



## THE AMAZING STRENGTH OF THE NAICKER SISTERS'



Naicker sisters at their goat farm.

Age has certainly not been a barrier for three elderly sisters who have stuck together through thick and thin to continue the livestock farm, left behind by their father after he passed.

Meet the Naicker sisters; Pungaamma, 83, Tulsiamma, 81, and Damyanti, 71, who live on their goat farm overlooking Namuka Bay.

Continuing the farm and the experience that comes with it, has taught the sisters independence and strength in sticking together.

On the hill, with a view of Namuka Bay, amongst prairie, roam goats belonging to the Naicker sisters.

Damyanti, a retired school teacher, who spoke on behalf of her sisters, spent her youth teaching. She was once engaged to marry, only to have her dream shattered when her fiancée died.

Pungaamma, a divorcee, has devoted her life to goat farming with the help of their sister Tulsiamma.

The goat farm which started in the 1950's, was born out of love

for a father of 11 children, to his daughter to rebuild her life.

"My sister, Pungaamma after getting divorced from her husband returned home to the loving embrace of our father," Damyanti said.

"Our father was a locomotive operator for sugarcane. He bought a pair of goats for Pungaamma to start with and she expanded thereafter," Damyanti said with a smile.

It was not all success, as one

who begins a business of any kind knows.

Years after her successful goat venturing, bad luck again seemed to have found Pungaamma when 40 of her goats were stolen from the farm.

"She was devastated and cried for days till our brother who resides in Malomalo bought her another pair of goat," Damyanti said with sadness in her eyes.

Speaking with much wisdom, she said mishaps happened in life, but one must continue on the course.

"Those lessons prepare us for the world and decisions we make in life make us what we become," she said.

"We experienced heartache in our personal lives, tough-times with our livestock and hardship living as women at home with no men."

She added, it was their sisterly love that kept them going and while her sisters did not speak English well, they made it up for it with other talents such as sewing and cooking, which was perfect.

In terms of being independent women, who survived the cruelty of life together, Damyanti said women should not need to depend on men.

"Stand on your own two feet and look at ways you can survive, so when something happens you are ready and can carry on. If we could do it, so can any other women."

"Never look down on yourself, always remember that we are all talented at something and no one is perfect always."

For Damyanti, after she retired from the civil service she dedicated her time to the farm, rounding up the stock from the hills.

"It is my responsibility and at my age I enjoy it. I know where the goats are and they know my voice. When I call, my voice draws them near from the far places they have roamed," she said.

"My sisters would be waiting at the shed. I do not want them to go uphill because of their age but they are still strong and sometimes they assist in the rounding up the flock."

The Naicker sisters' love for animals dates back to their father when, at that time, they not only kept goats and cattle, but cats and dogs for security and helpers.

"Because we have no men on the farm and in our lives, these dogs and cats keep us company and entertain us daily," Damyanti said.

Reaching the sisters' farm is not a comfortable road trip. One wonders how they managed all these years' with the current farm road they use.

"The road has been our only way to market our goats and we have been stuck with this for years and apart from focusing on the farm and the stock we would be really grateful for one thing and that is to get a proper farm road," she said.

Today, the sisters' are looking after a stock of approximately 150 goats and 10 cattle.

## WESTERN FARMERS ENCOURAGED TO ESTABLISH FRUIT ORCHARDS

Farmers must view their role like any other business, in addition practice inter-cropping to be self-sufficient.

Those were the words of encouragement from the Provincial Administrator Nadroga Navosa, Ms Ruth Atu while officiating at an organized field day for farmers at Faizal Khan's Orchard farm in Vatukarasa, Nadroga recently.

The field day was held to motivate farmers in the western division to establish fruit orchards on their farms. The exercise is also part of the five initiatives of the Ministry of Agriculture to increase the establishment of Fruit Tree Orchards to farmers. Fruit Trees contain high nutritional value.

"There is a need to develop Fiji's fruit industry to include more locally grown fruits in our diets so it is vital that you set up fruit orchards on your farms for food security and nutritional aspects and the western division has the potential for orchard cultivation," she said.

Farmers were informed that under agriculture, they played a significant role in the process of economic development of a country.

"It sustains and drives the economy, the backbone of everything and apart from providing food and other raw materials, it also provides employment opportunities."

She said aside from seasonal fruit, having fruit tree orchards assisted to reduce the import bill of fruits, improve farmer's livelihoods and the health of Fiji's general population, and adds to the supply of local fruit," Ms Atu said

She said it was important to plant fruit orchards as a commercial crop and also think of developing value adding products from it.

With the current pandemic situation, farmers were encouraged to advance and develop farming as a business and for food security.

"We must no longer stay in the knowledge that it is a way of life but

go beyond where you look at it as an important lucrative business," she said.

Further, farmers were enlightened on record-keeping, creating linkages to market, introduced to dragon fruit and a new variety green pearl guava orchard farm.

Women farmer participant Ms Kelera Nasita said the field day was an introduction to new farming areas.

"Some of us are subsistence farmers with the interest to venture into newly introduced fruits for food and nutritional security," she said.

"Meeting with other farmers enables us to share experiences and learn from them. There is available land with the potential to cultivate fruit orchards, apart from the traditional ones to feed the local market."

The Faizal Khan Orchard farm is the first orchard farm in Fiji established under the initiative of the Ministry of Agriculture.



Faizal Khan explains to the participants about Dragon fruit.