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A seafaring ray of hope

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Mature beyond her years, this Goan girl has already started making a difference to the world as we know it...



Malaika Vaz

At 20, Malaika Vaz has clearly aced the art of climbing the ladder — and is making headlines for all the right reasons. Award-winning wildlife documentary film maker, the country's youngest certified pilot and youngest explorer to go on an expedition to the Arctic and the Antarctic — with prestigious titles to her credit; Malaika has carved a niche for herself on the world map as an enterprising wildlife conservationist. She is currently working on an Asian conservation documentary focused on beautiful ocean giants — Manta and Mobula Rays.

Malaika is currently in Bengaluru. "The documentary focuses on the illegal trade in Manta and Mobula Rays across Southeast Asia," begins Malaika, who recently bagged the National Youth

Award conferred by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. Enthusing about the documentary, Malaika shares, “It has been an adventure filming this documentary, while free diving with animals in the Maldives, journeying to fishing markets across South India, and interviewing the main traders at the India-Myanmar border. This is a team project with Nitye Sood, the cinematographer and producer.” The documentary is slated for a mid-2018 release, and will be translated into Telugu and Tamil to reach out to local communities as well as global audiences.

The year looks promising for this enterprising youngster after a gripping documentary and a national award. Malaika adds, “I was incredibly humbled to receive the National Youth Award from the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs, along with other inspiring young Indians under 35. The award recognised those who have made compelling contributions to society in social entrepreneurship, technology, research, policy and more. It’s nice to have received this recognition, and believe that I have a lot to learn and work towards creating meaningful impact.”

The Goa-based youngster believes in the power of millennials to make a difference in the realms of oceanic and wildlife protection. “This generation is beginning to value nature and wildlife species, there’s an increase in awareness, and with the power of technology and the innate drive and knowledge, I see an upward curve in conservation,” says Malaika.

Outdoorsy to the T, Malaika indulges in extreme adventure sports. “I’m a certified PADI dive master, horse rider and national level windsurfer. I love going on horse riding expeditions too,” she says. Malaika also runs a social venture Kriya which she founded at 16. “The idea is to empower children and women who have been on the receiving end of violence, hailing from tribal communities, through adventure sports and outdoor education.”

Post high school, the wildlife film maker and adventure sports athlete resolved to pursue wildlife and oceanic protection, and stood by it. Through it all, her mantra remains — to find purpose within your sport. “I would definitely say that some of the best advocates for the protection of our planet, are pioneering mountaineers, scuba divers, sailors and explorers who push their personal boundaries in the wild, and came back home with stories challenging societal boundaries. For me personally, windsurfing, scuba diving, sailing, mountain climbing, kayaking and horse riding are ways to explore the natural heritage around me, and these experiences inspire me to centre my work around urging conservation action,” she concludes.