

Everest heroine, Nepal's pride, perishes in Himalayas

Pemba Doma Sherpa, who rose from an impoverished set-up to become the first Nepali woman to summit Mt Everest from Tibet, has perished in an accident in the Himalayan ranges that also killed two more sherpas.

One of the country's best-known women climbers, Pemba succumbed to injuries sustained in an accident Monday while taking part in an expedition to Mt Lhotse, the fourth highest peak in the world.

She was an orphan brought up by her grandparents in one of the most inaccessible villages in Nepal in Solukhumbu district - regarded as the gateway to Mt Everest. Pemba felt the urge to climb the snow-capped summits that she could see from the lodge run by her grandfather when Western mountaineers would drop by and discuss their expedition plans.

She persuaded a Western team to let her be part of the expedition to Mt Everest after promising that she would raise the large sum of money required for such a venture.

In 2000, Pemba became the first Nepali woman to summit Mt Everest from Tibet. Later, she also reached the peak from Nepal.

She was conferred a national award - the Suprabal Prasiddha Gorkha Dakshin Bahu - by Nepal's late king Birendra for her contribution to mountaineering.

However, the village girl who grew up as a dynamic woman and spoke nine languages became more than a mountaineer. She became an icon for women when she established her own trekking agency with her husband Rajen Thapa and founded a non-profit organisation, Save the Himalayan Kingdom, which runs a school for underprivileged children.

The names of the two male sherpa climbers who also died in Monday's accident were not known immediately. The group had summited Mt Lhotse and was returning when disaster struck.

The tragedy highlights the enormous risk that high-altitude sherpa guides face, having to cross dangerous areas several times for the sake of clients while allowing them to descend first during bad weather.

With the Lhotse disaster, the Himalayas have claimed at least 13 lives so far.

Six people perished while attempting to scale Mt Everest and four died on Mt Dhaulagiri.

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