

## India's wonder woman



Dr Seema Rao  
The birth of a hero

Growing up, the naïve and scrawny Dr Rao had no inclination to physical fitness and even confesses to being bullied in school for her weak disposition. But that changed when she met her husband whilst studying for her medicine degree. “Watching him practice martial arts inspired me to follow suit. I realised I could be strong and be in control rather than be controlled.” So along with martial arts Dr Rao also learned unarmed combat skills and rifle shooting. A chance meeting with a

senior police officer led the couple to train the forces. Interestingly, the duo has been working pro bono for the past 20 years. Along with the satisfaction of doing good came the hardship of a life without a regular income. “We would be travelling eight months in a year with hardly any money to get back. There was a time when I had to sell my mangalsutra to survive.”

The financial strain notwithstanding Dr Rao has also had to face terrorist fire in Jammu & Kashmir and narrowly escaped getting shot. “Once on the way to Uri, my vehicle overtook an army convoy that was ambushed with terror fire, barely a few kilometres behind me. I have also evaded specific terror traps after being cautioned by certain agencies.” Being noticed and recognised is a hazard in this profession and Dr Rao would often travel under various aliases. So much so that many of her trainees in the armed forces were also unaware of her real name. “Now Internet has made my life story viral and I have got known all over, making my security more complicated,” she sighs.

In a freewheeling chat the brave heart Dr Seema Rao speaks on training the forces and living her dreams fearlessly



Breaking stereotypes: Dr Rao is also among the handful of instructors in the world authorised to teach Jeet Kune Do.

Don't be offended when we say that Dr Seema Rao could kick your ass. She could drown you with one hand. It's nothing personal. After all Dr Rao is a 7th-degree black belt holder in military martial arts, a combat shooting instructor and a firefighter. She is the only woman commando trainer in India. At a time when we were all busy whiling away our time in college canteens, Mumbai born Dr Rao was busy training in martial arts. The seeds for this were sewn early on when her father, a freedom fighter, would regale her with stories of his struggle. “Listening to those stories of how he escaped prison and swam across the Mandvi river to safety always thrilled me. I made up my mind that I would do something for the country.” That something came years later when Dr Rao along with her husband Major Deepak Rao started training the Indian forces including the Army Corps Battle Schools and its Commando Wing, NSG Black Cats, MARCOS, GARUD and Paracommandos..





### **The life of a commando trainer**

Training commandos in unarmed combat is not just physically exhausting but also brutally difficult. Along with challenges of acclimatisation at altitude, Dr Rao also has to fight endemic tropical diseases like filariasis (a parasitic disease caused by an infection spread by blood-feeding black flies and mosquitoes) in the jungle and heat stroke in the desert. Training usually starts at 6 am and continues up to 6 pm. Night exercises extend upto 4 am in the morning. Injuries are a part and parcel of Dr Rao's life. A severe vertebral fracture saw her laid up in bed for close to six months.

The recovery was long and hard, but she remains phlegmatic. However it was the head injury followed by amnesia that goaded Dr Rao to rethink her life. "Every time I asked my self if I wanted to continue, the answer was always a resounding yes. Life is tough but no one told me it was going to be a rosy journey." On a personal level Dr Rao decided to forego the joys of motherhood for undivided attention for her career. Later on the couple adopted a girl child who is now 25 years old.





### **Leading the men**

Dr Rao has had to earn her stripes when it came to training men in Close Quarter Battle. It wasn't easy she confesses. "Yes, men do get rattled when they see a woman training them. But I led by personal example and demonstrating that I could it. For this I had to keep my skills wound up at all times despite injuries." To say that Dr Rao is just a woman commando trainer would be limiting, though. She is also among the handful of instructors in the world authorised to teach Jeet Kune Do an eclectic and hybrid martial art founded by Bruce Lee in 1967.





Dr Rao has

recently helmed a movie on women empowerment

She's also a scuba diver, an HMI medalist in rock climbing and a Mrs India World pageant finalist. Her book on Close Combat Operations has a permanent home in the FBI, SWAT unit and the Interpol library. Now 48, Dr Rao shows no sign of slowing down. She recently helmed a movie on women empowerment. When not delivering motivational speeches to institutes and corporates Dr Rao loves dancing, listening to music and watching action films. "I am a very colourful person. Life is too short to not try your hand at everything."

**Tags: dr seema rao, woman commando trainer**

*Dr. Seema Rao, India's only female commando trainer.*

When you know more about her, it will not be an exaggeration when one says that, search for a true Indian hero usually ends with her.

After continuous terror attacks on Indian soil, Government of India decided to revamp its security and modernize its security forces. Indian forces were to acquire asymmetric warfare capabilities for new age wars. So, in 1996, Dr Seema Rao and her husband approached the Service Chiefs of Army, Navy, BSF & NSG and introduced their system. The chiefs were impressed with the couple's dedication and decided to try out their training programme.

She is the only female instructor who trains Indian Special Forces. Along with her husband, Seema has provided training to almost every elite unit of the Indian Forces, including the NSG Black Cats, MARCOS, GARUD, Para Commandos, BSF, the Army Corps Battle Schools and its Commando Wing. She has also trained officers of the National Police Academy, the Army Officers Training Academy and the Police Quick Response Teams of almost every major city in India.

She has been training our commandos for more than 2 decades for free of cost . Even when there was shortage of money, she and her husband decided not to accept money from the military for their services.

Dr. Seema Rao and her husband Major Rao has improvised the Close Quarter Battle (CQB) with better techniques exclusively for the use of Indian armed forces and named it the **Advanced Commando Combat System**<sup>[1]</sup>.

While crimes against women have been rising, Seema has prepared a counter-crime programme for women, **DARE** (*Defence Against Rape and Eve Teasing*), which will teach the women to be mentally and physically active and beat the crap out of anyone who dares to raise their lecherous eyes towards a woman's modesty.

She is a 7th-degree black belt holder in military martial arts. She is one of the few people in the world who have mastered the art of Bruce Lee's Jeet Kune Do and are authorised to teach it.

She is also a crack shot combat shooting instructor. She pioneered a system of shooting with her husband, named as *Rao System of Reflex Shooting*. It is found to be more quick and effective in hitting targets than other methods. This system is patented and is incorporated to different Indian military units. Regarding her system, she once said

“I can shoot an apple off a person's head from 50 yards without giving him a scratch” .

She is also a firefighter, film maker, a scuba diver and an HMI medalist in rock climbing. She was also a Mrs India World pageant finalist. In 2009 she also received prestigious IAF para wings from Air Chief Marshal himself and was trained by GARUD commandos for this.<sup>[4]</sup>

Dr.Seema Rao is also very highly educationally qualified. Besides being a doctor of conventional medicine (MD), she is also an MBA in Crisis management with a Phd.

Seema Rao is the proud daughter of prominent freedom fighter, Prof. Ramakant Sinari. He helped in the liberation of Goa from the Portuguese. She could not even attend her father's funeral as she was travelling through hostile territories for work at that time.

Even the near fatal injuries which happened to her, like the vertebral fracture or getting shot by insurgents or even a temporary loss of her memory due to a severe head injury, did not cease her from continuing her service to this nation.

She is also an accomplished subject matter expert and author in the fields of Counter terrorism, Close Combat Ops, Unarmed commando combat etc. Her books are used as references by FBI, INTERPOL, UN and SWAT Police Forces the world over.

She is internationally recognized through many prestigious awards like World Peace Award by World Peace Congress, US President's Volunteer Service Award, Prime Minister of Malaysia's award for contribution to the country in 2008 etc.

Her motherland acknowledges her services through more than 1000 felicitations from Indian government added to four Army Chief Citations, Home Minister of India's Letter of Commendation in 2009 placing on record the selfless National service in the field of close quarters battle training etc.

**But...**

Despite sharing equally in all of the above contributions as a couple, Dr. Seema was not conferred equal Rank in the Army as her husband. She has clearly shown that women can be equals to men in combat roles. But the Army is reluctant to commission women in combat capacity. In this 21st century, we do not have a provision which allows woman to be awarded even [Honorary Ranks](#) for their selfless contributions. When then President of India, a woman, could confer rank upon Dr. Deepak Rao, why not Dr. Seema Rao. She was equally part of the combat couple team. If the reason comes only to "*Because she is a woman*", its high time that we change those regressive rules and give a chance for our women to further improve our security forces.

In a field which is male dominated, Dr. Seema Rao is still fighting the good fight and has carved out a space for herself. For all the great things she is doing for our nation and especially for trying to break the glass ceiling for our women, we all will have only one word for her.....

**\*Right Hand to Chest\* Respect**

**JAI HIND**