

09/11/2001

A natural calling

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AS far as Komathy Morgan is concerned, language and nature are undeniably intertwined; it was her love for one that sparked off her passion for the other.

While studying English literature in University Malaya, Komathy was inspired by poems about nature.

"Poems extolling the beauty of nature pointed out to me the joy that nature can offer to those who behold it," said the director of landscaping consultancy Nova Blooms Sdn Bhd, who began her working life as an English tutor at the university after she graduated.

Her foray into the field of landscaping was inadvertently initiated by her dotting husband K. S. Morgan, who brought her some water lily plants from Thailand and encouraged her to cultivate them. This was back in 1995. Although both she and Morgan already had some knowledge about water lilies - being members of the International Water Lily Society - it was still not an easy task

"However, with much care and hard work, our efforts began to sprout results and we became hooked! A year later, we set up Nova Blooms," said Komathi.

Her love for plants is not the only reason that prompted Komathi to set up the company - there's another reason that is rather more altruistic.

"I used to spend a lot of time in Slim River and I was saddened by the miserable condition of the estate workers. The poverty level was high and many of the parents couldn't afford to send their children to school. So I decided to start the company and channel some of the profits to set up a trust fund for these children," said Komathi, who has started a fund for the children of her employees working in the company's nursery in Slim River.

Originally, Nova Blooms specialised only in growing water lilies. Its efforts earned it recognition from the Malaysian Industrial Development Authority, which granted it pioneer industry status in the cultivation of aquatic plants. From there, the company progressed to landscaping work when it received inquiries on how to incorporate the aquatic plants into garden d`cor.

Komathi said her biggest breakthrough was during the Malaysian Agriculture, Horticulture and Agrotourism 1999 exhibition, when her extraordinary water lily display caught the attention of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed.

"It was the ultimate acknowledgement for Nova Blooms. The Prime Minister was amazed by the different colours of the lilies we displayed, as he was under the impression that they only occurred in white and yellow.

"I'm proud to say that with almost 36 varieties being cultivated in our nurseries, we have the largest collection of water lilies and lotuses," Komathy said.

With the exposure gained from Maha, Komathi's business took off and she was swamped with orders and landscaping projects. From then on, the company experienced a healthy growth in business.

However, Komathy pointed out that the path to building a successful company has not been without obstacles, some of which drained her physically and emotionally.

"This is a male-dominated industry and I had to face prejudices and scepticism due to my gender. At one point I was ready to throw in the

towel," said Komathy, who was quick to add that her husband's encouragement and support through the trying times gave her the strength to persevere.

Her persistence paid off, and she has expanded her nursery and her water garden to a seven-acre plot. In addition, she has opened a new office in Bangsar, a centralised locale that enables her to service her clients effectively. The services offered by Nova Blooms include turfing, creating custom-made gardens, lighting, organic-based landscaping, hardscape and professional garden-based maintenance services.

At the heart of these services is Komathi herself. She has no qualms about rolling up her sleeves and getting her hands dirty on the job. She also travels extensively all over the country to supervise her projects not just in the Klang Valley, but also in Pahang, Kedah and Kelantan.

However, she does try to spend as much time at home with her family as she can.

"My husband is extremely understanding and he doesn't mind sharing the housework. He's more of a mother to the children than me!" remarked the diminutive mother of three.

Her work has won the appreciation of many clients through projects such as the Damai Laut Resort in Lumut, Swiss Garden Hotel Kuantan, bungalows at Country Heights, Kelab Darul Ehsan Ampang and Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur.

"As a consultancy, we approach landscape design in a professional manner and endeavour to come up with something that is both aesthetic and functional and can meet the needs of clients.

"We believe in promoting the concept of intelligent landscaping. We use minimum chemical substances and pesticides and opt for natural fertilisers, which is one of the main reasons why our clients are happy with us," explained Komathy.

Komathy is not inhibited by a lack of paper qualifications in landscape design. Her love for nature, inherent creativity and ability to learn have taken her a long way in the industry, not to mention a willingness to work with other professionals such as landscape architects and feng-shui consultants if her clients request it.

"Anyone can succeed in any business as long as they're willing to work hard and take pride in what they do. There are no short cuts to anything, you must be prepared to make some sacrifices," she said.

Her enthusiasm for nature is not just limited to her work but is carried through in her philosophy as well. She believes plants and trees radiate an energy that is therapeutic and calming to our senses and because of this, she emphasises the importance of a well-kept garden.

"The garden is the first thing you notice when you walk into the compound of a house. You have to pay attention to it, so that you create the right ambience for your home," said Komathy, who is brimming with more ideas related to plants. These include a tropical water plant research centre and diversifying into other businesses such as food and biotechnology.

"You cannot be complacent when things are going well. You have to work even harder to maintain what you have built-up," she pointed out.

And with that parting statement, she's off to commune with the plants in the little garden she's created on the top floor of her office.

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