

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH FOR PIOLETS d'OR LIFE TIME  
ACHIEVEMENT AWARD AT SEOUL  
3<sup>RD</sup> NOVEMBER 2017

Mr President, Committee members and friends.

It is a great honour to receive the PIOLETS d'OR LIFE TIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD, Asia for the year 2017. Recognition from our own fellow mountaineers makes you feel very happy.

I started enjoying the mountains luckily at very young age. Around Mumbai, in India where I live, we have the Western Ghats, a range of hills small in comparison to the mighty Himalaya but challenging nevertheless. The options to trek are plenty, but the many ancient forts add to the beauty and historical importance of this region. Mumbai is a huge city, as big as New York, and many people live in it. Living in this busy city, I felt the need to go to the mountains very strongly. In 1962, I made my first trip to the Himalaya, that's almost 55 years ago. Since then I have been to the Himalaya, to trek and climb continuously every year. In the past, it was difficult to organise and even find information - no equipment or maps were available, and very few willing friends to go climbing with.

As a rule since my younger days, I never liked to visit the same area again. This allowed me to cover the entire length and breadth of this vast range, going to different valleys every year. Climbing different mountains and peaks around 6500 m high was a choice. From about 35 peaks that I have climbed, I have always looked into the surrounding valleys from the top and photographed many mountains. As a routine, I always made

detailed notes of my treks and climbs. These notes later allowed me to write many books about my treks and climbs. I was editor of the *Himalayan Journal* for 35 years and it was a rich experience. This journal has been published by the Himalayan Club since the year 1929. This great club which is one of the oldest international clubs in Asia, celebrates its 90<sup>th</sup> Year in 2018.

I have trekked and climbed extensively with many friends. Each one of them has contributed in a unique way. They have helped me enjoy the mountains and made me feel at home amidst them. I wish to thank all of them. My instructors, Sherpa friends, people who have guided me and also my devoted porters from Himalaya who dutifully accompany me every year to even the remotest of places, I am thankful to all of them. Mountaineering is a high risk activity, and few of my friends have died in the mountains leaving a huge void in my life. I feel very strongly for their loss as they were all great friends who died young and fit. I myself survived three serious accidents and but was saved by my friends and porters each time who helped me to continue with my climbing. I am grateful to each one of them and remember all of them today.

I have been on many joint expeditions with people from other nationalities. It was always a great learning experience. Language was never a barrier as mountaineers speak language of the mountains. I have been on 8 major expeditions with the British climbers, with Sir Chris Bonington as my co leader. I have been on expeditions with the French and the Japanese climbers as well. We bonded and enjoyed well and became friends for life. Persons like Tom Nakamura from Japan, who is present today, is a great friend and my go to person when any information is required.

For such long enjoyment of mountains, support of the family is very essential. My elder son, Sonam, enjoyed hills with me. Today he is a banker and married to Charue, and they both always support and take care of us and listen in detail to my climbing stories when I return. They say that behind every person there is the support of a woman. My wife Geeta, also a good trekker, helped in all respects and thanks to her our home welcomed many mountaineers from different parts of the world. I am very happy that she is present here today with me.

Many decades ago, I stood on top of a hill in our local range. With me was my younger son Nawang who trekked with me and others to many places in the Himalaya. He chose to join the Indian Army and became an officer in the famed Gorkha Regiment, to serve our country and guard the Himalaya. He was unfortunately killed in a terrorism attack in Kashmir in the year 2000, at the young age of 25 years. I dedicate this Award to him and his memory. He will be proud of it.

It is indeed a great honour to receive this award from the world mountaineering body and be a part of Asian climbers. I hope it will encourage me to trek and explore further in the Himalaya and write about it. One lifetime is not enough to see all the Himalayan ranges.

Thank you Piolets d'Or Committee for this great honour which I am honoured to accept, especially as the first Indian mountaineer.

Harish Kapadia

Speech Delivered at Seoul Award Ceremony

3<sup>rd</sup> November 2017

