

All-women's team gears up to scale greater heights

One has a doctorate, another is an instructor with a US-based adventure club -- eleven women from diverse backgrounds with a common passion - scaling heights - have come together for a mountaineering expedition to a peak in Himachal Pradesh.

Cheering and geared up to scale the 6,349-meter Phawararang peak, the women will start their journey July 5 and are expected to be back July 25 - roughly in three-weeks.

Reena Dharmshaktu, the team leader of the expedition, has more than a decade's experience of mountaineering behind her. But this is the second all-women's expedition that she is a part of.

'An all-women mountaineering expedition is not very common - especially in India. Thankfully things are changing and women are coming out to join adventure clubs and pursue their passion. The last such expedition, that I was part of, was not successful because of bad weather. Hopefully this one will,' Dharmshaktu told IANS.

The women in Dharmshaktu's team, all in the age group of 20-early 30, come from all across the country.

Nabanita Mukherjee and Sharmila Santra are from Kolkata, Chandra Bisht is from Chandigarh, Jigna Modh is from Maharashtra, N. Bidya Devi from Manipur, Munshi R. Babubai from Gujarat, Kamala Kumari from Bihar, Mamta from Haryana, Seema Toppo from Sikkim and Sushma Thakur is from Himachal Pradesh.

'Mountaineering is our passion. This has brought us all together. But professionally, we do different things to sustain ourselves,' said Dharmshaktu, who was born and bred in Darjeeling but now is settled in Delhi.

'For example, I am a freelance instructor at the National Outdoor Leadership School in the US. We go for regular tours and expeditions. There's somebody else who is a PhD scholar from the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU),' the 35-year old mountaineer added.

And how different is a mixed mountaineering team from an all women's one?

'There's absolutely no truth in what people say about women being physically weak to scale difficult peaks... it's all in the mind. I have been on mixed (team) expeditions and all-women ones and the latter is definitely more fun!' Dharmshaktu said.

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