

EVEREST HAS PROVED ELUSIVE

Serap Jangbu Sherpa (34), born in Khumjung of Solukhumbu district, within a short span of time (from 1999 to 2003), has climbed six of 14 peaks in the world that are over 8,000 meters high. The lure for climbing the Himalayan peaks was in his blood as his father was also involved in mountaineering activities. Only one achievement has proved elusive so far namely reaching the summit of Sagarmatha (Mount Everest) Twice the weather did not favour and once an accident forced the team to return. Soft spoken person that Mr. Sherpa is, he is not keen on publicity. In a talk with **Dr. Hari P. Shrestha** and **Prem N. Kakkar** of **NMA Newsletters**, he shared his views on various mountaineering related matters and elaborated on his several ascents. Excerpts:

Q. What aroused your interest in mountaineering?

Serap Well, it's in the family. My father was associated with mountaineering expeditions. He used to make the route on Ice Fall. Being the eldest son in the family, I naturally took up the profession. My two younger brothers are also in the same profession.

Q. The first peak you scaled?

Serap I was nineteen years old when I successfully climbed Mera Peak (6654m.). That was my first success. It was in 1989 with a Japanese team. Till 1998, it was only trekking peaks. That increased my interest in climbing. The big break came in the spring of 1999 when I ascended Kanchanjunga Main Summit (8,586 m). In the autumn season of the same year, I successfully ascended Shishapangma (8,012m). In both the expeditions, I was with South Korean teams. That provided me encouragement and the zeal to go for peaks over 8,000m.

Q. Could you tell something about your Mount K2 ascents?

Serap Mount K2 is not an easy peak to summit. It was all sheer luck that I got the opportunity in 2000. The expedition team I went with was also S. Korean. I became the first Nepali summiteers. The second time was in the spring season of 2001. I became the first the summit twice in the same year and the 1st to climb it twice.

Q. Something about other peaks you have climbed?

Serap I climbed Shishapangma South-West Face (8,027m) in the autumn of 2000. Lhotse (8,516m) twice in 2001 and 2002. Cho Oyu (8,201m) in the 2001 autumn



season. Annapurna I (8,019m) in 2001 and 2002. Makalu (8,463m) ascent had to be abandoned at 7,300m.

Q. Which do you consider to be the most dangerous or difficult to climb?

Serap I feel it's Mount K2. The high speed winds, avalanches and boulders falling create quite a dangerous situation. The Bottleneck provides terrifying moment for mountaineers. The last 500m took me six hours during my first attempt but over 13 hours in the second time. The descent, in fact, is more difficult than the ascent.

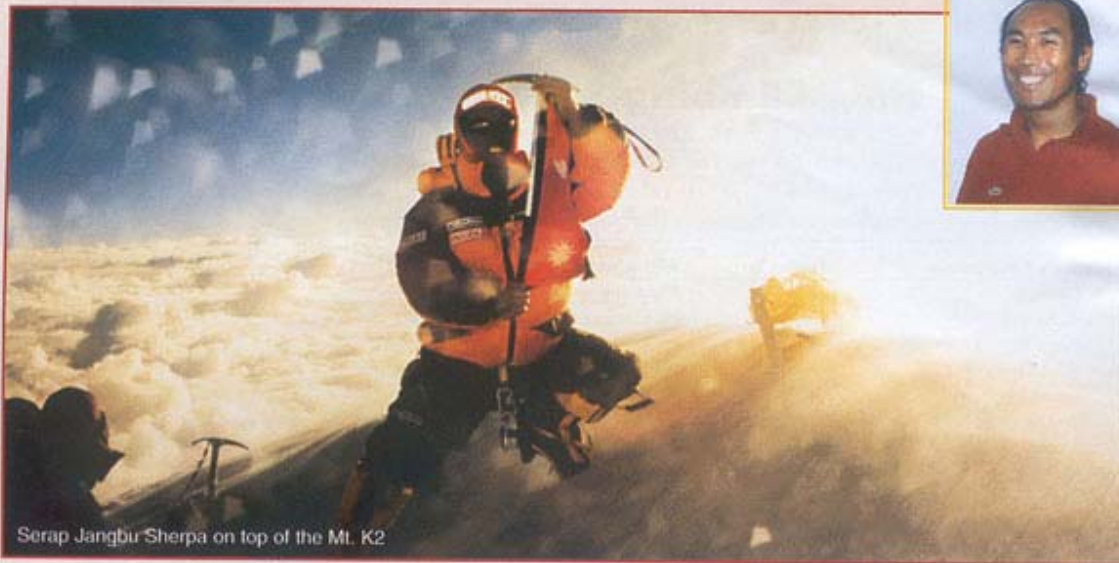
Q. How do you feel about missing Everest thrice?

Serap I missed three times. Even during the Mount Everest Golden Jubilee Celebration I had to turn back from 8,200m due to an accident involving a member of the expedition team. If I had made it this spring it would have been wonderful but things did not go as expected. It's luck that counts. The weather, too, is there. On two previous occasions, the weather turned unfavourable so the climb had to be abandoned.

I like to be on the Everest summit at least once. Maybe this autumn or next year in the spring I'll give it a try.

Q. Any dangerous situations you have faced?

Serap Yes. It was first time to Kanchenjunga. I fell into a deep crevasse some fifteen meters. But, luckily not much damage was done to me. These crevasses can sometimes



Serap Jangbu Sherpa on top of the Mt. K2

prove fatal. You have to be very careful where you're stepping.

Q. Do you find it comfortable climbing mountains?

Serap Climbing any mountain is difficult but the thing is that I have no fear. Experience has given me confidence. I have gained valuable technical knowledge which proves very helpful.

Q. Is training necessary before attempting to climb peaks?

Serap Though I haven't undergone any type of formal training, I learnt all by experience. On the whole, training, I feel, is necessary. It makes safe climbing possible. I have completed a guide training course but I regret that I could study only upto Class Six. Education is also vital.

Q. What do you think about the recently marked Mount Everest Golden Jubilee Celebration?

Serap The Golden Jubilee Celebration was good for publicity. It gave a healing touch to the ailing tourism industry. Tourism, which provides employment opportunities and generates foreign currency, had not been well for some time. Now I think the celebration, which attracted global attention and media focus will do good. This is because world famous summiteers were present on the occasion. The programmes organised were also praiseworthy. I was so impressed that I named my daughter, who was born on April 17, 2003, Jubilee Yangi Sherpa.

Q. Even when the tourism sector in general was facing hard times, mountain tourism saw significant growth. In your opinion, how can we further develop mountain tourism?

Serap I feel mountain tourism is developing. To make the sector grow further, the royalty fees have to be reduced for smaller peaks it must be waived. In fact, many new peaks have been opened and for many the charges have been waived or reduced by the government. This is quite good. But more has to be done. There should

be greater publicity of Nepal as a unique destination. All this must be done as mountain tourism has a vital role to play in the economic development of the country especially the local areas like Solukhumbu. We must also be more serious in environmental conservation efforts.

Q. Do you believe in competitions on the Himalayas? The record making part.

Serap I do not quite fully believe in competitions. I personally have no interest in going for record making climbs. In mountains, one has to be careful. Challenges are not healthy. It may prove dangerous.

Q. Are you satisfied with your work as a mountaineer?

Serap Yes, I am. The income is enough to run the family. But there's a time limit. What I mean to say is that as one becomes older, it is not possible to continue in the profession. It's only possible when one is fit and physically strong.

Q. The countries you have visited and the languages familiar to you?

Serap I have visited Switzerland, Pakistan, India and China. I have been invited to visit South Korea but I have not been able to make it.

As for languages, I can speak English and Korean besides Nepali and Tibetan. I learnt Korean with friends of the S. Korean expedition teams.

Q. You have climbed six over-8,000m peaks. Any plans to scale all the 14 peaks that are over 8,000m?

Serap If possible, I'd like to. But I do not like to go for publicity before actually climbing them. The desire is there, of course.

In fact, it is only since 1999 that I have climbed peaks over 8,000m. Only four years now! There are still many more years to go and many more peaks to climb. I am optimistic. The only great desire at the moment is able to reach the summit of Everest.

