



Milk Revolution: Stories of Indian Women from the Mountains of Garhwal

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Received: 10 May 2024; Received in revised form: 11 Jun 2024; Accepted: 20 Jun 2024; Available online: 30 Jun, 2024

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Abstract— *Stories gathered around the milk created the milk stories for women in India. White Revolution served as a means of financial independence and women created niche of their own. While the stories of women have always been an inspiration for the world, however, the main motivation remained the women of the rural background who have poor economic conditions and uncertain means of livelihood. In Uttarakhand, a hilly state of India, especially in Uttarkashi and Tehri Garhwal, there are numerous stories worth telling of the survival of women and the common factor among all of them has been the 'milk' and there is enough data which proves that how milk had been a boon for the downtrodden society of India since the great revolution started which was named: "Operation Milk."*



Keywords— *White Revolution, Milk, Rural Women, Uttarkashi, Tehri Garhwal, Uttarakhand, Films, Oral Literature, Stories*

Literature has always been primarily folk, and folk existed in rural masses. And then 'Milk' in the name of revolution created a hysteria giving work to even extremely poor and thus several stories have been created until now, though not have become great literature, giving life to each of them and their houses lighted up again—with mirth and laughter. Milk has become a phenomenon and mass production through one of the greatest movement in India has been successful ever since—It was named *Operation Flood*.

White Revolution, "milk production by the masses," was launched by the name *Operation Flood* by the Government of India in 1970 which ultimately transformed India from a milk-deficient nation into a world's largest milk producer ("Operation Flood") changing the rural landscape of India. The objectives of the whole program were: "Increase in milk production, augmented rural incomes, fair prices for consumers, and increased income and reduced poverty among participating farmers while ensuring a steady supply of milk in return" ("Operation Flood"). And the participation of rural women in the whole scenario created a different parallel movement that helped

the nation of which half the population has always been female. "To stand on her own feet": This motto came alive again, after independence. "*Manthan*, a Hindi movie directed by Shyam Benegal in 1976 was inspired by the same pioneering milk cooperative movement, 'white revolution of India,' of Verghese Kurien" ("*Manthan*"). Art and Literature created a canvas to be understood by millions of people who were unaware of such a great revolution. "*Manthan* was India's first crowdfunded film financed entirely by the dairy farmers of Gujarat" ("*The Better India*"). *Manthan*, the movie, starring Girish Karnad, Smita Patil, Amrish Puri, and Naseeruddin Shah, revolves around milk production and the price paid for it:

Amrish Puri is a milk usurper in the movie whose position comes to danger when a govt. officer arrives and offers the villagers the dream of a cooperative society where everything will be a fair deal and no caste will come anyone's way. This brings confidence to the faces of lower caste citizens of the village and infuriates the higher class people. But

after many trials and tribulations, eventually the govt. officer was transferred from the village, as the higher class interfered, and the whole higher caste citizens rejoiced at his departure, but eventually, the Harijans took the matter into their own hands and formed a free society. (“Manthan”)

This movie focuses on the role of cooperative societies in the economic development of India, protecting them from market exploitation and the pain of personal selling. A cooperative society aims at eliminating the unnecessary gains of middlemen in the whole process. Being voluntary in association and having equal voting rights, this type of format has become a major winner among the downtrodden and economically backward classes. In today’s rural India also, it is as prominent as it was yesterday. Uttarakhand is the northern state, situated in the foothills of the Shivalik range in the Himalayas, though is not culturally diversified but is geographically challenging with a population of almost ten million people. The state, with an indigenous population with distinct communities, is divided into districts which are further divided into spoken dialects, customs, and traditions. The lives of rural women need change especially when we talk

about a developing country like India, with dismal nutritive conditions for women especially those who fend for fuel, fodder, and water. However, for making changes, women have been mobilised for political participation by ensuring their participation as Gram Pradhans. But in retrospect, the political involvement of women has faded dimly over the years either because they lack time and commitment to realising their political commitments or because other commitments like family and fields take precedence over other fulfilments of roles and duties. Hence, it has not been self-sustaining development.

A more sustainable model of change can be ensured by structuring the government policies around the economic development of women and subsequently ensuring their political participation in the overall development of the state. The policymakers should take an exhaustive, on-the-spot cognizance of rural women, living their lives in diverse time frames than their counterparts in urban setups. Women from remote districts of Uttarkashi and Tehri Garhwal in Uttarakhand enthusiastically mobilising their economic demands led to the conclusion that the women in distinct, remote rural areas are still dependent on milk production for economic survival in their villages. Many women in these areas became the significant part of these *milk stories*:

S.No.	Name of Female	Name of Area (Rural /Semi-urban)	Number of Cows/Bufaloes	Milk Production on Daily Basis (in Litres)	Current Price of Milk (in Rs. per Litre)	Time since joined the Revolution
1.	Vimla	Dakhyat Gaon, Barkot, Uttarkashi	1 Cow (replaces every 5-7 years)	10 litres (sells 8 litres; 2 litre is used for personal consumption)	50 rupees per litre/kg	20 years
2.	Pavitra	Dakhyat Gaon, Barkot, Uttarkashi	1 Cow (replaces every 5-7 years)	10 litres (sells 8 litres; 2 litre is used for personal consumption)	50 rupees per litre/kg	10 years
3.	Sarita	Barkot Town, Uttarkashi	1 Cow (replaces every 5-7 years)	12 litres (sells 10 litres; 2 litre is used for personal consumption)	55 rupees per litre/kg	20 years
4.	Anupama	Barkot Town, Uttarkashi	5-6 Cows (replaces every 5-7 years)	50 litres (sells 45 litres; 5 litre is used for personal consumption)	50 rupees per litre/kg	20 years
5.	?	Ponti Gaon, Barkot, Uttarkashi	1 Buffalo (replaces every 5-7 years)	10 litres (sells 9 litres; 1 litre is used for personal consumption)	60 rupees per litre/kg	15 years

6.	Shobha	Kamand Gaon, Tehri Garhwal	1 cow (sold recently due to financial and time constraints)	7 litres (sold 5 litres; 2 litre is used for personal consumption)	55 rupees per litre/kg	3 years
7.	Aunty Ji	Kamand Gaon, Tehri Garhwal	1-3 cows (replaces every 5-7 years)	30 litres (sold 25 litres; 5 litre is used for personal consumption)	60 rupees per litre/kg	10 years
8.	Dudhwali Mami	Fold Gaon, Uttarkashi	1 cow and 1 buffalo (replaces every 5-7 years)	15 litres	40 rupees per litre/kg	30 years
9.	Meena Rawat	Barkot Gaon, Uttarkashi	1 cow and 1 buffalo (replaces every 5-7 years)	15 litres	50 rupees per litre/kg	25 years
10.	Bhajan Dei	Barkot Gaon, Uttarkashi	1 cow and 2 buffalo (replaces every 5-7 years)	15 litres	50 rupees per litre/kg	30 years
11.	Sumitra Rana	Bagsari Gaon, Dhanari, Uttarkashi	6 cows (replaces every 5-7 years)	35 litres	50 rupees per litre/kg	25 years
12.	Rajkumari	Bagsari Gaon, Dhanari, Uttarkashi	1 cow and 1 buffalo (replaces every 5-7 years)	15 litres	50 rupees per litre/kg	20 years
13.	Cheta Rana	Bagsari Gaon, Dhanari, Uttarkashi	2 cow (replaces every 5-7 years)	12 litres	50 rupees per litre/kg	30 years
14.	Nagdei	Gyansu Gaon, Uttarkashi	2 cow (replaces every 5-7 years)	12 litres	50 rupees per litre/kg	40 years
15.	Mateswari Devi	Gyansu Gaon, Uttarkashi	2 cow (replaces every 5-7 years)	12 litres	50 rupees per litre/kg	40 years
16.	Reshma	Gyansu Gaon, Uttarkashi	2 cow (replaces every 5-7 years)	15 litres	50 rupees per litre/kg	15 years

Fig.1: Data of women producing cattle milk in several areas of Uttarkashi and Tehri

District for the economic upliftment of her family

Note 1: People measure milk in Kgs (instead of litres) in hilly regions of Uttarkashi and Tehri Garhwal District

Note 2: “?” indicates that the milkwoman does not want to reveal her name.

The above data proved that a lot of rural women depend on milk production for economic prosperity. In their book, Singh and Shrivastava, in simple terms, have explained the milk industry in detail, and done a “SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threats) analysis, focussing on the needs, objectives, and significance of the White Revolution. The detailed index aligns everything in tandem from start to the end in the book which makes it

easier to go to the description detailing the effectiveness of the milk production in India” (v-xi). It was a book that, with an Indian perspective, was a great start to understanding the milk revolution in India. Under SWOT analysis, the main strength of Amul, the largest milk co-operative, is being the production of milk, market share and larger consumer base apart being the quality of the milk; the weakness lies in further expansion and legal issues; the opportunity for Amul

was international expansion and expanding product portfolio; and lastly the threats are increasing competition and growing veganism trend all over the world. “In 2008, the World Bank hailed the program’s success and on similar levels promoted schemes in Africa” (Scholten). The White Revolution of India became imperative in understanding the whole scheme, level by level, leading to success and creating a new future using its context in motion.

In the article on *mocomi.com*, the website shortened everything for kids for understanding:

The White Revolution helped increase milk productivity and milk was now sold at competitive market prices. This program increased the demand for the development and production of healthy animals, the use of modern technology in the milk production sector, and networking between various small and large-scale dairy industries. The first of the three phases of the Milk Revolution started in July 1970 intending to set up dairy cooperatives in 18 milk sheds in 10 states. They were to be linked with the four best metropolitan markets. By the end of this phase in 1981, there were 13,000 village dairy cooperatives covering 15,000 farmers. Phase 2 aimed at building on the designs of phase 1 and the assisted Dairy development programs in Karnataka, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh. By the end of this phase in 1985, there were 136 milk sheds, 34,500 village dairy cooperatives, and over 36 lakh members. The last Phase, 3 emphasized consolidating the gains of the earlier two phases by improving the productivity and efficiency of the dairy sectors for long-term sustainability. It ended in 1996 and by that time there were 73,300 dairy cooperatives and over 9.4 million farmer members.

The Milk Revolution created many stories which started locally in every part of India. Every woman who took part, and is still involved in the revolution, has the story of not getting enough due to fewer means but slowly and gradually everything changed. They became self-reliant and helped their children and families to a better life, through a little investment and a lot of hard work. Every story was a fact and fictionalised movies like ‘Manthan’ are solely based on the truth of the Milk Revolution. Books have been

written and millions and millions of stories proved that the White Revolution has been a success.

Then there are stories of women in Tehri and Uttarkashi of Uttarakhand who got a new lease of life through the milk of their own, and how the Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) came to their rescue. One such project is “Women Dairy Development Project under Scheme of Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP) in District Tehri Garhwal of Uttarakhand (Hifeed)” This project helped a lot of women in dairy related subsidiary incomes. The main objective of this Hifeed programme was:

- To provide training to women beneficiaries in dairy development programmes, at family level and cluster levels.
- To organise women in the form of cooperative societies and making facilities economically viable through training, infrastructure and access to credit.
- To enable women groups in dairy development programmes for enhancing income and employment generation opportunities.
- To provide technical back up packages to women beneficiaries in animal husbandry practices and dairy development programmes.
- To enable active participation of women from economically weaker sections, SC, ST, OBC and BPL families in their own village economy.
- To empower women to be able to move in the positions of decision making power.
- To develop grass root level leadership.

This programme facilitated lives of women at the grassroot level because of the clear objectives: “providing training and skills needed for the dairy programmes, giving literature and course material to the trainees, giving technical assistance and infrastructure, health facilities, marginal money to purchase cattle by women beneficiaries,

marketing support to the milk cooperatives and milk producers” (Hifeed).

In Uttarkashi, “Uttarakhand Co-operative Dairy Federation Ltd. (UCDF Ltd.), the apex federation of district milk cooperative unions in the state of Uttarakhand, established Uttarkashi Dugdh Utpadak Sahakari Sangh Ltd. in 1989 which has helped numerous women since then by creating alternate employment avenues for women” (UCDF). For the same goal, “Tehri Dugdh Utpadak Sahakari Sangh was established in August 1999 in New Tehri” (UCDF). An article on the betterindia website states: Patma, a resident of one of the village in Uttarkashi took loan in January 2011 and bought a cow. She narrated her short successful short story:

“We are happy today. Earlier, when we worked at cutting grass, we were unable to make any money,” remarks Patma. “Now, with my cows producing milk for at least ten months of the year, I make a profit of between Rs 5,000-6,000 a month. Moreover, my children are getting good nourishment and we even utilise the dung from the cows as fertiliser,” she discloses with a smile. (Dairy Diaries)

There are thousands and thousands of stories in the mountains where lives of a family have been changed by the touch of the milk. These stories are no less than folklores, fables and short stories or novels in their own perspective, though they are all told mostly in one gasp–oral literature of the mountains. Every woman has a story to tell, and every story has all the elements of a story. It has a plot, the characters, theme, the settings, the narrative point of view and each woman has a style of her own, especially the innocent one. No one can tell the mystery behind the smile in spite of such hardships in the hills, but everyone survived and with a happy tone in times of adversity. No literature can ever be complete without telling the story of these women who stood tall and created a story of their own.

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