

## DHAULAGIRI ADVENTURE

In 2013, the target was the Dhaulagiri – I (8167 m), the Mountain of Storm, the seventh highest. “Dhawal” means white in Sanskrit and “Giri” is the mountains. Distance is 34 kilometers from another famed peak Annapurna. Between the two peaks flows the Kali Gandaki river from north to south. On Saturday the 13<sup>th</sup> April, 2013, the trio - Basanta Singha Roy, Debasish Biswas and Malay Mukherjee flew off to Kathmandu from Kolkata airport. At Kathmandu three Sherpas – Pemba, Pasang and Dawa joined them.

15<sup>th</sup> April, they started from Kathmandu and reached Beni by Car. Next day after breakfast they reached Darbang (1110 m) by bus. The way to the Base Camp of Dhaulagiri is through Khamla, Bagora, Doban via the Italian Base camp.

17<sup>th</sup> April , the trek started along river Myagdi. Around 4-30 in the afternoon they reached Khamla and stayed in a house for the night. Next day they reached Bagora (2080 m). 19<sup>th</sup> April they reached Doban (2510 m). 20<sup>th</sup> April Saturday around 11am they had lunch in Salagari and then reached Italian Base camp at 4pm.

Snowfall started from the same evening and continued for next three days so they forced to stay there for next five days.

They saw quite a few memory pillars in the memory of mountaineers died at Dhaulagiri at Italian Base camp.

On 26<sup>th</sup> April they set off for the Base camp. Crossing Swiss camp and Japanese camp they reached the Base camp and found French, Japanese, Polish, Italian and Spanish groups.

Ghastly wind almost tore them apart now. It comes from Tibet side and affects the mountain body in such a way that they look like natural sculptures, big scratches in the mountains. On the right side of the Base camp is Dhaulagiri. Chhonbardhan glacier is in the middle. There stands the dark stone Pyramid shaped tomb. Due to its similarity with IGAR peak, it is called IGAR. The usual route to Dhaulagiri is through the North-east ridge of Mt. Dhaulagiri.

In 1950, French mountaineer Maurice Herzog came to climb Dhaulagiri. Having failed to locate the right route, he switched to Annapurna and succeeded in climbing it. After this a

few attempts had failed. On 13<sup>th</sup> May 1960, a Swiss Austrian team made it Dhaulagiri. Debasish followed this route.

In next few days the Base camp was organized. From the temple to the toilet tent, everything was arranged.

On 30<sup>th</sup> April, at about 2:30 am they set out, having tea and biscuits. They crossed Chhonbardhan glacier. After continuous ascend at the Igar slope they turned at left hand. Then gradual slope of Snow field. They went ahead as per the indications of the marking flag. The road is full of crevice. Strips of ice fall all around. These are fragile and may break at any moment. After crossing a long snow field, they reach at Camp-I (5800 m) at 10:40 am.

Northeast side has Tukuche and Tukuche West. Northwest has other peaks of Dhaulagiri. A hard Ice wall just south of the Camp one. Pemba fetched a full sack of Ice from the wall to make drinking water.

1<sup>st</sup> May. After a bit of upward movement they found Annapurna from the slopes of ice in the eastside. Tukuche is at North-east, Sita Chuchura is at North. From North to West the other peaks of Dhaulagiri. Their destination Mt. Dhaulagiri is on the South.

They climbed upto 10-30 am. Reached upto around 6000 meters. Then returned to the camp one.

Snowfall set in from the afternoon. Its speed began to increase rapidly. All around covered by snowy layer.

2<sup>nd</sup> May . They three alongeith Pemba set out at around eight in the morning. Destination now is Camp-II. Light snow fall is going on. No trace of previous footmarks due to continuous snowfall from yesterday. Soft snow deposited heavily. Each step is going inside. So the climbing becomes more laborious.

It was cloudy from beginning. Gradually everywhere covered by thick cloud. it became so heavy that their visibility now came down to maximum 8 to 10 feet. The speed of walk too is now reduced. In spite of best efforts they could not make it to the Camp-II within 11'o clock. In between wind become stormy and simultaneously snow fall started.

There is some confusion about the right route at the moment. It was decided that the luggage would be left here and they would descend now. The real trouble starts at this point. The route is now totally lost at the time of descending in the thick veils of cloud.

After an immense effort when they could not mark the way, Pemba decided to create a cave or rather a niche in the ice. There is no tent, no stove, no way to cook food. Even any shovel for removing ice is not with them. One small piece of cardboard is with Pemba. Desperate attempts made with it to create a niche and dump themselves there for the night. Alas! All efforts failed. It is almost impossible to make such a cave for four of them. They give up the work. One ultimate effort to find the path.

After about two hours frantic search a faint image of the marking flag could be located. With the help of that they could each Camp-I around 5 in the evening.

A day of rest followed. 4<sup>th</sup> May at 8:30 am the journey began again. Target is the North-east ridge of Dhaulagiri. Weather is absolutely fine today. Clouds however were rising in the east. Some people have come from Base Camp yesterday. They joined them today.

Gradually become cloudy, Snowfall began at one point. Climbing continues. After a steep climb, they reached Camp-II ( 6400 m). Spent the night there, next day they returned to the base camp.

Next few days at Base Camp. Whole lot of climbers have assembled now. Exchanges, merriment. Time passed well. Everybody waits for the good weather at summit.

On 10<sup>th</sup> May at 7:30 am they set off for French pass. At 11:30 am they reached at French pass (5360 m). From there Dhaulagiri is at South, southeast is Tukucho, Mukut Himal in the north. They returned to the Base camp at 2 pm.

Snowing and ghastly wind ushered in 11<sup>th</sup> May. Sherpas and Climbers assemble for discussion on summit plan. Decision to move up became difficult since there is no specific weather report. Days are passing on. Monsoon time become nearer. Observing this some groups abandoned the venture and went back.

On 19<sup>th</sup> Debasish and his team set out at the day break rather defiantly and reached Camp-I in almost 8 hours. Next day at Camp-II. One Japanese lady climber Kono and her two sherpas started one day before them.

21<sup>st</sup> May they set out for Camp-III at 6:30 am. Way through steep icy wall. Weather was clear, they climbed through that vertical wall. Annapurna and Nilgiri at east. Tukucho at north. Some members, sherpas are in front and back. Most intriguing, however, was the fierce momentum the wind started to gather with the passage of time. Snow drift with winds. They found the remains of the Japanese lady's tent at two in the afternoon. Yesterday they established their Camp-3 here. Today they ascend further to pitch their Camp-4.

The ice pieces now hit their faces as stone chips. Amidst life challenging efforts, they made it to the Camp-III (7250 m) at 4 pm.

Initially, it was decided to start for summit approach in that very night at 10, after taking a few hours rest. But due to heavy wind, they forced to change that plan. It was decided to march further on the next day.

So rest whole day. On 22<sup>nd</sup> May, at night 10'o clock, they started for summit march. Two Spanish and their Sherpa started just before. When they started, the weather was pleasant, no wind at all. After around two hours climbing they reached at Japanese Camp.

Seeing them the Japanese lady came out. She has two sherpas. They had teamed up with her and began to climb all night.

Unlike previous cases our journey is now interrupted by strong wind from time to time. About half past two, we were just below the summit hump. There is nothing like a fixed rope.

We tied ourselves in one rope at a gap of 15 to 20 feet. This is called rope up process. Winds intensified . Ice was flying . Too cloudy to see the summit clearly. The distance is about

80 meters from us. You have to go up through a gully, turn left and then the summit. Suddenly one person slipped . With him went another . By chance they got stuck in a soft snow. Mountaineering ethics desisted us from reaching the summit leaving them behind. We decided to descend. The Japanese lady also began to descend.

Reaching a comparatively safer point we advised Pasang Sherpa to take our rope and try to help those down there.

Pasang returned after half an hour and expressed his inability to rescue them since his sunglasses were swept away in wind. He could neither rescue them only with the help of he rope.

We also were rapidly losing our vision . Walk all over the night without sunglasses has affected our eyes awfully. Basantada gave his handtorch to me, but my eyesight did not become clear.. I requested Pemba to go ahead of us so that I could follow him step by step. I became fully sightless in a short while and felt like crying aloud. Nobody however wanted to leave me alone. Oxygen stock exhausted. Body became fully inoperative. There was no water , no food. 24 hours have passed . I suggested them to tie me up in sacks and leave me alone, expecting to be feeling better in a while. Finally it was decided that Pemba and I would hold on to one rope. Others will take another . It would be like a relay run. Likewise the descend continued through whole night. I did not realize that Basantada had sat at the starting point. I was visionless and could not see him at all. Pemba went on instructing me, now left, right at the next step, like that. Sometimes I crawled. Sometimes being dragged on ice . Pemba said the tent of the Japanese lady was close by . Some one pulled me into the tent. All of a sudden. I thought it was Basantada . Getting senseless , I laid down with my head on the knee. Someone put forward a hot juice mug. I drank, possibly . The rest of it was unknown. I came back to senses after a couple of hours to find myself in a tent. That Japanese lady was by my side. Asked Pemba, where is Basantada ? He was at the starting point, Pemba answered. He and Dawa stayed back in the tent of the Japanese lady. They went back to Camp 4 on 23<sup>rd</sup> morning.

I woke up to attend a call in walkie talkie . They have located Basantada . He simply expressed his inability to move ahead and wanted to be piggybacked for coming down. I sort of tried to organize it but Basantada was then crying and saying 'I wont be able'. 'Think of your family and pick up the grit', I retorted. Pemba explained everything to Dawa . After one hour we tried to contact them again in walkie-talkie . No response. Have both of them gone into the tummy of the mountains? I wondered . We have been travelling together since 1997. I was in a sort of sadistic trance. Suddenly Pemba cried out, 'Basantada has arrived'. Putting him in the tent we got engaged in his treatment. He was having a cerebral

edema. We have to take him down fast. Next morning Basantada expressed his inability to move and wanted to sleep. We decided to tie him up and carry him downwards.

I reached Camp3 in a short while around 9 45 am. Three mighty sherpas brought him down. In friction with ice, Basantada's legs were seriously scratched. By noon time the new arrangement was complete . There suddenly was sound of a helicopter. God sent, as it were! We tied him up into the rope in no time. He was almost unconscious.

How on earth this flying machine had come ? Sent really by God ! We wondered. But , no. We heard later that the missing news of us already had created great ripples in the planes. Youth Service Minister, Government of West Bengal, informed the Chief Minister. Her office contacted Delhi. Then there was this contact with Indian embassy Kathmandu. All expenses of the rescue was borne by the Government. Basantada was brought to Kathmandu on the same day. Debasish and his team came to Camp 2 on 25<sup>th</sup> May. As they were nearing the open area close to IGAR , the same helicopter picked them up.

Some expeditioners , sherpas and that sweet Japanese lady were lost forever. It was only a matter of 60/70 meters from the summit. The labour, the risk, the stress , notwithstanding, the team deserved the salute of the nation. They have come back to Dhaulagiri , one day or the other.