

Barney Hall, the youngest, untenured professor in the department of veterinary sciences at the University in Calgary had been told off, in no uncertain terms, that he had either to produce papers in refereed publications, or get research grants if he wished to extend his stay at that establishment. His previous attempts at reading papers at conferences had been uniformly unsatisfactory, and even dangerous. A small review paper of his on the usefulness of growth hormones at a one-day workshop organized by the cattle industry had roused loud protests from green fiends and health freaks; another oral presentation in his own university on improving the quality of veal by close-penning calves led to an animal rights activist rushing the dais to stab him with her ball-point pen. He was now genuinely scared that if he attempted to publish a paper he might get a letter-bomb by return post. The only option was to go for a government grant, but the bureaucrats in Ottawa were now cagey after public outcries against them for spreading mad cow disease.

During this unhappy period, he was invited to dinner by an Indian colleague from the department of electrical engineering who had gained fame by inventing a rugged non-breakable light-emitting diode, which encased in a patented Canadian plastic holder could be stuck onto the seat of one's pants as a safety device during dark nights. Though his sensibilities revolted against the smell of curries, he went along hoping to pick up a tip or two on how to swing grants his way. His Indian friend was too full of himself to listen to his veiled requests, but enlightenment came when he was served curds and rice. They helped to mitigate the sharpness of the curries, and if he remembered his undergraduate course on nutrition right, live curds also contained useful microbes that helped break down food faster, and promoted the absorption of the 'B' family of vitamins. Curds were produced from milk, and milk came from cows, which were part of his turf!

With great excitement he focused his research on curds, how they could be made to the highest Canadian health standards, and how their quality could be improved in terms of quantity and nutritive value. By the time the first few shoots of green grass broke out of the eternal snows blanketing the campus, he had completed an exciting proposal how Canada could teach the poor of the third world the benefits of eating curds. The head of his department was equally thrilled, to whom all this was very new, never having ventured even to try a fruit yogurt, since the very name had a threatening French sound to it. In any case, the university was hungry for money, and it would do him no harm if a junior of his caught the fancy of the bigwigs in Ottawa.

The two professors need not have worried so much about what reception they would get in the capital; the vice-president of the Canadian International Development Agency immediately saw the advantage to himself, his department and his country, if this project were to be supported, and throwing his arms round Al and Barney led them to the cafeteria for a cheap lunch. At the coming review meeting for reallocating budgets, he sponsored the project, added more expenses, and asked for ten million dollars Canadian to be given to the university to set up a separate foundation to further the on-going research, and extend its benefits to all non-terrorist countries. He was able to convince the Canadian government that a hundred million spent on this project would bring back home five hundred million in earnings through exported curd churns of the latest Canadian

design; consultancies of Canadian curd experts – to be insisted upon by the Canadian donor agencies; and sale of curd technology and curd starters to third world non-terrorist countries.

Since India was a major player in the Aid Recipients Market, it was decided by CIDA that the Canadian Curd Mission would see its birth in that country. Dave's success at garnering a large and stable grant had suddenly made him very popular with the higher echelons of academia; he was even invited for a barbecue-fest in the vice-chancellor's back garden during a quickly warming June Sunday. Grant money gave Barney a new poise; and girls instead of trying to stab him with ball-point pens were willing to be asked out to dinner. During a brainstorming session in the basement of his department, several of his new girl admirers spontaneously came up with the name for his foundation: It was to be The Great Canadian Curd Churn! Over a million dollars Canadian were spent on designing the foundation's chic booklets and leaflets, with inevitable pictures of starving African children on the cover and a smiling Indian girl at the back, skipping along eating curds out of a plastic cup with a visible logo of The Great Canadian Curd Churn. The National Film Board of Canada sent teams to thirty odd countries to film trees, colours, lakes, and silent sands, with quick glimpses of local people making, eating, relishing curds. The film won several awards round the world, and continued to be considered a high point in Canadian film-making history. A lot more money was spent on organizing talk shows and other media events, and Barney had the time of his life flying to Sofia, Nairobi, Stockholm, and Madras, to introduce his life's work.

Sharmaji was well aware of all these developments, since he always kept his nose close to the well-known points of grant generation. He was one of the first to congratulate Barney on his fundamental scientific discovery, and suggest that a partnership between the foundation and his own society would help *immediately in saving lives*. Barney listened wide-eyed to the tone of feverish urgency in Sharmaji's voice, and held himself in readiness to save the lives of the poor children he had seen so often on the cover of his brochure. The CIDA official in New Delhi invited the press corps to witness the gift to Sharmaji of one hundred curd churns of the latest Canadian design. The broadly smiling Canadian High Commissioner was flanked by a team of Canadian Curd Technologists, who had been taking anti-malarial pills for a month, and who had brought their own portable Canadian water-purifying kit for use during the arduous training programme they would carry out in Sharmaji's villages. In New Delhi itself, Sharmaji held an orientation meeting for his guests, showing blown-up pictures of cobras, kraits, and Russell's Vipers for easy recognition in case they found them in their bathrooms, or in their shoes. The non-poisonous varieties were to be gently shooed away, while the poisonous ones could only be gently removed by his own trained staff. A young Canadian curd technologist wondered if Sharmaji could teach her how to gently remove poisonous snakes herself, since she couldn't bear to kill any living thing, other than spiders which she dreaded.

A small tent township was erected by Sharmaji near his rural center for the international electronic media teams, of CNN, BBC, German radio, France One, and of course CBC, who camped there for a fortnight to create live programmes on how Canadians were

saving the lives of poor women and children by teaching them how to make and eat curds.

However, Canadian nutritionists warned on several talk shows that Indians being ‘Non-Caucasians’ would be lactose-intolerant, and hence unable to immediately assimilate milk or a milk product, such as curds, and great care must be taken in introducing curds into India. Emeritus Professor Mike ‘Hogwash’ Adamson, who had justified the sobriquet he received in youth by winning the Canadian Jakob Creuzfeld Award for high-protein engineering of cattle feed, declared himself cautiously hopeful. Filmed on his cattle ranch in Alberta, he took the viewer carefully over the intricate science involved in making a ‘Non-Caucasian’ drink milk, and came up with a ‘unique all-Canadian theory,’ in Rosaline Blabberwell’s words! The TV crews, intent on fair reporting, also showed a five-second clip of Indian malcontents holding up placards in Indian dialects with slogans about Indians having eaten curds everyday over the last five-thousand years.

“ I have watched Masai tribesmen drink milk,” said Professor Adamson, shaking his head in wonder and pursing his lips. “ Now the Masai are also Non-Caucasian, and yet they can drink milk. Scientifically this has never been explained! I kind of guess it could come from drinking raw blood from an opened vein in the neck of a cow, calf, or bull, you take your pick. Look, I will show you.” As the camera followed him, he trotted into his barn, slit open the neck vein of a small calf and bent down to drink the blood.

“ How does it taste, Hogwash?” asked Rosaline excitedly.

“ Oh, I dunno, it kinda tastes like, I guess, raw blood,” said the professor straightening up and wiping his mouth with his handkerchief. “ There, I ruined that kerchief, dunno what Elsie is going to say when I get back in. But science is demanding.”

“ Canadian science is making small but important breakthroughs like this everyday to help people living all over the world. One day soon, Mike ‘Hogwash’ Adamson’s novel idea may help save an Indian child’s life, but unfortunately the Hindoo religion might prevent millions upon millions from making use of this simple measure. This is Rosaline Blabbermouth taking you back to the CBC studio in Calgary where a group of young Baptists are even now with Swami Biriyaninanda, who runs the Yoga clinic downtown. Let us see if religious taboo can be lifted to permit millions of starving children to drink raw cow’s blood.”

When Sharmaji was interviewed by the CBC in his rural ‘unit,’ he said that with the help of the Canadian Curd Training Programme he had been able to induce the first learners to eat a little bit of curds. When the camera went into the canteen, it showed rows of frightened women refusing to eat curds, till Sharma over there spoke to them in their own, I guess, Hindoo dialect, and then after a few hesitant mouthfuls, the enthusiastic response of the poor women to this Canadian food was really, really, overwhelming. When the Canadian High Commissioner was interviewed in New Delhi, he said proudly that his own kitchen staff had been asked to include curds in every menu, and he and his

diplomatic guests from now on would eat at least a symbolic spoonful of curds to show that Canadians empathized with the people of India.