



PROFILE

K.C. Rekha: Seagoing Fisherwoman from Kerala, India Dream Big, the Sea is the Limit

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Taking a road less travelled is not easy. Sometimes the whole of society stands against you. But no such fear deterred Rekha K.C. of Koorkenchery, a village in the Thrissur district of Kerala, India, the first woman in the country to go fishing in the deep waters of the outer sea. Amidst prevailing social stigmas, 45-year-old Rekha has been fishing in these waters with her husband Karthikeyan for ten years.

she would join him at sea. Today, she does the netting and catching, thus challenging the linguistic imbalance of the word 'fisherman'. "At first netting was difficult as it was all about calculating fathoms, but with practice we now net at 10-20 fathoms a day, depending upon the season," she says. Using only gill nets and hooks, they catch mackerel, sardine, tuna, pomfret, sole and other small fishes. "We may not have been able to save much, given our daily expenses, but there were times we would earn up to Rs 40,000 (USD 625) selling fish," says Rekha.

Rekha's day begins at three in the morning. She and her husband go out to sea by four o'clock. Although she can't swim, it is Rekha's intense belief in Kadamma (the goddess of the sea) that enables her to take up the challenge. Lacking any access to navigation technologies, their voyages rely solely upon traditional knowledge.

India's Central Marine Fisheries Institute recently felicitated Rekha for being the first woman to venture out to the outer seas for fishing.

Necessity may have forced Rekha to take up fishing but today it is her love for the job that keeps her going. "As long as my health allows it and the sea keeps me happy, I will continue my job," she says bravely. All she needs now is a new boat with a good engine to replace the current one which uses up too much petrol. Unfazed by her financial crises, Rekha continues to dream about the fortunes that Kadamma has in store for her each day. The dreams that twinkle in her brown eyes are as vast as the sea. ❏

"Although the sea is considered mother and goddess, our society forbids a woman from entering the sea," she says. "I faced strong opposition...they even said it would destroy the sea. There were even times when our nets were damaged," she adds.

Rekha is no stranger to struggle. Twenty years ago, when she fell in love with Karthikeyan, their families, being from different communities, and certain that the match was doomed to fail, opposed it. "Today, after all these years," says Rekha, "our work celebrates our togetherness and is a sweet revenge for all those who said our marriage wouldn't last." The couple is blessed with four children.

Rekha began her fishing career by helping Karthikeyan land his catch. As her expertise grew, one day Karthikeyan asked her whether