9. Up You Go!

2nd February 1984

Mountaineering Camp

Nehru Institute of Mountaineering, Uttarkashi



We were at the mountaineering camp and were very excited. Twenty of us were teachers from Kendriya Vidyalayas. There were other women from banks and other institutions.

Today was the second day of the camp. In the morning as I got out of bed and put my foot down, I screamed in pain. I remembered yesterday's 26 kilometre walk with the heavy rucksack on my back. I was afraid to go back to that steep climb and the rough narrow path.

With tears in my eyes I started walking slowly towards the room of Brigadier Gyan Singh, the Director of our adventure course. I was thinking of what I would say to excuse myself from that day's trek. Suddenly, I heard his deep voice from behind.



"Madam, what are you doing here at breakfast time? Hurry up! Otherwise you will have to trek on an empty stomach."

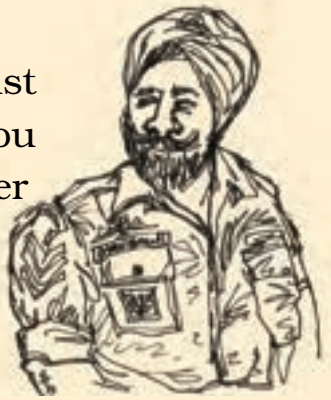
"Sir, Sir….," I could not say any more.

"You have came to tell me that you have blisters on your feet, that you cannot walk, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"That is nothing new. Now get ready quickly."

I hung my head and rushed back to get ready. I had just turned when I heard his voice again, "Listen, madam. You will lead group number 7. You will have to help any member who has difficulty climbing the mountain. You have already been told about the responsibilities of a group leader in the mountains."





Tell

- Have you ever seen the mountains? Have you also climbed a mountain? When and where?
- How far have you walked at one time? How far can you walk?



Imagine

- What do you think about the paths on the mountains? Draw a picture.

A big responsibility

I started thinking about what a leader must do:

– Help others in carrying their bags.
– Let the group go ahead and keep to the last.
– Help those who cannot climb properly.
– Find a good place to stop and rest.
– Look after those who are not well.
– Arrange for food for the group.

The most important thing is to be ready to be punished even when some one else may have made a mistake.

I realised that there was a special kind of discipline here. I wondered whether the camp will still be fun!

Group no. 7

Group No. 7 included girls from Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Nagaland. I was the only teacher from Kendriya Vidyalaya in this group. I was happy to meet my new group members. Most of them could not speak Hindi well. I still feel bad that after being together for 21 days, I could not talk even once with Khondonbi from Mizoram. She spoke only Mizo. But in our hearts we grew close to each other.



Tell

- What do you think about the responsibilities of a group leader?
- How would you feel if you were made a leader in such a camp?
- What does a monitor in your class have to do?
- Would you like to be the class monitor? Why?

Crossing the river...

5 February 1984

We got vitamin C, iron tablets and hot chocolate milk with our breakfast. These were given for strength and to keep us warm in the cold. Every morning there would be a medical check up. We tied our bandages and counted the days left!



After an eight kilometre trek we reached a river. There was a thick rope tied across the river, from one bank to the other. The rope was tightly fixed to pegs or 'pitons' on both the sides. I was feeling nervous. I started thinking what would happen if the rope came out. I was trying to estimate how wide the river was.

Our instructor tied a rope around his waist and put a sling (type of hook) in it. He then put the sling on the thick rope tied across the river. Walking through the icy water, he went to the other side. No one was ready to step into the fast flowing river. Everyone was pushing each other to go first. I stood last in the line hoping that no one would see me. Just then our instructor came near me with the sling and rope in his hands. I knew there was no escape now. I was ready, but did not have the courage. Sir could guess my fears. He called out loudly, "Three cheers for Sangeeta madam!" And before I knew it, someone had gently pushed me into the water.

I felt as if my feet were frozen. I started shivering, my teeth were chattering. I caught hold of the rope and started putting my feet firmly on the river bed. As I walked further in, the river got deeper and slowly the water reached upto my neck. In the middle of the river I lost my balance and started slipping. I was so scared and felt so cold, that the rope slipped from my hands. I started shouting for help.



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I was sure I would be carried away by the river. But no, I found that I was tied with the rope to the sling. "Hold the rope! Hold the rope", I could hear the shouts. I somehow managed to get hold of the rope and pull myself forward. Slowly, with some courage, I reached the river bank. I felt a special kind of happiness as I came out of the water. Happiness on finishing a challenging task. Now, standing on the bank, I was calling out to the others to hold the rope tightly. I knew that this confidence was a result of facing a challenge with courage.

Find out and write

- What kinds of tools are needed for climbing mountains?
- Have you ever seen a hook and rope being used for anything else? Where?
- What else can we use if we want to cross a river in the mountains?
- Why do we need extra energy on the mountains?
- Have you ever heard of anyone who has done something adventurous? What?
- Have you ever done anything adventurous? If yes, tell your class. Write about it in your own words.

Rock climbing

10 February 1984

We had to climb 15 km to reach Tekla village. It was at a height of 1600 metres. Our rucksacks had all that we may need – food packets, water bottle, rope, hook, plastic sheet, diary, torch, towel, soap, windcheater, whistle, glucose, jaggery, *chana* and some other snacks.

We could see fruits and vegetables growing in the step fields. We saw Colonel Ram Singh standing on a 90 metres high flat rock with pegs and ropes.



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We had been told to first observe the rock carefully and identify holds – places where we can put our hands and feet. Today I was not going to back out. I stood first in the line. Our instructor tied



a rope around his waist. He put the sling, and held the thick rope which was hanging. He started climbing as if he was running up. I also put my sling. But as I took my first step, I slipped. And there I was – swinging from the rope!

"Keep your body at an angle of 90° while climbing," I heard. "Keep your back straight. Do not bend."

Keeping this in mind, I imagined the rock as flat ground and started to climb up. Again while coming down we had to use the rope, in a special way called 'rapling.' I did this with the same fearlessness.



Tell

- Have you ever climbed a tree? How did you feel? Were you scared? Did you ever fall?
- Have you ever seen someone climb a small wall? What do you think is the difference between climbing a wall and climbing a high rock?

A funny incident

14 February 1984

It was evening. Khondonbi was feeling hungry. We did not have anything to eat. She jumped over the fence and got into a field. She quickly plucked two big cucumbers and came back. Just then a woman came from behind and caught hold of her bag. She started saying something to Khondonbi in her own language. We could not understand what she was saying. Khondonbi was trying to explain in her Mizo

language which we could not understand. I tried to explain in Hindi but neither of them could understand it. Finally, I folded my hands to say that we were sorry.

By then our group had gone far ahead. It was already dark. I thought we had lost our way. Now we were really scared. We could not see anything even with our torches. I started sweating even though it was cold. I tightly held Khondonbi's hand. I called out loudly, "Where are you all? Can you hear me?" My voice echoed in the mountains. We both started to whistle loudly and flashed our torches. Probably the group had noticed that we were missing. We heard some whistles at a distance. I understood the signal. We held each other's hand tightly and waited. Khondonbi felt that we should keep talking. She started singing a Mizo song loudly. After some time, we saw them coming towards us. At last! We were with the group again.



Tell

- Is there anyone in your class whose language you do not understand, or who does not understand yours? What do you do in such a case?
- Have you ever lost your way? What did you do then?
- Why do you think Khondonbi would have sung loudly?
- Have you ever seen someone doing something special to get over their fear? What and when?



Try

- Ask your friend for a book without speaking. Try to explain something to the class in the same way.

A special guest

15 February 1984

After dinner we met a special guest – Bachhendri Pal. She had just been



selected as a part of the team to climb Mount Everest. She had come to seek the blessings of Brigadier Gyan Singh. It was a happy evening – we were all singing. Bachhendri also joined us in singing and dancing on the famous *Pahadi* song '*Bedu Pako, bara masa, kafal pako chaita, meri chhaila.*' At that time we had no idea that Bachhendri would become the first Indian woman to reach Mount Everest and create history.

Camp in the snow

18 February 1984

We were standing at a height of 2134 meters. We were to spend the night here. Everyone was busy trying to put up the tent. We used double layered plastic sheets for the tent and for the ground. The air between the layers would help to keep us warm. We put in the pegs and began to put up the tent. As we tied it from one side, the wind flew the tent from the other side. After quite a lot of pulling and tugging, we managed to get the tent up. Then we dug a drain around the tent.



We were feeling very hungry. We collected some firewood and stones to make a *chulha* and cooked some food. After the meal, we collected all the waste in a bag to clean the camp site. Soon we got into our sleeping bags. I was not sure if I would be able to sleep in it. Would it be comfortable? Would I not feel cold? But the bags were filled with soft feathers, which help in keeping us warm. We were all very tired. So very soon we fell asleep.



Teacher's Note : The children can be encouraged to learn the languages spoken by their friends. This would help them appreciate and respect other languages.



The next morning we woke up and found that it was snowing. White soft fluffy snowflakes were gently falling. Wow! It was so beautiful! The plants, the trees, the grass and the mountains – everything looked white. Today we were to climb higher, to 2700 metres. We walked carefully on the snow with the help of sticks. It was difficult because we kept slipping. By afternoon we had reached snow covered mountains. We enjoyed throwing snowballs at each other and making a big snowman.

Last day at camp

21 February 1984

We were getting ready for the camp fire. Each group presented a programme. We were enjoying – telling jokes and laughing, singing and dancing around the camp fire. Soon it was midnight. Brigadier Gyan Singh got up and called me. I thought, "Oh, no! what have I done this time?" But when Sir announced my name for the 'Best Performance Award' I stood still. He blessed me and tears of joy rolled down my face.



Discuss

- Why do you think a drain was dug around the tent?
- Besides mountaineering, what are other activities that can be called adventurous? Why?



Kalyani Raghunathan

Teacher's Note : These pages of a diary are based on the real experiences of Sangeeta Arora. She teaches in Kendriya Vidyalaya, Shalimar Bagh, Delhi and is also a member of this EVS textbook writing team.

Imagine and Write

- You are on a mountain. How do you feel there? What can you see? What do you feel like doing there?

Alone on the mountain top

A twelve-year old girl living in the mountains was out on a school picnic. She climbed a mountain peak of 4000 metres with her friends. The girls had done this for fun and adventure. Soon it was dark and they could not come down. It was also cold and scary. They were alone without any food and it was a long night. This happened to Bachhendri Pal, played when she was a young girl.

Bachhendri grew up in Nakuri village in the Garhwal area of Uttarakhand. When she grew older, she joined Nehru Institute of Mountaineering, Uttarkashi. Her guide was Brigadier Gyan Singh. Bachhendri did very well in her training. She started to train women in mountaineering courses. In 1984, Bachhendri was selected as a team member to climb the Mount Everest.

Snow storm

There were seven women in that 18 member team. On the night of 15th May the team was very tired after having reached a height of 7300 metres. The team put up their tents and went to sleep. Around midnight they heard a loud sound and then a bang. Before they were fully awake, the tent flew off and something very heavy hit them. There was a terrible snow storm. Bachhendri was almost buried under the snow and was hurt on the head. Many of the team members were also injured. The others used snow-picks and axes to dig out those who had been buried under the snow.

The rest of the team members returned to base camp but Bachhendri went ahead, climbing slowly but steadily towards the peak. It was seven minutes past one o'clock in the afternoon of 23th May when Bachhendri Pal stepped onto the peak of 8900 metre high Mount Everest also called Sagarmatha in Nepal.

There was another team member with her. There was no space for two people to stand on the top at the same time. One slip and they would fall straight down-thousands of feet below! Bachhendri and her team-mate dug into the snow and pitched their axe firmly in the ice. Using this as a hook, they tied themselves to it with a rope. Only then two of them could stand there. She was shivering with cold but filled with the warmth of achievement. She bowed her head, pitched the national flag and took photographs. She spent 43 minutes on the highest peak in the world.

Bachhendri Pal became the first Indian woman and the fifth woman in the world to reach the peak of Mount Everest.

Teacher's Note : Teachers can either make available the photographs or if possible the actual mountaineering equipment like sling, pitons, hunter shoes, sleeping bag etc. This will help discussion with children.



Kalyani Raghunathan

Think

- Why did Bachhendri put up the Indian flag on the peak?
- When have you seen our national flag being hoisted? Collect information of our national flag.
- Make groups of 6-8 children. Design a flag for your group. Explain why you chose that design.
- Have you seen the flag of any other country? Where?



What we have learnt

- Explain why it can be adventerous and challenging to climb a mountain. How would you prepare if you were to climb a mountain? What would you take with you? Write in your own words.