

## **DU student SAACHI SONI selected for Mt. Everest expedition 2013**

*Saachi's favourite quote: "It's not the mountains that we conquer but ourselves"- Sir Edmund Hillary*

*Indraprastha College student, SAACHI SONI was selected to join the Everest Expedition, 6 April-1 June, 2013. Delhi University and Indraprastha College gave her financial support and plenty of encouragement for which she thanks the Vice Chancellor and the Principal of her college. In a team led by Col. Niraj Rana, Saachi finished 90% of the climb. Then due to extremely bad weather conditions and also because the team was in grave danger having lost some members, the mountaineers gave up the final summiting. Being the youngest member of the team, Saachi found the experience both challenging and philosophical. She speaks in her own words:*

“Every time I gaze upon the Himalayas their beauty leaves me spell bound. I feel privileged to be the youngest girl from our country to have undertaken the Everest Expedition and gained so much experience at such a young age. I would always try to take my country to greater heights. Meeting great mountaineers like Reinhold Messner, Gerlinde Kaltenbrunner at the Everest base camp and sharing their inspiring experiences has given me knowledge and brought me much more closer to mountains.

I did my mountaineering courses from the age of 7 to 17, several of them under the Ministry of Defence, and qualified as the best trainee. Getting selected for the Everest Expedition was a Dream come true. I had to undergo rigorous training and scaled peaks in Gharwal, Sikkim and Himachal. We worked at low oxygen levels and temperatures that stayed below -30 deg -50 degrees Celsius. Mountaineering demands not just physical strength but also mental resilience.

The temperatures on our Everest journey could be below 40 to 50 degrees, a single climbing shoe weighs 3.5 kgs and we carry a back pack of 30 kgs containing oxygen cylinders, equipment and our essentials, in short - our life. We crossed huge creaking crevasses on shaking ladders where looking down I found only darkness. The harsh weather, cold nights on empty stomachs, avalanches, winds blowing at high speeds tearing up our skins, zero visibility, frostbitten fingers, breathlessness and the sleepless nights tested us to our physical and mental extreme. An experience like that changes a person radically. Somewhere between the stars that lay above just within reach and clouds that yearned to touch me below, I laboured on with a burning curiosity for the view from the top with a prayer in my heart for preservation and gratitude towards nature's bounty.

As I reached close to the summit, I was spellbound by the incredible beauty surrounding me and the sun rise from the top when other peaks looked strangely small. At night, you see stars so close that you believe God and heaven are near. The view is wonderful; you forget all your pains and become lost in deep meditation. I bowed to the Himalayas and thanked them for allowing me to step on them.

But we could not spend much time at the top because we had to make an early push to reach the lower camps after this attempt at summiting Mt. Everest had to be abandoned. Returning back was more difficult but we reached safely, though sadly aware that some of our companions had not.

Now that I have become the youngest girl of our country to attempt to scale Mt. Everest and among the DU students who are seriously taking to mountaineering, I find the sweat, tears and pain were worthwhile. Its a matter of pride as well as humility for me when people come up and say I am a source of inspiration to them.

I conclude my experience with a quote by Swami Vivekananda who has been a great source of inspiration for me: “Never be afraid of anything. You can do marvellous work. Be a hero. Say this to everybody... 'Arise, Awake and stop not till the goal is reached'.”

**SAACHI SONI**