



## AROMA SPREADS ITS FRAGRANCE FAR AND WIDE

– MR. R. PONNUSWAMY, FOUNDER,  
OF AROMA SRI MAHALAKSHMI DAIRY.

Some people dream of success, while others wake up and work hard at it.

R. Ponnuswamy is one among the latter. He is the Founder of Aroma Sri Mahalakshmi Dairy. He dedicates his success thus "My work is committed to preserve the health and wellness of families and farmers". Sri Mahalakshmi Dairy with its Aroma brand is a pioneer in the dairy industry in and around Coimbatore.

### EARLY LIFE:

R. Ponnuswamy hails from a small village near Perur which is close to Coimbatore. His father used to sell milk and had to go several miles by cycle every day to make ends meet. Ponnuswamy fondly recalls that his parents sent him to school and never encouraged him in selling milk which was their family business. They wanted him to study and settle in a government job. Selling milk by the liter to several tea shops and collecting money on a daily basis was a herculean task.

In fact, in the early 1950s, his father even contemplated closing down the milk business. R. Ponnuswamy was studying in 10th standard then. It was at his insistence that they stayed put in business with R. Ponnuswamy stepping in and taking over the responsibility to continue the business. He was given a time of one year to stabilize the business on the condition that, if things don't work out, he will have to continue his studies and they would close down the milk business.

With his task cut out, R. Ponnuswamy would cycle to Coimbatore two times a day to sell milk. That's 80 km per day. Thus began his journey. In spite of putting in so much hard work, the earnings were hardly Rs.100 per day. He would get paid on a monthly basis and the income was just sufficient to pay electricity charges of their farm. In a few months, he knew this was not a viable model and that they were losing money. He did a bit of analysis and found out that shops that were shut on Sundays and those which buy in small lots were not paying well and he sometimes had to even discard the excess milk. Back then there were no refrigeration facilities. He then started focusing on supplying to only well-paying shops and those which buy in bigger lots. These and a few small course corrections stabilized his business.

### THE FIRST SHOP:

After a few years, R. Ponnuswamy realized that to grow in business they must try to put up their own tea shop so that they can start consuming their stock and thus increase profitability. The first shop was put up in Vysial Street in Coimbatore. This shop was in the name of Sri Mahalakshmi. This tea shop had its own identity, some uniqueness to stand apart and make an impact. To demonstrate hygiene, it had a huge vessel with boiling water in which the glasses were kept immersed after wash. It also had chairs and fans for customers to sit and enjoy their tea. Back in 1970s these small measures were a novelty and helped in the tea shop making a mark. The quality of tea served helped establish the first bakery. R. Ponnuswamy slowly started adding more shops in Coimbatore and also branded them as Aroma.

### GROWTH:

Over a period of time, the bakery business ensured that there is no wastage in milk

produced and also higher profitability. In parallel, the dairy business also started growing. In the 1990s Sri Mahalakshmi Dairies introduced cow's milk and also introduced milk sachets so that they are distinctly branded and sold. He even went to NDRI (National Dairy Research Institute) in Bangalore to study the packaging techniques and introduced them in Coimbatore. This enabled them to widen their products and reach and grow the Dairy business. They started distributing in a small area and over a period of time expanded their market. In early 2000, they tied up with a multinational company and started selling their products in the name of an international brand. However, this arrangement did not last long and after a year or so the collaboration was discontinued. The Aroma trade name was back in business. A few years back, Sri Mahalakshmi Dairies added a powder plant and are now selling a variety of milk products all over India. The brand Aroma has leading Kollywood actors as their brand ambassadors and is one of the well-established brands in the milk and milk products business. They have 1000 plus direct employees and around 30,000 farmers supplying milk to their various collection centers. The plants, collection process and payment to farmers are in sync and have a great degree of automation for quick and efficient results.

#### PRODUCTS:

Sri Mahalakshmi Dairy now sells a host of milk based refreshments from fresh milk, fresh cream, fresh curd, flavoured milk, unsweetened khova, paneer, ghee, skimmed milk powder and whole milk powder. Their primary moto was to focus on the poor and economically weak farmers in the districts of Coimbatore and Tirupur. Future plans include cheese and other specialized products.

#### QUALITY OF PRODUCTS:

Once the milk is collected from the farms, it is pasteurized and then, homogenized under specific guidelines to achieve the stringent quality standards. High standards of hygiene and purity are adhered to, at every stage - right from collection, processing, packaging to transportation. There are a total of 45 tests that the milk has to undergo right from the point of collection from the farmers to the point of packaging at every stage before it finally reaches the consumer.

Every morning and evening, thousands



of farmers in various villages milk their cows and reach the fresh milk to the dairy's collection centers. The fresh milk is tested at various stages and sent to the chilling centers before being processed in the dairy.



As proof of their commitment to consistent quality assurance, Sri Mahalakshmi Dairy and its products are certified by reputed accrediting agencies including TUV for excellence in food safety and management. The dairy is open to visits for school students and they have these young visitors almost every other week. The management proudly demonstrates to the next generation the best practice employed in ensuring product quality.

#### A CHAMPION:

Sri Mahalakshmi Dairy has over a period of five decades established itself as one of the leading players in milk and milk product business. From a small time milk vendor to a national dairy brand, R. Ponnuswamy has proved that there is no replacement for hard work and perseverance. He has received many an award and an honorary doctorate too for his pioneering work in his chosen field.

A remarkable journey indeed, by a true Champion of Kovai.