

MY STORY

Vijay Patwardhan, 44, goes underwater to rake in the moolah

Poseidon ADVENTURER

My fascination with scuba diving started way back in 1981 during my college days. I had joined the National Cadet Corps in Mumbai and enrolled in an underwater diving course. The Indian Navy conducted the session. Just after

I finished my course, I went with a friend to one of the Rotary Club meetings where Vishwas Sapatnakar, who had returned from London, gave a demonstration on scuba diving. He wanted to start a training course for divers and given my background, I joined him in the venture. In 1982, we conducted our first training course, and till October 1995 both of us worked together. For me it was more of a hobby than anything else.

I received my first diving kit in quite an unexpected way. On 2 April 1993, I was requested by the police commissioner of Thane to recover deadly explosives including RDX, weighing 2,680 kg from the

bottom of the Nagla Bunder, near Thane. We had to make sure the underworld did not get their hands on the explosives which were, I am told, powerful enough to blow up Mumbai, Thane and half of Navi Mumbai.

By January 1995, the news of the

recovery had spread wide and some Indian expatriates in New Jersey, US, collected money and sent me a full set of scuba diving kit. I could never have thought of buying one myself since a full set cost around \$2,800 then (roughly Rs 85,000).

For me, scuba diving is both a pastime and a social service. I have been asked to help out by both the police and fire departments. I am regularly called in for the recovery of valuables, smuggled goods or even dead bodies

from underwater.

And it is because of this that I want to spread my

expertise around. I have been training students (Rs 800 for two hours for snorkelling; Rs 2,000 per dive for scuba experience). My income from these classes is around Rs 12,000 a month. I need to save a bit and add more diving kits as only then will I be able to expand. Each set of equipment is expensive, ranging from Rs 85,000 to Rs 1.3 lakh.

As a manager with Bayer India finding time for my hobby is getting increasingly difficult. I can only go underwater on weekends. I want to start diving sites along the west coast at Dwarka and Porbunder. Although awareness is low, I see a bright future in my new venture and intend to take it up full time by the end of this year.

As told to RAKESH RAI



Photograph: BHASKAR PAUL