

Kong Kara, the Food Entrepreneur from Shillong

Phikaralin Wanshong or Kong Kara, is a resident of Pohkseh, Shillong, and an entrepreneur who specializes in food processing. Her work has been acknowledged by the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise which awarded her with the Best Entrepreneur Award in 2010. The award was conferred to her by then President of India Smt. Pratibha Devi Singh Patel in New Delhi.

Kong Kara inherited her interest in food processing from her mother who was passionate about pickle making. Kong Kara is a mother of four kids and initially, she made pickles which were enough for just her household. Her children loved the pickles and so did all her friends and neighbours. This constant positive feedback finally motivated her to officially enter the food processing business. In 1998 she took the first step by attending a two-week training course organized by the Department of Food and Nutrition. Aspiring to succeed in the food processing industry, she went for further training under various departments, including training organized by the Department of Horticulture in 2005 and 2006 at Fruit Garden, Shillong.

Products made by her enterprise include a large range of pickled foods - bamboo shoot, dried fish, beef, tamarind, mango, wild apple, chillies, sohshang (*eleagnuslatifolia*) and various other locally available fruits. The enterprise also manufactures juice from locally available fruits such as carambola, pineapple, cherry (Sohiong) and many others. Kong Kara buys the raw material from the local market. Hygiene is very important in her operations and Kong Kara is especially careful about cleaning and drying all produce before the pickling or processing. For packaging, Kong Kara buys plastic pouches and plastic jars from Mumbai and Guwahati respectively. Roughly calculated, the enterprise operates at a 25% to 30% profit margin.

As a female entrepreneur, Kong Kara has also taken up the responsibility of helping other women who face economic hardships. She has herself trained students from various institutions and aspiring entrepreneurs who are particularly interested in food processing. She has engaged in training programmes organized by the Meghalaya Institute of Entrepreneurship.

Kong Kara has recently ventured into the bakery sector, and has even set up a shop where she sells her baked goods. Her success in food processing has attracted online retailers which is a testament to her diversifying and expanding business and the popularity of her food products.