ministry of Agriculture at that time, i.e., in 1998. I told him apart from everything else, that this is also the decade of the Woman. You say you want one-third reservation for women. Here, a woman has been groomed, yet you are thinking of appointing a man. The PM felt I had a point, and she got it.

Amrita worked independently and learned to manage on each job but credit went to Kurien for putting her in those independent positions. She admits, his style of developing was to put her into situations.

S: How did you learn?

A: By reading up on all the issues I was facing, studying in detail every thing that came to me, consulting friends inside and outside, and most importantly by focussing on the objectives, and being clear about the targets to be achieved. Dr. Kurien gave me the opportunities and the freedom to handle matters. The fact that he was ageing put greater responsibility on me.

S: Did he play father to you?

A: In a sense. It was father but only up to a point; most of the time it was boss. He had complete confidence in my decision-making capabilities. If I went in and said, please sign, he wouldn't even read, but he would sign. If somebody was sitting with him, he would tell the person, "I sign because *she* has put it before me".

S: Will you please give an example?

A: Promotions were earlier done only on the basis of seniority. When he put me in charge, I changed that, and recommended that some promotions be based on merit—in other words promotions were made out of turn in exceptional cases. He said, "You can do it, but are you sure it won't create unrest?" I said, "that's my problem". He signed the papers. That was the kind of trust he had in what I said and did.

S: Kurien managed to keep the Government at a distance. How is it now?

A: That was also one of his greatest contributions. He gave NDDB a distinctly independent character despite it being a government body. I have also succeeded in guarding our autonomy. In addition, I have developed public relations on a one-to-one basis with most of the government officials, right up to the top. I am perfectly comfortable contacting them and sharing our problems with them whenever there is a need.

Amrita is sincere in telling the unvarnished truth that she and her colleagues worshipped Kurien. Under Kurien's leadership, Amrita, her colleagues, the farmers and their cooperatives grew. Most importantly, production of milk and milk products grew in quality, stature, and impact. The standard of living of farmers and staff improved. It is a heroic journey in the creation of recognisable wealth. It has been a win-win game throughout.

I remember the élan with which she organised the International Dairy Congress. I got all the credit for it but it was this girl, Amrita, who had done it. She blossomed under responsibility—it brought out her many wonderful qualities—and I selected her to be my successor. —Dr. Kurien



Cooperatives, Cooperation, and Competitiveness— 3 Cs

GOOPERATIVES CAME INTO existence on the fundamental assumption that cooperation amongst producers will lead to proper growth and an equitable distribution of income, which would then come together to protect community interests. The 3 Cs would work synchronously in a democratic set-up provided people are taught that it is in their best interests to work for the common weal.

S: What is the status of the Government's interference in cooperatives?

A: The same as it was before. Their interference is seen in transfers, promotions, deciding the price of milk-you name it. If a cooperative made a loss, they used to approach their government, to provide grants to meet the deficit. Now that has stopped.

S: What about the Central Government?

A: The Central Government has recently approved a rehabilitation package for cooperatives that have the potential to perform better, and where a projection can be made that their net worth will be positive in seven years. The Central Government contributes 50 per cent of the package, and the State Government the remaining 50 per cent. Our responsibility is to work with the cooperatives to make the plans and monitor their implementation. But the State Government's assurance is necessary in that they will allow the cooperatives the freedom to function; enable them to implement the plan; and most importantly, not change the Chief Executive without NDDB's consent. Regretfully, it is not working that way.

S: Why?

A: Because the minister and his department interfere. Officers are transferred without any regard to their competence, performance, or record of service. The governments continue to interfere in pricing, and in other areas of internal management. If a fellow has made a mess of one cooperative, he is transferred to another cooperative where he creates another mess. When the governments change, those who come into power do the exact opposite of what the former government has done. The cooperatives have become a political football. If the new Chief Minister wants to break the power base of the previous Chief Minister on the cooperatives, he may even go all out to supersede the Board and get his candidate elected as Chairman.

S: Did you not plead with them in the interests of poor farmers, to not indulge in such destructive, unproductive activity?

A: They agree when you meet them, but most often they have their own agenda. If the cooperative is a profit making one, it's good business. If it's a loss making unit, let it continue to make a loss—who cares? The bye-laws of the village cooperative state that a person can contest for the position of an office bearer in his society, only if he pours milk at his society for 300 days. The government that came into power in one state amended the bye-laws so anybody could stand for election irrespective of whether he is a milk producer or not. Imagine the havoc it has played. A cooperative is an institution of "users", i.e. its members should be the only producers.

S: What have you proposed to de-politicise the situation?

A: That's where we thought Marketing Joint Ventures could be one way of professionalising the key activity of marketing. Efficient marketing would in turn put pressure on the cooperatives to improve the efficiency of the plant, the transportation from the village, and the quality of raw milk and products.

The legislation on the formation of Producer Companies under the Companies Act, which was recently passed, is another path created to allow cooperatives to function on a level playing field with their private sector competitors. A cooperative can become a Producer Company if two-thirds of its General Body votes in favour of the conversion.

S: So you are partially privatising.

A: No—converting into a Producer Company is not privatising. All the essential principles of a cooperative are retained namely:

- 1. Only the shareholders can be producers,
- 2. One man, one vote,
- 3. Shares can be traded only amongst members,
- 4. A cap is set on dividend as stated under the Cooperative Societies Act, and

5. Investors cannot take over. There is discipline in complying with the requirements of the Companies Act. This provides for greater transparency; in the long run we hope such companies will provide an environment which will attract professionals who have greater freedom from government's red tapism in working.

Amrita is trying to strengthen the cooperation between cooperatives to improve their ability to compete against Britannia, Nestle, and other MNC giants. But she is facing opposition from the GCMMF. Their opposition is, she feels, against the interest of farmers, who unfortunately are at the mercy of power politics.

The 3 Cs communicate a relationship of profound significance, which has to be creatively managed. It cannot be done through egoistic posturing.



The PAN Brand and Local Brands

S: What should have happened?

A: Ideally cooperatives all over the country should have come together. Every state has its own brand. They are regional brands and need to be strengthened regionally. But there are too many brands to promote nationally. If the cooperatives had been mature enough, they would have selected two-thirds of the brands, say a northern brand, a southern brand, and so forth, to promote nationally. Then, for example, if Amul wanted to sell their products in Karnataka, the Karnataka Cooperative would have manufactured it over there and sold it, and vice versa. If Karnataka wanted to sell it's Nandini brand in Delhi, their product would have been made in the north and sold there. You save transport costs—everybody benefits.

S: Appears logical. What was the obstacle?

A: The cooperatives have not matured. They feel they can survive, and are still not concerned about the competition in the market place, particularly from private and multinational brands.

The Gujarat Cooperative is the only one which has built a strong marketing infrastructure nationally. It is now capturing markets to which cooperatives in other states should in fact be marketing their milk and milk products.

S: But where is the need for all this? Why doesn't Amul fortify its hold over all of India, or spread wherever it has not reached, and compete companies like Britannia or Cadbury all over the world

A: Each cooperative is a political animal. They do not want to let go of their local brand. Nandini, for example, doesn't want to loose its identity. On the other hand it has ambitions to expand to other states. And why should they not, and how can you prevent them?

S: It becomes a competition between cooperatives on the one hand, and against Britannia and Nestle on the other. The MNCs will take advantage of this with their financial and marketing muscle power, won't they?

A: Amul now wants to expand its liquid milk market nationally because the market for products is getting saturated. This means they will be competing with cooperatives in each state; and most of the cooperatives are weak in marketing.

S: Since GCMMF does not accept this argument, you have had to take the joint venture route through Mother Dairy—is that what you are saying?

A: Yes, the joint ventures work at strengthening regional brands in each state, and thereby allow the growth of the markets and business of each cooperative. All this is essential because NDDB has invested over Rs 2000 crores in the cooperatives, and millions of rural producers depend upon milk for a livelihood. It is necessary for the NDDB to intervene.

Amrita is taking a holistic approach, a PAN brand to coexist with local or regional brand by uniting the cooperatives to fight the outside enemy. Her thoughts on the subject of "Brands" are worth quoting from the talk she gave at a CII Conference on Corporate Image: Going Beyond Brands, on March 7, 2002 at New Delhi:

I believe our image should be the essence of the thoughts and feelings we want people to have about our corporation and to which we genuinely aspire as evidenced by our actions and the results we achieve. If our 'image' is truly based on integrity, quality, durability, value, innovation, and of genuine concern for our clients, then the customer may choose our brand—all of those positive images helping to convince her or him to buy our products or services.

There is another model, which I would like to place before you, a model, which integrates the best connotations of brand and corporate image that is trust and dependability with production and supply. It is a model under which cooperative societies bond together to deliver produce to customers of quality and fair value, and the economic gains so derived are shared equitably over the entire length of the supply/value chain. Partnership is sustainable, exploitation is not.

My fundamental point is that it is values based on the true integrity of their performance that count, not the image. The crucial ingredient of success is the old fundamental concept "public service".

Amrita is saying that "images" must convey a true and justified "reputation", which is the only way to earn peoples' trust.



From Project Management to Sector Management

NDDB's WORK PROFILE has changed, and it requires a mindset change. It has moved from managing projects to managing a sector.

Amrita has had different challenges to face since she took over from her giant predecessor. As Kurien himself said, it is not easy to step into his shoes. Amrita knew this well as she explains: We hero-worshipped him. I wasn't sure how it would work without him in this seat. So I was careful about everything I did. I was conscious of the fact that I would be watched minutely by everyone, and therefore had to ensure that no one felt insecure in Kurien's absence.

When one takes over the number one position in any organisation, equations change. Each individual in the organisation watches how it is going to affect him. The power holders watch how the power equations change; how the policy changes. Loyalties are not transferred just because one is appointed to that position. The leader may have positional power, but he has to work hard to secure personal power. This is awfully difficult,

when the earlier leader has achieved iconic status on the merits of a long innings of great achievements. It gets further complicated if the retired executive is active in the organisation, and is available in the vicinity. What skills did Amrita use to facilitate her acceptance?

A: Communication. I met people in different groups, and talked to them about what we were doing. I assessed their comfort levels. I tried to read the signals and to get them involved in course corrections if something was going wrong. That kept them occupied. I left them no time to while away in talking about the leader's departure and so on.

S: It was a business-like approach, participative and transparent in character. A more caring effort from a woman must have appealed to different constituencies in the organisation.

A: It was a shift, from a domineering boss whom nobody was allowed to question, to a more sharing and collaborative leader. When Dr. Kurien was here, we had a project with a framework. Afterwards, we moved on from managing projects to managing the dairy sector in a rapidly changing market environment.

S: You are saying that the character of the organisation was changing from managing projects to managing a sector. The nature of the tasks was changing, requiring a shift in vision, perspective, objectives, and the use of different management skills.

A: We looked at the whole sector. We scanned the performance and strategies of private and cooperative operations-their dairies, unions-and graded them. This helped decide where we should locate our state offices.

S: But with Kurien, whom you respected throughout your career, what went wrong?

A: It is a conflict of basic values. I would give you a few examples.

The Dairy Board had set up some commercial units, i.e. the Mother Dairy in Delhi, a vaccine and biological unit in Hyderabad, and a vegetable oil (Dhara) marketing venture. All these constituted the "empire" of NDDB, as Dr. Kurien often referred to them. We had always talked about the need to convert these units into companies once they were running at a profit. For example, the vaccine plant was set up, in a way, ahead of its time. The farmers were not willing to pay for the vaccine. The animal husbandry departments did not take control of the Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) seriously, though it caused an annual loss of about Rs 4000 crore. It took us about 8–10 years to make a profit.

The Mother Dairy had a turnover of Rs 800 crore and was in fact a commercial unit that should have been paying tax. But he was extremely upset when he heard that it was being converted into a company. He asked, "Why are you destroying the empire?" I replied, "Because I don't want to be an emperor". We opened 18 state offices with multidisciplinary teams to get closer to where the cooperatives were situated, with the intention of working in partnership with them to strengthen them; this was not possible from Anand where we only complained that they were not functioning properly.

We started getting first hand information about operational issues like quality control, pricing, production processes, the quality of staff, their appropriate placements and management, the depth of political interference, etc. We could then hold dialogues with the cooperatives and the state governments on the interventions required. He referred to this as "*dismembering*" NDDB. Our studies revealed that most of the cooperatives were weak in marketing. He did not agree. We saw that the only state with a strong marketing infrastructure was Gujarat, but they were not willing to reach out to the other states to support them in marketing.

Further, with Dr. Kurien as Chairman, the NDDB had taken a World Bank loan from the Government of India, which in turn has been loaned, to the cooperatives. An amount of about Rs 1,200 crore has yet to be repaid to the Government over the next ten years, and we can do so only when the cooperatives pay us back, for which they need to make a profit. Quite a number of cooperatives are running at a loss but have the potential to do better, provided they can improve their marketing. Therefore, it was this area that NDDB was prepared to support; which Dr. Kurien considered unnecessary. He believed, to quote him, "All one needed was to have faith in cooperatives".

This conflict about values entails a commitment towards honouring the Government's loans, strengthening regional brands and cooperatives through marketing tie-ups, the restructuring of NDDB, and maintaining control over the management of a giant organisation.



Conflict of Values and Vision

T COULD BE argued that this is also a conflict of vision. The values you add come from the personal values you hold, short-term vs. long-term interests, commercial trade-off vs. developmental solutions, confrontation vs. cooperation. Differences between the values of leaders affect the organisation's mission and leadership styles for better or worse. The outcome of such conflicts depend upon the logic and validity of initial perceptions and changes in circumstances. If the input is rubbish, the product is trash. The means through which it is processed might also be faulty. To a great extent structure, systems, contexts, and circumstances, determine values.

To overcome these constraints, visions sometimes flash through the omniscient unknown inner self. Visions are like maps, which guide us through the complexities of life. Freedom from foreign rule was a vision. Establishing self-sufficient milk producers' cooperatives was a vision. Such visions outdate existing practices, and aim at touching Man's ultimate potential. You might term it as the gut feeling an individual has for what the future holds.

Amrita's and Kurien's stand on policies, strategies, and all the interrelated issues are therefore symptomatic of a conflict of vision.

Said Deepak Parekh, "A vision provides a sense of direction on the basis of an assessment of the present, the past, and the likely future. Visions can be wrong, hopelessly off the mark, if they are not born from strong values, strengthened and nurtured by an analytical ability to constantly assess emerging alternatives. This though is never enough. The objective part is normally enveloped with an uncanny intuitiveness for what lies ahead" (Pandit, S., 2001).

The clash is about the relative importance that needs to be given to developing competence in the NDDB's and cooperatives' mindset towards realising the cooperatives' potential. It also means enlarging your vision to secure the foundations of your present, and future related activities. Such expansion, to include water and ecology amounts to, a sort of annexation of territory.

The core issue is belief in the villagers' ability to share a vision in sculpting a distant future, and in their preparedness to sacrifice for it the present compelling existential demands. The job of catalyst Amrita, and NDDB, is not only in increasing awareness about the impending ecological disaster, it extends to translating that awareness into action that ensures sustainable development. These issues have not cropped up since Amrita took over—they were always there.

S: You thought that when you took over, you would shape the policy and direction of NDDB and the cooperatives, to the way you saw current reality—is that it? After you actually took over the chairmanship your perspective may have changed. Did you not discuss it with him?

A: I did. I tried to explain to him that for 35 years we have been blaming the Government and the cooperative Societies Act, which permit so much governmental and political interference, and the unbridled powers of the Registrar of cooperatives, for the sad state of the cooperatives. In Andhra Pradesh though, they now have a parallel Cooperative Societies Act, which gives cooperatives complete freedom to function if they do not have any Government equity; the cooperatives are diffident about letting go the Government's hand and standing on their own feet.

Dr. Kurien was not willing to accept that there was a problem with the working of the cooperatives, and that some restructuring was required. His response was *If democracy doesn't work, you need more democracy; you cannot give up democracy.*

S: But what about democracy within NDDB and GCMMF?

A: That is a good question. But that thought comes when one is being introspective. His remark makes a good newspaper headline. It became increasingly clear to me that unless we fought for democracy in producers' cooperatives, they would not survive. Dr. Kurien was not prepared to accept this view. He preferred to leave it to God, in whom I suspect he has no faith, whereas *my faith in God is driving me to do what I believe is right.*

In A Conflict of Visions, Dr. Thomas Sowell said, "Dedication to a cause may legitimately entail sacrifices of personal interests but not sacrifices of mind or conscience." (Sowell, T., 1987)



The Fallen Icon

E SEE HERE a clear manifestation of conflict in values and belief systems. The strategies of NDDB, and GCMMF flow from this fundamental disagreement, and have been stoked to the current politicised atmosphere. The illiterate farmers, in whose wisdom Dr. Kurien and Amrita have immense faith, are probably upset by this sorry spectacle.

I did not approach Dr. Kurien to know his side of the story because I did not want to get into the controversy.

The public does not know that Amul is a cooperative venture. As Kurien said, "We sell a brand and not cooperatives". He may well be right. But it is not only a fight on brands and marketing. It is more a fight for control and management of cooperatives, GCMMF and NDDB. Now that Amrita has been given five year's extension as chairman of NDDB by the government she has the time to push through her agenda.

S: Will you please elucidate your vision of the future of the dairy industry?

A: While looking at the future of dairies, one needs to look at sustainable development in the broadest sense. One can't look at dairying as a business only, and ignore one's responsibilities towards the environment that sustains it. Dr. Kurien prefers to ignore these as he considers these inconsequential. This was the

change I was trying to bring about in his thinking. I feel the more technical you are the less you are able to concern yourself about the more fundamental ecological issues which makes your enterprise sustainable, particularly when it is so closely related to agriculture.

S: I don't quite agree because I see many technical people are genuinely involved in ecological activities. But how are you taking care of these issues?

A: It is an important exercise but a difficult one. I am attempting to address it through The Foundation for Ecological Security (FES), an organisation that we initiated some years ago. If we do not care for our land and water resources we court ecological disaster. I do not subscribe to the proposition that limitless growth is possible. My officers do not share my view that there are limits to growth, but that does not mean the issue does not exist. The fact that it is there is more evident today than ever, and requires the most serious consideration by all of us who have a sense of responsibility for the future of our fellow citizens; and in any case for over 11 million farmers who are members of the cooperatives.

We know this is a wide subject. It is being deliberated all over the world. As executives, we need to define the time span and delineate the boundaries of our growth to ensure sustainable development. It is clear that we cannot continue to act in a thoughtless manner. This is the classical battle of trade off between narrow, short-term interests and broader, long-term interests. We know that the legacy we leave is based only on our current but rapidly growing knowledge of facts, and the limitations of our own thinking. All we can do is ensure that our current actions do the least possible harm to us in the future.

S: To energise the cooperatives and the NDDB one needs such an infusion of enthusiasm.

Being essentially the loyal person she is, Amrita's face does not hide her deep hurt and unbearable sorrow. To say in one breath that we deservedly almost worshipped Kurien and now on deep reflection communicate that he has fallen from grace is excruciating. It is only because she is gentle and caring that she is able to convey in the most decent language the pain she is undergoing for having to face her fallen hero.

Heroes have a thousand faces. We need not feel guilty in our making Kurien, god. We were right in our assessment of his spectacular performance. Amrita may derive some solace in remembering what Celine said in *The School of Corpses*, "God is under repair".

Amrita looks sorrowful and tired. Her indomitable spirit and belief in the fundamentals of her approach is carrying her through this ordeal without falling sick so far. There is real tension in her job, which is bound to cause deterioration in her health. This is the price achievers pay for the cause they espouse but are unable to relinquish the struggle, whereas we surrender to the safer havens of fate!

Will Rogers said, "Being a hero is the shortest profession on earth". They are the glory of their times. They create efficiency-regimes during those times.



Dwindling Tribe of Missionaries

THE FUTURE CAN be built on the basis of our faith in the potential of our young generation. So I ask: what about the new generation of recruits?

A: There is much less idealism. I make it a point to meet the new entrants when they go through the induction programme. We tell them the history of NDDB, the spirit of the cooperative movement, the milk revolution and what we have created. We present them our SWOT. It is extremely difficult to pass on the inspiration couched in an appropriate message when they see so many cooperatives are making a loss. They begin to see that there is lack of professionalism, and to an extent they are right. But one has to breathe into them the ethos that goes with our responsibilities and hold fast to our commitment to larger goals.

S: Are you able to attract bright candidates?

A: It is difficult. The brighter you are the more likely it is that you might have fewer ideals and you are in life for yourself. The Dairy Board's success so far has been that we have been able to attract

persons who believed they needed some mission in life. They were missionaries, who were paid less, who did an unusual kind of work where there was no glamour in working in a village. They accepted and stayed on because they derived satisfaction in seeing people better their lives. The tribe of such missionaries is rapidly dwindling.

S: Will you please share a stirring experience from your missionary work?

A: In my very early years when I was in Ballia, a poor village in Eastern UP, I saw women standing there in a queue at the society with vessels of milk to deliver. To one woman in a bright red sari who had about 100 grams milk in a *lota* to sell I said, "what a pretty saree you are wearing". She turned her face away. I realised I had said something wrong.

Then I asked the society secretary why she was upset? He explained that there are six women in that family with just one sari, which they wore when they went out, otherwise they dressed in newspapers when in their house. From the money she gets from these 100 grams, she has to feed six hungry bellies at home. If she can feed the cow and make her produce 200 grams instead of 100 grams it would improve her livelihood. Now tell me how would you feel if you were faced with such stark poverty?

S: Quite moving.

A: I met a man at a chilling centre on the way to Pokhran before the second nuclear test. I asked him, "What is happening over there?" He takes out a twenty-rupee note from his pocket and tells me, "This is mine. I can buy now what I like. I don't have to go to the baniya (village moneylender) in the village and borrow money. What I saw was liberation. One doesn't realise what it means to live in a village and be bonded to a moneylender. S: To make missionaries out of those working here in the midst of blatant (vulgar) display of consumerism is damn difficult!

A: It is. The proportion of missionaries in society is generally dwindling in the face of growing materialism. However in a group of thirty we still find two to three with a missionary zeal.

S: How is it in west?

A: They do not have poor farmers like ours. The disparity is not so great as over here. In other words our poverty is of the lowest denomination. What is a cooperative? It is a society formed to do business, where the shareholders are the producers. The employees of the cooperatives are not paid as well as MNCs. They complain about it but they realise that they are paid to get maximum value for their employers—the members. Whether they get better prices by tying up with MNCs or whosoever doesn't matter to producers. How the employees of cooperatives do business is not the concern of the producers so long as they get them better prices for their produce. That is why the worlds over cooperatives are merging and forming alliances sometimes even with private companies.

S: If you have to compete with the MNCs and you need expertise you cannot afford to stay hierarchical and pay according to seniority.

A: That is why in the Mother Dairy we took a conscious decision about salaries. If the cooperatives are paying less we cannot do the same to marketing guys or others whose expertise commands a much higher market value. We began paying a handful of people handsomely on the basis of their performance. When the NDDB officers are deputed to the joint venture they start getting 20% more to start with. Depending on their performance they would later got more and be absorbed in that set up.

S: Did this apply to people selected to head the state offices?

A: For the first time in NDDB the middle level officers got some recognition. Some of the youngest have become state directors. It brought in the realisation that if they go out and perform they have prospects of better earning and recognition. You are given responsibility, position and authority but with that came accountability. They were proud to hold those positions. Now in some cases they are not able to perform because the State Governments are hopeless. What can one do if at the highest level as Chief Minister he is unhelpful or his officers couldn't care a damn about all the developmental work that is going on in their jurisdiction?

S: Your decision making looks far more complex.

A: You are right. Decisions that affect the organisation as a whole are comparatively easy to take. Whereas the one's that have political ramifications are difficult and politics is in a state of constant flux. If the minister is interested in supporting particular district unions we have to think of the political alignment and the worthiness of the proposal. Ministers change and with them the ground reality.

S: It looks as if your decisions are not so much based on costs, risks and commercial considerations but more on goodwill and relationships.

A: You are right but the discipline necessary in the utilisation of money cannot be lost sight off. Unless you earn or save money somewhere you cannot subsidise anything anywhere else. The moral responsibility to earn first remains. Interest rates matter and the value for money has to be recognised. It is not a free for all. There is a rigorous method in place of such decisions. All the while exceptional circumstances do arise requiring fresh considerations and we do provide that.

S: You are practising a caring and participatory leadership style. You appear to be taking all stakeholders with you in fulfilling the mission you have set for yourselves. You must have seen such leaders elsewhere. What is common in this style of leadership?

A: Humility, absence of arrogance, capable of listening, sharing, and empathising want to work in teams and for teams, and not for themselves. It all boils down to a temperament, which is not dominating, but caring.

S: You are a triple X formula, born Gujarati, speak Gujarati and a vet. So you had a head start in being able to easily mingle with the villagers and understand their issues accurately, am I right? Could you relate to them instantly and acceptance was not an issue.

A: Yes, that may have been an advantage in Gujarat—but we are a national body and need to converse with farmer elected representatives in their own regional language. A missionary doesn't work for money, although he might earn some. You might be a born missionary or you might start with guilt feelings as most do, and become one in the process. In fact many times for inducting the help of top-notch outside professionals, who seek fees we cannot afford, I had to instil in them, that feeling as a starter. Only then do they start understanding how much their expertise means to poor farmers and their starving institutions ultimately they enjoy working with them.

S: To energise the cooperatives and the NDDB one needs such an infusion of enthusiasm.

A missionary is a person devoted to the organisation. Here in NDDB or Cooperatives he is not working for a mission of charities. He is not inducted into security forces for war against terrorism. He has to achieve the commercial objectives of the organisation. But he has to remember that he is serving a cooperative organ of governance formed to serve the cause of milk producers most of whom are landless, small and marginal farmers. His commitment to altruism must be high. He must be seen to be working with genuine fervour realising that he is neither in the best paid MNCs and at the same time not in the low paid most hazardous work of charities or the armed forces.

The stock of such a tribe of workers has steadily shrunk since independence. The chances of their growth and availability are high with ecological issues moving to the centre stage of the national agenda. Many professionals from different vocations have moved into neglected areas to work on issues of societal concerns, e.g. Dr. B.V. Parmeshwar Rao, Dimli, West Bengal, PKS Madhavan of Action for Welfare and Awakening for Rural Enviormental (AWARE) and such others (Ref: *The Week: Prophets of New India*, Penguin).

Saving Mother Nature from total debasement has acquired critical mass and more will join the battle.



Revitalising the Cooperatives

YOU CAN SEE that Kurien and Amrita have different perspectives on the future of NDDB and the cooperatives.

S: When did you start noticing the differences between Kurien's style of leadership and yours?

A: We began Phase III of Operation Flood in 1987. I was the secretary then. I noticed that he looked upon the exercise as managing a programme, organising people, and marketing a packaged product. It was almost a kind of military operation for him.

S: Times have changed since you took over, and you are required to think anew—is that it?

A: My fundamental approach is that although I get a salary, I must think as an employee of a cooperative—I need to act as a trustee. The villagers trust me to sell their produce at a profitable margin and to give them better returns. In 30 years' time I would like to see the villagers' educated sons run their businesses. I am not interested in keeping them illiterate so that their current

despicable situation continues. Their elections will be more independent and free from rampant politicisation and corruption. In that development I can lay the seeds of mutual loyalty by putting together their innate skills and our professionalism. There will be a synergy of interests.

S: You are looking to the profit of the emerging farmer. You want to prepare both the present members and the new ones, so that they understand their roles and responsibilities towards themselves, their families, and genuine cooperative functioning. You also want to induct more women into the movement. As most studies and experiments have shown time and again, their influence in the families as economic partners will have a positive impact.

A: Yes. However when I approached Dr. Kurien, he instinctively said, "It's useless, but take the money because I don't know what CD means". In this characteristic way of teasing he dismissed CD as some music system, instead of acknowledging "cooperative development"! Whenever we spoke of it he would point a finger at me to indicate that it was my baby. He wanted nothing to do with it. He never accepted either the approach or the operation.

S: Your mission attempts to remake the person and his institution (the cooperative) at the grassroots level through process of education. You want to expose him to market realities and allow him to understand why it requires a different professional approach and working style, dress code, and demeanour. He should be educated to understand that some skills and competencies command higher rewards in the market place and that such realities cannot be wished away by false idealism.

A: Yes. It means making him understand that we don't want to exploit him but enable him to improve his awareness about the realities of doing business.

I am banking on a more involved and participatory cooperative development (CD), where the genuine cooperative spirit can flower.



The Ecological Dimension

THE WORLD IS witnessing the destruction of rain forests, droughts, famines, and the wayward floods of rivers, while they cause enormous damages year after year. The business charter for sustainable development has been signed by MNCs at the World Industry Conference on Environmental Management (WICEM). However, we have to resolve our own issues, whether they are about water, forests, or any other variable of our ecological system. Amrita, the evolved CEO, is struggling relentlessly to make the paradigm shift at NDDB and the cooperatives in the light of the changing global scenario and our stark realities.

S: You want to avoid all types of exploitation—both human and ecological?

A: Yes. My "limits to growth" theory incorporates both. Like agriculture, dairying in India depends very substantially on the productivity of living natural resources, and therefore the loss of biodiversity, particularly of plant life, is a cause of grave concern. If unsustainable exploitation continues unabated, it will undermine the very foundations of our ecological security irretrievably, with catastrophic consequences on our whole economy.

S: I feel you might have to go through the materialistic growth cycle before you talk of balanced growth in poor countries.

A: In northern Karnataka we have built dairies with huge capacities. Meanwhile, the water in the nearby wells has disappeared. The consequences can be imagined. Take another case—Rajasthan. Human and cattle migration used to occur because of scarcity of water. Over the last three years however, the farmers have been working to prevent human and animal encroachment into ecologically sensitive areas. This has improved the ecological foundations, and therefore the hydrology, of their locality. Former large scale migrations have reduced because the area has been able to recharge its water reservoirs. We have only to help nature to heal and renew herself to restore the most threatened resource in our lives today-water. FES is building models for sustainable development. I am exasperated because I am not able to convince the urban based decision makers about this obvious truth. Living as they do in an artificial environment, they are oblivious of natural phenomena. They jump to the wrong conclusion in believing that the application of short-term technological solutions is a permanent answer to our water problems.

S: How did the Rajasthan experiment begin?

A: Well, the proposal came from the State Director. He was closer to reality than most of us. He saw the problem between the relative haves and have-nots in the poor community. The water dimension had a far graver impact on their lives than milk. The protection and ecologically sensible use of land and in general, the protection and strengthening of all ecological processes became the central theme. The concerns of landless people were therefore addressed, and it will in time, strengthen in this model. S: You should have a mechanism in place to show the correlation between water and the benefits obtained in the business of milk production.

A: You are absolutely right. To get our contemporary decisionmakers to understand, we have to quantify the benefits. Our biggest problem in milk is that we have too many scrub (unproductive) cattle which cannot be improved or slaughtered. The breeding programmes are therefore totally compromised, levying a heavy burden on our overstretched national resources. *When you cannot eliminate the unproductive animals, you create a problem of potentially catastrophic implications.*

S: The problem is both political and religious. It is a very contentious issue. So we enter into the subject of the politics of water, the river linking project, etc.

A: Yes, that is correct. We cannot have milk without ensuring that adequate water is available. In Phase I of Operation Flood, we had people from NDDB work in villages. In the second phase, we allowed the cooperatives to do the groundwork. Now, at the Dairy Board, there are only a few with first hand experience of grassroot issues. They are too remote from the reality in the villages. The state offices we have opened are now providing us with some of these inputs. But it is FES that is emerging to build that vital strength. We need to constantly update our skills and levels of awareness about the changing realities at ground level.

S: It might be construed as a conflict of ideologies as far as Kurien is concerned. I suppose you must also be facing opposition from the Board in the financing of such schemes that go far beyond immediate milk business concerns. Also, you will be seen as superimposing your personal agenda on the business model and the basic objectives of NDDB.

A: Yes. I want a march on "back to basics". I am very clear that I have to suffer opposition to reach that.

There is emerging awareness amongst corporate of the vital importance of environmental protection. Tragically it is not widespread. The awareness grew because of increasing demand

for green organic products from consumers and global concerns about community interests.

The enormous task of protecting the environment from ecological disaster needs even bigger efforts at mindset change in the same class of people who own mammoth enterprises and believe they are creating wealth through the conversion of natural resources into cash. They have not been attuned to caring for the external natural resources beyond their own arteries of supply and distribution network. Undoubtedly, their response to the critical need for change is slow.



The Missionary

NOW I AM able to see Amrita in a different light. She is decidedly on a mission encompassing not only milk production, cooperatives, and marketing, but the fundamentals that sustain these and much else. Her vision is local with ecological and global dimensions.

S: What was your mission at the start of your career and what is it today?

A: My exposure to villages at a very young age made me feel that I would like to improve the quality of life of people in the villages. At that age I could see that this would be possible through animal husbandry. As a consequence, I was drawn to the veterinary profession. I could see myself making a contribution by qualifying in that field. As a vet, one didn't just treat animals but became an important link between villages and Anand. I sat and had tea with them. I saw through the same window they used, to look at world around them.

S: Gradually your mission underwent a change.

A: I thought if milk can do so much, water will do so much more. The underlying desire to serve the poor remained unaltered but I felt I needed to move on to broader dimensions to include many more who required help. S: So the medium changed from milk to water while the basic mission to serve the poor remained intact.

A: Yes, but not just water. It goes beyond—to secure and strengthen the life support systems that sustain us all and the economy on which our livelihoods depend. The land is being rapidly degraded—through villagers gathering firewood, through overgrazing, etc. The rejuvenation of the land can be brought about through the participation of the local villagers, who can prevent degradation of the natural vegetation of the uplands. Equally important is that the state must:

- (a) Reinforce protection of uplands to restore forests through natural regeneration, and where necessary through seeding of endemic species of vegetation, and
- (b) Introduce legislation declaring such state forests as "National" not just "Forests" since the ecological benefits derived from providing full protection goes well beyond state boundaries.

S: You have done so much over here that you understand the role finance plays in this resurrection process. What role has your entrepreneurial competence played in this success?

A: I have the passion and commitment, which is most important, and believe that I have the capacity to make a persuasive case. I think people see that I have no selfish motives. I say this on the basis of my experience in raising money for the hospital for which I am responsible. People say that they give me money because they know it is safe in my hands.

S: What you have become today is due to a combination of luck, chance, and real effort. What would you ascribe your success to?

A: Mainly to these elements combined, but also to sustained intellectual effort. To the vision, the mission, the absence of self-

centred motives, preparedness to fight for what I believe in, and suffer the consequences as I do, to be of service to others.

Amrita's indomitable spirit is felt in her presence. I have experienced it. In one person you meet a missionary and an exemplary CEO. She symbolises that remarkable courage which fights for others and not for oneself. She has put her whole being into a vital holistic cause.

We have ample professional protestors garbed as social activists, NGOs, and what have you. But rarely do we come across a rebel CEO working for poor, I mean an authentic missionary! And Amrita is one such. For those who want to do something creative and meaningful for others she is an inspiring role model! We need more Amritas, don't we?

We also have genuine rebels bringing about change at the grassroots with quiet, missionary zeal. Those are India's farm fields of hope.



Take-aways

- It is not just working with people but caring for them.
- Each cooperative is a political animal.
- My faith in God is driving me to do what I believe is right.
- I feel the more technical you are, the less you are able to concern yourself about the more fundamental ecological issues which makes your enterprise sustainable, particularly, when it is as closely related to agriculture.
- My officers do not share my view that there are limits to growth, but that does not mean the issue does not exist.
- The brighter you are the more likely it is that you might have fewer ideals and you are in life for yourself.
- You are given responsibility, position and authority but with that came accountability.
- Common factor in caring and participatory leadership style are humility, absence of arrogance, listening, sharing, and empathising, want to work in teams and for teams, and not for themselves.

- A missionary doesn't work for money, although he might earn some. You might be a born missionary or you might start with guilt feelings as most do, and become one in the process.
- If unsustainable exploitation continues unabated, as it is today, this will undermine the very foundations of ecological security irretrievably with catastrophic consequences to our whole economy.
- When you cannot eliminate the unproductive animals, you create a problem of potentially catastrophic implications.
- We cannot have milk without ensuring that adequate water is available.
- We need to constantly update our skills and levels of awareness about the changing realities at ground level.
- As a vet one didn't just treat animals but one became an important link between villages and Anand.
- I have the passion and commitment, which is most important, and believe I have the capacity to make a persuasive case.
- People say they are giving me money because they see it is safe in my hands.



Author's Profile

Shrinivas Pandit is a veteran HR professional and a leadership counsellor. His clients include Dian Graha Elektrika, Indonesia, Biocon Group, Bangalore, NABARD, and Pitambari, Mumbai.

Previously, Mr. Pandit was Executive Vice-President (Personnel) Siemens Ltd. Prior to that he headed the human resource divisions of Blue Star, Herdillia Chemicals and Johnson & Johnson.

Mr. Pandit is a graduate in economics and law; and obtained a postgraduate diploma in personnel management and industrial relations from the London School of Economics. He is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development, UK.

He has previously authored three widely acclaimed books— *Thought Leaders, Design Your Career* and *Exemplary CEOs.* He has also written numerous articles on career guidance, organisation cultures interpersonal relationship, leadership, conflict resolution, mindset change, etc. He has conducted many in-company workshops, seminars and addressed public conferences.

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