

SCALING GREAT HEIGHTS

Santosh Yadav is the only woman in the world that has scaled Mt Everest twice. She was born in the small village of Joniyawas of Rewari District in Haryana. The girl was given the name 'Santosh', which means contentment. But Santosh was not always content with her place in a traditional way of life. She began living life on her own terms from the start. Where other girls wore traditional Indian dresses, Santosh preferred shorts. Looking back, she says now, 'From the very beginning I was quite determined that if I chose a correct and a rational path, the others around me had to change, not me.'



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Santosh's parents were affluent landowners who could afford to send their children to the best schools, even to the country's capital New Delhi, which was quite close by. But, in line with the prevailing custom in the family, Santosh had to make do with the local village school. So, she decided to fight the system in her own quiet way when the right moment arrived. And the right moment came when she turned sixteen. At sixteen most of the girls in her village used to get married. Santosh was also under pressure from her parents to do the same.

A marriage as early as that was the last thing on her mind. She threatened her parents that she would never marry if she did not get a proper education. She left home and got herself enrolled in a school in Delhi. When her parents refused to pay for her education, she politely informed them of her plans to earn money by working part time to pay her school fees. Her parents then agreed to pay for her education.

Wishing always to study "a bit more" and with her father slowly getting used to her urge for more education, Santosh passed the high school examinations and went to Jaipur. She joined Maharani College

and got a room in Kasturba Hostel. Santosh remembers, "Kasturba Hostel faced the Aravalli Hills. I used to watch villagers from my room, going up the hill and suddenly vanishing after a while. One day I decided to check it out myself. I found nobody except a few mountaineers. I asked if I could join them. To my pleasant surprise, they answered in the affirmative and motivated me to take to climbing."

Then there was no looking back for this determined young girl. She saved money and enrolled in a course at Uttarkashi's Nehru Institute of Mountaineering. "My college semester in Jaipur was to end in April but it ended on the nineteenth of May. And I was supposed to be in Uttarkashi on the twenty-first. So, I did not go back home; instead, I headed straight for the training. I had to write a letter of apology to my father without whose permission I had got myself enrolled at Uttarkashi."

Thereafter, Santosh went on an expedition every year. Her climbing skills matured rapidly. Also she developed a remarkable resistance to cold and the altitude. Equipped with an iron will, physical endurance and an amazing mental toughness, she proved herself repeatedly. The culmination of her hard work and sincerity came in 1992, just four years after she had shyly asked the Aravalli mountaineers if she could join them. At barely twenty years of age, Santosh Yadav scaled Mt. Everest, becoming the youngest woman in the world to achieve the feat. If her climbing skills, physical fitness, and mental strength impressed her seniors, her concern for others and desire to work together with them found her a special place in the hearts of fellow climbers.

During the 1992 Everest Mission, Santosh Yadav provided special care to a climber who lay dying at the South Col. She was unfortunately unsuccessful in saving him. However, she managed to save another climber, Mohan Singh, who would have met with the same fate had she not shared her oxygen with him.

Within twelve months, Santosh found herself a member of an Indo-Nepalese Women's Expedition that invited her to join them. She then

scaled the Everest a second time, thus setting a record as the only woman to have scaled the Everest twice, and securing for herself in India a unique place in the annals of mountaineering. In recognition of her achievements, the Indian government bestowed upon her one of the nation's top honours, the Padmashri.

Describing her feelings when she was literally 'on top of the world', Santosh has said, "It took some time for the enormity of the moment to sink in... Then I unfurled the Indian tricolour and held it aloft on the roof of the world. The feeling is indescribable. The Indian flag was flying on top of the world. It was truly a spiritual moment. I felt proud as an Indian."

Also a fervent environmentalist, Santosh collected and brought down 500 kilograms of garbage from the Himalayas.



(Edited and adapted from 'Beehive' NCERT, New Delhi)

EXERCISES

A. Let's Answer

1. How can Santosh Yadav inspire the girls as well as their parents in India?
2. From where did Santosh take the inspiration of mountaineering?
3. "From the very beginning I was quite determined that if I chose a correct and rational path, the others around me had to change, not me." State some changes made by Santosh Yadav in her family custom.
4. Describe Santosh's team spirit during the expedition to Mt. Everest.
5. Describe briefly Santosh's life from a local village school to Uttar Kashi's Nehru Institute of Mountaineering.

B. Let's Discuss

- a. Early Marriage is a curse.
- b. Nothing can stop you if you have firm determination to do something.

C. Let's Do

1. Collect photographs of some eminent mountaineers.
2. Do a project work on the leading mountaineers in India.

