

Q: You recently launched your biography titled 'Triumph through Tragedy,' outlining the challenges you have faced over the years. Could you tell us about your journey?

A: It is a story where I lost my husband when I was 25. He was an Army officer who was ambushed by the terrorists during the insurgency in 1971. My elder daughter was two-and-a-half years old and I was expecting my younger daughter.



I thought I should do something, firstly to keep myself occupied and also because I always had entrepreneurial ideas in my mind but my husband did not want me to work. I had done batik as a hobby while I was in Colombo with him and I thought I would start it on a commercial scale, which my father also discouraged, thinking that I would not be able to handle labour and marketing. But I was bold enough – I got a few girls, trained them in the technique and I started making batiks in 1973. With my kids hanging on to me, I still managed to carry on the work.

I started this operation under Ramya Batiks. Then I ventured into the export market in 1976 by attending trade fairs in Europe. By 1980 I bought the land in Kadawatha, built a house and moved here by 1982, got the girls in Colombo schools and closed down my batik workshop in Kurunegala. I am from Kurunegala and I was with my parents at the time.

“It was very difficult at the beginning; no one believed in me, not even my parents. As a result, I had a very hard time to convince the banks and the government officials. But I took a lot of risks and went ahead

When I started, though it was a limited liability company, my father was never active in the business. One bank said, 'you being a woman, it will be a liability to the bank if we give facilities to you'

I feel with my being in the business, I was able to help many underprivileged people and serve the community, those who are less fortunate, by providing them with shelter and healthcare and giving them encouragement in their desperation, giving them support mentally by telling them my story. I feel this is what I have achieved, which I am continuing to do

We should have a mission and we should work towards it in an ethical manner, managing in a very honest way. Women should be courageous, have a lot of patience and balance the family and business together. It's difficult for a woman, unlike for a man – she has to balance both without disturbing either”

Then I devoted more time for the children and later I thought again that I should start something. After doing some research, I entered the garment industry under Ramya Apparels, which was a limited liability company established in 1987 and I took my father as the other Director. Commercial operations started in 1988. I started with 35 machines; now we have five factories with 5,000 employees and giving sub-contracts to many other factories. We have also developed a self-employment system.



