

The social entrepreneur for the disadvantaged

It was more of a delight than surprise to come across a first of its kind dairy cooperative society in the hinterlands of Nazira at a village called Sundar Pukhuri, 20 kilometres away from the headquarters of the Sivasagar district in the far North-East of the country, more so given the incurious state of affairs in dairying and absence of any institutional structure in the area. It is being referred to as first of its kind because, though small, still it might be the only dairy cooperative society in the country to possess its own dairy processing plant. It's called the "Sundar Pukhuri Milk Co-operative Society" which was registered in the year 2004.

Figure II.1 (clockwise from left): a) Sundar Pukhuri Processing Plant b) milk pasteurizer c) packaging plant d) peda being made and packaged



Since then it has come a long way and now markets its own packaged milk and milk products under the brand name of "Kareng" and it has its own milk tanker, BMCs and milk marketing vans. Initially it has just 12 members and collected 56 litres of milk but now membership has gone up to 245 and its collecting and processing 1,500 litres of milk daily and the situation is such that it has to refuse enrolment of new members due to limited processing capacity as well as limited market.

All this has been possible because of single handed efforts of Dr Jagdish Barman, a veterinary doctor by profession who desperately wanted to do something for people of this area and provide employment opportunities to youths in the area itself. With this noble dream he started on this mission and formed a SHG with 12 members in 2004. Slowly, the word spread and both membership and procurement started rising. In 2007, the need was felt to have its own processing plant as the society was forced to discard surplus milk which it could not market. But installing a dairy processing plant required huge funds, Dr. Burman through his perseverance and untiring spirit over several years gathered funds from CSR corpus of ONGC, donations from six local MLAs, Dairy Development Department, District Rural Development Agency, Zilla Parishad, Bank Loans and some personal loans from friends and relatives which totalled to about Rs 90 lakhs. Finally in 2014, the plant with an installed capacity of 5TLPD was commissioned successfully. Many obstacles manifested but he continued to take baby-steps and ultimately was able to realise the big dream. He says, *“When your intentions are noble, God shows the way and provides help from several quarters.”* He also facilitated many families to get bank loans to start rearing crossbred cows who were inspired upon seeing the change in lives of many dairy farmers. Elimination of the middlemen ensured that the dairy farmers in the area get fair and regular enumeration for their produce. Society also provides cattle feed, mineral mixture and veterinary services at subsidised rates to its members. Several milk collection points have been established in nearby villages to pool in the milk among which one is an all women society.

The brand “Kareng” was registered in 2014 and the marketing was formally inaugurated by Hon’ble Chief Minister. It is now marketing liquid milk in variants such as standard, toned, double toned and fat free milk and milk products like cream, *paneer*, *ghee*, *mawa* and curd. The society is planning to start manufacturing of value added products like *lassi* and ice-creams. Recently, they have started making *peda* after they were able to get two sweetshop experts from Kolkata. Now, Kareng brand has successfully established itself in Sivasagar city and adjoining urban centres. Consumers are confident of its purity and quality. Consumers were earlier did not have any option than to purchase milk from vendors who are notorious for selling adulterated milk at high prices.

Dr Burman enjoys immense respect among the villagers, rightly so, as they believe he has been God-sent to transform their lives although he himself believes that he has done nothing extra ordinary and it was his duty. In his own words, *“God has been graceful enough to help me realise my dream of bringing white revolution in Sivasagar”*. He still believes there is a long way to go although this effort of his has already transformed lives of 245 poor rural families and has provided employment to about 1,000 youths. The plant now processes 4 lakh litres of milk annually and providing quality milk and milk products to thousands of satisfied consumers. The society has an annual turnover of Rs 1.5 Crores!

For more details, please visit: www.kareng.org