



Creative Manufacturing Stories:

Interviews with women co-owners of
Bangalore Greenkraft and Ektha Apparel
Incubated by Industree Foundation



2017



Sarina

Producer Company:
Bangalore Green Kraft
(BGK)

“Women shouldn’t depend on their husbands. They should support themselves. I am earning for three people, and taking care of my husband and son.”

What’s your name?

Sarina

Where are you from?

I am from Somasundarapalya, HSR layout, Bangalore.

What were you doing before you came to Ektha? How long have you worked here?

I joined Bangalore Green Kraft as a helper in 2008. I had started this kind of work in 2005 at another apparel company, where I was in the cutting department. Then the company closed and I joined BGK. I found out about Bangalore Green Kraft through other companies in the area.

What training have you received here at Bangalore Green Kraft? How has your role evolved?

After joining here as a helper, I got experience as a table worker, then as a line leader, and now I am a team leader. When I joined, I only knew how to place gum. In 8 years, I have learned a lot about production and management. I have also received First Aid training here. I learned skills quickly, from hard skills to management techniques.

What has your overall experience been at BGK?

In other companies, managers control the employees. But here at BGK, we work as a family. There’s a lot of freedom. In other production centers, the management doesn’t care about the employees. Here, we all care about each other, even the small details of each co-worker’s life matter to everyone.

Does your family support your work?

I don’t receive any financial support from my family, so they are happy that I came to work here.

What are the positive aspects of working here?

I like working here because we learn different designs and skills.

What are some of the difficulties you face while working here?

Nothing at all is difficult about the work. Of course, since we are sitting on stools we have back and neck pain, but we have started doing yoga every Thursday to resolve this issue. If I could make one change at work, it would be to move around more often.

What do you see yourself doing in the future?

I have a personal dream and a professional dream. Professionally, I currently manage 20 people but my dream is to manage 100.

Personally, I currently own my own house, but my personal dream is to buy a house for my son. I want to save up enough money to provide him with a good education.

I don’t want my son to have to take care of me in my old age. I want my husband and myself to be financially independent and capable of taking care of ourselves in old age.

What’s your message to the world on Women’s Day?

Women shouldn’t depend on their husbands. They should support themselves. I am earning for three people, and taking care of my husband and son.

What would you say to someone buying your products?

If someone would purchase one of our banana mats, I would explain that it’s eco-friendly and encourage people to buy the product.



Vendamma

Producer Company:
Bangalore Green Kraft
(BGK)

“I would encourage young girls to become interested in the kind of work I do.”

What’s your name?

Vendamma

Where are you from?

I am from Koramangala, Bangalore.

How long have you worked here? What has your experience been?

I have worked at BGK for six years.

What were you doing before you came to BGK? How has your role evolved since you started?

Before this, I was doing housekeeping. Here at BGK I have always been a tailor. I came to know about this company because I lived in the neighborhood where the headquarters used to be.

Does your family support your work?

Yes, my family supports my work.

What are the positive aspects of working here?

This job is better than housekeeping or other work, and the pay is also better. And there is company contribution to the pension fund.

What are some of the difficulties you face while working here?

There are no difficulties in this job.

What do you see yourself doing in the future?

I am happy to continue working as a tailor.

What’s your message to the world on Women’s Day?

I would encourage young girls to become interested in the kind of work I do.

What would you say to someone buying your products?

I would tell them about the product. I would be happy that they are buying my product.



Sumina

Producer Company:
Bangalore Green Kraft
(BGK)

“Women and men are equal. We can do the same work.”

What's your name?

Sumina

Where are you from?

I am from Darjeeling.

How long have you worked here?

I have worked at BGK for only ten months.

What were you doing before you came to Ektha?

Before this, I was living at home in my village in Darjeeling. I came to Bangalore to join my husband, who learned about BGK through friends.

How has your role evolved since you started? Have you received any training here?

When I joined I was only making boxes and now I am also making samples. Since I started working at BGK, I have received sample-making training. This was good training. All the training is ongoing, but I've learned a lot already.

The soft skills training we receive is important. Thanks to the soft skills training we understand that we are entrepreneurs, not employees. That gives me freedom to choose my work and not be under pressure.

Does your family support your work?

Yes. My family supports me in my work.

What are the positive aspects of working here?

Every woman does household work, but working here satisfies me because I've improved my status in life through learning new skills. This gives me a lot of happiness. Whether or not we do good or bad work, we are all friends. What I like best about working here is that everyone is friendly.

What are some of the difficulties you face while working here?

Language was the only difficulty I had in my work, but that is getting better. Initially, when I came I didn't know the local languages, so that was a problem. But gradually I learned the work, and now I appreciate the environment of women working together.

What do you see yourself doing in the future?

I want to learn to make other samples, and also learn how to make larger-sized products.

What's your message to the world on Women's Day?

I would say that women and men are equal. We can do the same work. Before, it was expected that women would stay home and do housework, but that's not the case anymore. Women should go out and work.

What would you say to someone buying your products?

I would tell someone who is buying my products, like a basket for example, that it's handmade, that I've made it myself, and that it's very high quality.



Radha

Producer Company:
Bangalore Green Kraft
(BGK)

What's your name?

Radha

Where are you from?

I am living in HSR layout, but am from Hassan district, Karnataka.

What were you doing before you came to BGK?

Before this I was a housewife. Before marriage, in my village, I was working as a schoolteacher for children in 1st-7th standard. I have a Bachelor of Education. Now my husband and I are in Bangalore to earn so we can go back to the village and settle comfortably.

How long have you worked here?

I have worked here for the past three and a half years.

How has your role evolved?

I joined as an accountant and joined an SHG (Self-Help Group). In three and a half years, I've become an administrator. I have learned responsibilities like line production reports, hourly production reports, daily production reports, waste management, chemical management, sharp object and nail policies, and I-Way compliance.

What training have you received here at Bangalore Green Kraft?

I have received first aid management training, so if anyone feels ill I can respond. I have also received Lean management training, I-Way compliance training, waste management and sexual harassment training.

What has your overall experience been at BGK?

In other companies, managers control the employees. But here at BGK, we work as a family. There's a lot of freedom. In other production centers, the management doesn't care about the employees. Here, we all care about each other, even the small details of each co-worker's life matter to everyone.

Does your family support your work?

My family is happy that I work here—both sides of the family support me in my work.

What are the positive aspects of working here?

I have a supportive manager, and my colleagues also support me, so this feels good. Neelam gives preference to women and supports us in all ways. I know that if there's any problem I can go to HR or speak to Neelam. Here in the office, we are all friendly; we celebrate one another's birthdays and can speak freely together on any subject.

What are some of the difficulties you face while working here?

When there's work pressure, I sometimes find the work difficult but aside from those times I feel free. I think this job is 20% difficult and 80% enjoyable.

Since I am the only person in administration and in charge of all the materials, sometimes my colleagues ask me for too many different things at the same time and this creates pressure.

What do you see yourself doing in the future?

In the future, I want to become a District Collector. I am in the process of completing my degree through correspondence classes. I like correspondence classes because they give freedom. I'm in the second year of the program, and will later prepare for the IAS exams.

What's your message to the world on Women's Day?

My advice on Women's Day is that women should work, learn a lot, and support their families and husbands. We women should be faithful to our husbands who are giving us the freedom to work outside of the home. We should not disrespect this freedom.

What would you say to someone buying your products?

I would tell someone who is buying our products about the product and where it comes from. I would explain that we are working under a Self-Help Group Producer Company model, and that our materials and processes are environmentally friendly.

“In other companies, managers control the employees. But here at BGK, we work as a family. There's a lot of freedom.”



Fatima

Producer Company:
Ektha Apparel

What's your name?

Fatima

Where are you from?

I am from Koramangala, Bangalore.

What were you doing before you came to Ektha?

Before this, I was working as a tailor at another company. I left because I had been working in the same company for 9 years. I came to Industree Crafts Private Limited when it was still a small company in Koramangala, close to my house. Then when the company became Ektha and moved to HSR Layout they provided a van service, and I continued work here. I learned about the job from a colleague at my former company.

How long have you worked here?

I have worked here for over four years now.

How has your role evolved?

I've been a tailor the entire time here at Ektha. I have learned a lot; I can join a collar, attach sleeves, and I can stitch any part of a garment that is needed.

What training have you received here at Ektha?

The soft skills training we are receiving now is very important. We are learning about money management, how to take care of our children and families, and how to save. It's important that we learn this because it's not just husbands who should know how to take money from the ATM. We should also know how to do it for ourselves.

Does your family support your work?

My family supports my work. My in-laws don't stay with me, but I live with my husband, my mother, and my son. Sometimes my husband has questions about why I come home late, but he knows that we both have to earn so we can support our son. My husband does contractual flooring work and so he doesn't always have steady work.

What are the positive aspects of working here?

Here, we are organized into Self-Help Groups, which means we can save money together and help one another. At other places, everyone works for themselves, earns for themselves, and goes home.

What has your overall experience been at Ektha?

My experience at Ektha has been good. Here, there is a van service to and from work. At other places, if you are a few minutes late they subtract it from your pay. Here, everyone understands each another and even if we are a few minutes late, it's OK and no money is cut. At Ektha, I also get to participate in designing garments, which I like a lot.

What are some of the difficulties you face while working here?

Here, there are no problems as such; but sometimes our production people put pressure if we leave the floor for some time. Like right now I am here in this interview, and there's a lot of work waiting for me back at my table!

What do you see yourself doing in the future?

In the future, I want my son to study well and get a good job. That is what my husband and I are both working for.

What's your message to the world on Women's Day?

There are women in villages who don't work. I am happy that I've been able to come out of the house and do tailoring. I think you can't run a household with just one person's salary, you need two people. Young girls shouldn't stay at home, because then they won't see what is outside. The products I create are going out into the world and so am I, and this makes me very happy.

What would you say to someone buying your products?

I would tell them that we are very happy and proud that our products are being sold around the world.

“Young girls shouldn't stay at home, because then they won't see what's outside. The products I create go out into the world and so do I, and this makes me very happy.”



Arifa
Producer Company:
Ektha Apparel

Don't keep girls at home. We must not restrict the girl child; families should give knowledge and freedom to girls to do what they want. Don't make girls feel unsafe or threaten them, don't stop them from being educated. But young girls should also remember to use their freedom responsibly.

What's your name?

Arifa

Where are you from?

I am from Koppal district in Karnataka.

How long have you worked here? What has your experience been?

I have worked at Ektha for three years.

What were you doing before you came to Ektha?

Before I came to Ektha, I was doing the same work as I am now; quality audits and assurance. I came here because my other company closed. Neighbors and friends had recommended that I come here to look for work.

How has your role evolved since you started?

When I joined, I was maintaining one batch. Then, I moved up to two batches, then to the full floor. Then I began working on finishing and sampling, and now I work on quality control and even train others in the same.

Does your family support your work?

Yes. Thanks to my work at Ektha, I have been able to help my husband open a mobile shop.

What are the positive aspects of working here?

Here at Ektha, we all know we are part of a producer company, so we all feel a sense of ownership over our work. We participate in bi-monthly meetings where we discuss both our personal and professional problems and solutions so that we can all help one another, whether it's speeding up production or helping someone resolve a personal issue. I have recently started organizing a new meeting group myself about a month back.

What are some of the difficulties you face while working here?

Work doesn't cause me any major difficulties. Sometimes the work pace is quite fast, like when there is a tight delivery schedule and not enough people to handle the order.

At my previous company, the stress and pressure from work was a lot more. But at least I have been able to implement what I learned at my previous company here at Ektha.

The biggest difficulty I had when joining was getting people to listen to me, since a new quality manager can be perceived as an "enemy" by the production line. But now, everyone is friendly to me and trusts my experience. All my co-workers are also my friends. I feel good coming to work every day.

What do you see yourself doing in the future?

I dream of opening my own department store one day, where I will sell creative products like crochet bags and recycled plastic bottles turned into flower designs. I will also do bead work.

For now, I am looking to find a channel to sell my own products. The designs and manufacturing are not a problem, but I do not know how to go about selling. I know that I would like to do business in an urban place, like Bangalore, and employ villagers in my hometown to create the products. I hope to create my own producer company one day.

What's your message to the world on Women's Day?

Don't keep girls at home. We must not restrict the girl child; families should give knowledge and freedom to girls to do what they want. Don't make girls feel unsafe or threaten them, don't stop them from being educated. But young girls should also remember to use their freedom responsibly.

What would you say to someone buying your products?

Ektha is a producer company, so everyone feels a sense of ownership. There's no stress from work, rather there is a sense of collective responsibility. After working here, we can gain enough knowledge to start our own businesses. Producer companies can be created all over the world so all people can learn what a micro-entrepreneur is.



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