



Case Studies on Women-led Enterprises Volume X

***SHANTI ASHRAM – AMRITA SCHOOL OF
BUSINESS***

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POORNAM: LIGHTING LIVES WITH HOPE

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*The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day
runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures.*

*It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless
blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers.*

*It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean-cradle of birth and of death,
in ebb and in flow.*

*I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world of life.
And my pride is from the life-throb of ages dancing in my blood this moment.*

*Rabindranath Tagore
Praan (Gitanjali)*



INTRODUCTION

This study documents the success stories of women-led enterprises supported through the “Poornam” initiative of the Shanti Ashram, Coimbatore. It is a continuation of nine earlier studies on women-led enterprises conducted by the students of Amrita School of Business (ASB) in the years 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018.

The objectives of this study were:

1. To make an initial attempt to document the experience of successful women-led Enterprises.
2. To share the motivation and strategies that the groups employed while running the enterprises.
3. To study the economic achievements and viability of the enterprises
4. To identify gaps and risk factors that challenge the sustainability of the enterprises
5. To give recommendations for the growth and development of the enterprises.

The present study was conducted by a team comprising an ASB MBA student and an ASB faculty member in February 2019. The team was accompanied by senior staff from Shanti Ashram. Interviews were conducted with two women entrepreneurs.

The following women and their micro-enterprises were the focus of this study

1. Rukmani: *Rearing Goats*
2. Chithra: *Grocery Store*

The report has been prepared based on interviews and interactions with the women entrepreneurs and observations on how they conduct their business.



Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the women entrepreneurs for sharing their experiences of running their enterprise with us.

We would like to thank Dr. S.R Subramanian and Bhuvaneswari Akka, who accompanied us for the interviews.

Dr. SRS Anna is a source of inspiration for many; he is a role model for what one human being can achieve in a lifetime as he continues to work tirelessly for a higher cause even at the tender age of 80. His vision includes *Sarvodaya* – the upliftment of all; and *Antyodaya* — seeking to ensure that the poorest in society do not get left behind (but can instead express their potential).

We would also like to thank Bhuvaneswari Akka for her warmth and caring. She has been patiently recounting the lives of the women entrepreneurs to the students of Amrita School of Business for over ten years. We admire her long-term commitment to the women's programme at Shanti Ashram.

The Study Team

1. Prof Shobhana Madhavan. Faculty, Amrita School of Business
2. Durga Gunasekaran , MBA Student, Amrita School of Business 2017-2019



Case Study- 1: Rukmani



NAME OF SHG: *MANASVINI*

TYPE OF ENTERPRISE: *Goat rearing*

LOCATION: *J.J Nagar,
Kuniamuthur*

YEAR OF INITIATION:
Family Business for 60 years

Motivation Behind Starting Enterprise

Rukmani is a self-confident and dynamic women entrepreneur around 60 years old. She was married young around the age of 16 after completing her tenth grade. She has two sons. One of them works as a lecturer in a college. The other works in a private enterprise.

Rukmani and her family appear to be very well settled. Unlike many other women entrepreneurs in Shanti Ashram's women's empowerment programme, Rukmani did not start the business on her own. Her husband's family has been in the goat rearing business for over 60 years, and Rukmani has used her entrepreneurial skills to develop and maintain the business. The family has about 80 goats and some chickens and a cow. The veterinary doctor is called every six months to check up on all the animals.

Rukmani sells the goats she rears for about 3000 rupees a piece. Most of the eggs from the chicken are used for their own consumption. The family get around 10



Interviewing Rukmani

litres per day of milk from the cow. Most of the milk is consumed by the family. If there is any remaining milk, it is sold in the neighbourhood. There is a high demand for the high quality natural milk that her cow produces.

What is remarkable about Rukmani is her involvement and support in helping her two sons run an unusual business — breeding professional racing homer pigeons. The terrace of her home is filled with pigeon cages. The family sells these pigeons to racers, and some of the pigeons are sold for thousands of rupees. According to Rukmani, one of the pigeons raised by her family won the Tamil Nadu State gold medal.

Strategies Used to Run Enterprise

- The family is well known in the locality since they have run the animal husbandry business for decades. They do not need advertisements.

Economic Achievements

- The income from animal husbandry helped her to educate both her sons to so they could do their Master's degree.
- The sons not only hold full time jobs, but also run a profitable competitive flying pigeon business.

Comments on Viability/ Sustainability of Business

The business is sustainable. There is always a demand for country eggs, good mutton and natural milk.



The Racing Pigeons

The nature of the business offers a natural insurance against crises. Rukmani shared how her family tided over many problems as they could always sell a goat for ready cash.

Future Plans

Rukmani appears to be fairly content with her life. The niche business of breeding racing homer pigeons appear to be doing successfully. Her goat business continues as it always has, but it is the racing pigeon business that occupies pride of place in their family. The family has a shared passion that is heartening to behold.

Other comments

During our interview, Rukmani spent the first ten minutes complaining how the former President of their SHG named Renganayaki took loans from the members and absconded with the money. Rukmani was trying to blame Shanti Ashram for the debacle until she was reminded that the loan had nothing to do with the Shanti Ashram and it was the private decision of each member to loan Renganayaki money.

Concluding Remarks

Rukmani appears to be fairly content with her achievements. She also seems to have a supportive family with strong bonds. While we were in her home, her husband's brother dropped by and he spoke about the family and community. She and her husband help her sons by looking after the pigeons while the sons hold full time jobs outside.

Case Study 2- Chithra



TYPE OF ENTERPRISE: *Grocery Store*

LOCATION: *Moovendar Nagar,
Kuniamuthur*

YEAR OF INITIATION: *2009*

Motivation Behind Starting Enterprise

Chithra started a grocery store for economic reasons — her family needed a source of income. She runs the store with her husband. When she started her store, there was no grocery in the neighborhood and setting up a store seemed like a good opportunity. Chithra's husband buys the supplies from town while she serves customers in the shop most of the day. Chithra pays a rent of Rs 3000 per month for her shop. The shop has a daily sales of about 3000 rupees per day. She and her husband make purchases on a daily basis from wholesale merchants. Some products such as milk are delivered by the supplier to the store.

Chitra has two sons, both of them are now married and the family stays together. Her two sons work with Chennai Silks. What is remarkable is that Chithra insisted that both her daughters-in-law continue their education after marriage. Chithra shared that since she herself had to cut short her studies and was married off very young by her parents, she wanted to make sure that her daughters in law did not have to go through the same experience. One daughter-in-law completed her B.Tech



Chithra with her spouse and interview team in front of her store

(full-time) while the other has completed her B.Ed degree. Chithra is very eager that both of them get good jobs.

Strategies

- The shop is open for very long hours from 5 am to 11 am. Since they sell milk products and basic household necessities they have customers throughout the day
- Being polite to all customers

Viability

- A few other grocery stores have come up in the neighbourhood and her business got negatively impacted.

Economic achievements

- Chithra has been able to educate her two sons and her two daughters-in law with her income.

Plans for the Future

- Chithra dreams of a day when she owns a large shop or even a supermarket built on her own land.

SHANTI ASHRAM VISIT

Reflections by Durga Gunasekaran, ASB MBA Student

In the last year of my MBA I got this wonderful opportunity to visit Shanti Ashram and participate in the Mahalir Mela women's entrepreneurship programme. What made me feel the NGO a unique place is the leadership by an empowered woman, Dr. Kezevino Aram, who runs it with a wonderful vision and mission, helping the needy. The words Vinu Akka said are still lingering in my minds... she said " it is not just getting from the society but also making the young students understand their part of saving and making the world a better place to live in by giving back'.

Shobhana Mam had always said that Vinu Akka is one of the best leaders she had seen, and when I met her I could understand why. From watchman to doctors in the nursing home, each one addresses her as Vinu Akka with so much love and the practice has such an impact over others without naming anyone but fondly addressing as Anna/Akka regardless of age differences which makes the atmosphere nothing but a family. What touched me most apart from the positive environment where Shanti Ashram is built, is the opportunity Vinu Akka had given to differently abled like Ramu and Thangakili Akka who were beaming with energy and appeared very happy to do their part of service. I loved the day thoroughly visiting rural women entrepreneurs.



It was very generous of SRS Sir to accept our request to prepone the women entrepreneur activity, when my classes got cancelled in eleventh hour. I felt blessed when everything fell right into the place, the day I could never forget. The ever cherishable experience I went through with him still runs before my eyes. At this age, his activeness, spirit and energy is unimaginable. To have heard about his career path, students he had nurtured who are into great roles and responsibilities now, was highly inspiring.

Both the women entrepreneurs, Rukmini Akka of Goat rearing and Chithra akka of grocery store, filtered among others for Kasturba Gandhi awards were soulful women who were highly efficient in their respective business. I got awe-spined by their spirit and business handling techniques without any proper education or management qualifications. As an MBA student I was highly touched by this entrepreneurial aspect of them.

Both of them were highly skilled in their respective fields. Yet Chithra Akka was my personal favourite too just as my mentor Shobhana mam felt. She was a one-woman army who up brings both her family and business. She had raised two sons as an empowered mother and now she continues that by being mother of her two daughters in laws, by continuously supporting them to pursue higher education through regular courses. She even supports them by taking care of the grandchild. She was truly awe-inspiring.



On International Women's Day, Mrs. Chithra was awarded her life's first award by Shanti Ashram in such grandiose Women's Day event which motivated her to thrive more in life.

The Women's Day events were organized so well which even inspired dignitaries from various fields. The 'Dialogue with boys' was an intellectual event when adolescent boys spoke on equality with such clarity. It was so promising to see the next generation has a better vision on women empowerment when each boy shared their personal experience and how they support the women in their family and friends' circle. This is yet another distinguishable aspect I noticed in Shanti Ashram, where Women's Day was not just about women. It is engaging the society on whole in order to achieve equality, the statement was put into action by the team.

My heartfelt gratitude to the sweetest smartest and most empowered professor Shobhana Madhavan, a perfectionist who has given my life's first golden opportunity in volunteering for an NGO. Despite being an active member of rotaract club in Stella Maris college, the experience I had felt through Shanti ashram was the most enriching event as it is run by a 'people leader' Dr. Vinu akka.

Prof. Shobhana Madhavan from Amrita School of Business is my role model who inspired me through every aspect of her action as a lovely philanthropist through village outreach program in Ettimadai Village other than being a great teacher in teaching interesting Negotiation classes in first year to Cross Cultural



Management in last year of my MBA, both of which involved interactive learning practices.

Shobhana Mam gave me the opportunity to interact with the team under Vinu Akka's guidance. Vinu Akka inspires a lot of young woman like me and I wish to continue to be a part of Shanti Ashram's wonderful philanthropist activities in future too.