

Mountains, Modernity and Nature: Reconfiguring the aspects of Himalayan Mountaineering

Debaditya Dutta

Assistant Professor in Sociology, Government General Degree College,
Mangalkote

Email: debaditya.dutta23@gmail.com

Abstract: *This paper traces the genealogy of mountaineering from its origin in the Alpine mountains to its manifestation in the Himalaya through the mechanisms of colonialism in the late nineteenth century. Mountaineering and modernity coincided with each other and conquering the Himalayan mountains became a colonial project. The paper attempts to show how the entanglements between nature and humans were (re)organised as mountaineering unfolded in the high Himalaya. From records on the early Himalayan surveys and expeditions the paper tries to comprehend the reconfiguration brought about in the Himalaya through colonial survey and mountaineering in its early days of inception.*

Keywords: Mountaineering, modernity, nature, Himalaya, colonialism.

Introduction

About 45 million years ago, the Indian tectonic plate collided with the Tibetan tectonic plate, giving rise to The Himalaya; the highest and the youngest mountain range in the world. Himalaya used in its singular form instead of Himalayas means “abode of snow” in Sanskrit. It’s a 1,500-mile-long range bounded by Indus on the west and Brahmaputra on the east (Isserman and Stewart 2008). The Himalaya range has fourteen mountain peaks that are higher than eight thousand metres from sea level and are still rising. Mt. Everest being the highest. Similar geography is not found anywhere else on planet Earth. Mt. Aconcagua, which is the highest peak outside of the Himalaya, has an elevation of 6,961 metres. Between Everest and Aconcagua, there lie more than a hundred mountain peaks that are higher than Aconcagua, all located in the Himalaya.¹ With such incomparable

geography, these mountains have become the core of high-altitude mountaineering and trekking in today's world.

Mountaineering in the Himalaya is a rather modern phenomenon that began in the late 1890s.² Mountaineering initially has its roots in the Alpine Mountains and was then transferred to the Himalaya by the British Empire. The high Himalaya have been drastically transformed by mountaineering and trekking which are based on notions of nature and the ways we interact with it. Scholarships in Himalayan mountaineering have mostly focused on the dynamics between a Sherpa and a non-Sherpa mountaineer or the major feats of the Himalayan Giants.³ Rarely, studies on Himalayan mountaineering have gone beyond a mountaineer and Sherpa binary and made nature the focal point of social enquiry. Mountaineering facilitates various forms of entanglements between humans and non-humans (mountains)⁴ which are embedded in the lifeworld of the participants.⁵ It directs us towards the societal comprehension of the ontological ideas of nature, mountains and non-humans.

Through various discourses on mountaineering, this paper seeks to critically engage with the imaginations of the Himalaya and Himalayan mountaineering that took shape in the late 19th century. It traces the genealogy of Himalayan mountaineering, which had its inception in the Alpine mountains and was transported to the Himalaya through colonialism. The paper attempts to show how the entanglements between nature and humans were (re)organised as mountaineering unfolded in the high Himalaya.

Pre-Colonial Era: Period before Mountaineering

To contextualise the changing dynamics between humans and non-humans, we need to begin our discussion from the period when mountaineering didn't exist in the Himalaya. 'The high places across the globe have often functioned as multivalent heterotopias, spaces of otherness', imagined as pure and natural in opposition to the impure lowland (Simpson 2019). With such a binary in place, there lies a tendency in academic scholarship to imagine these mountainous spaces as being devoid of indigenous people or occupied by people fleeing state-making mechanisms. Himalaya is considered a space where modernity and valley-centric state formation has failed to penetrate. Studies on the Himalaya have labelled these regions as 'non-state spaces' (Scott 2009). According to van Schendel, the Himalaya falls under the categorisation of *Zomia*, a space that lies at the periphery of multiple states but lacks strong centres of state formation, is politically ambiguous and therefore fails to produce significant scholarship under the

area studies banter (Schendel 2002). Recent scholarship on Himalayan studies has challenged such a determinism.⁶

The high Himalayan regions as imagined were never sedentary nor did the people residing here had escaped modern state governance. Matter of fact, these regions were controlled by various states, each knowing its boundaries and alliances. Home to many fluid and settled communities, the high Himalayan people were mostly pastoral and engaged in trade across the Tibetan and Indian sub-continent. Most people knew their way around the mountain passes mainly for trading and herding yaks. Tibetan Buddhism was and still is the dominant religion of the region. We find the presence of Buddhist monasteries that were built around the smallest villages which substantiates permanent settlements of communities. The lifeworld of the local population residing in these areas was primarily guided by religion. Knowing the exact altitude of where they reside and the mountain peaks in quantifiable units were insignificant to them. The summits were the abode of Gods to the local people as well as to people far off.

For Hindus it is not simply the abode of snow but of the gods, and beginning from the mythical journey into the mountains of the five Pandava brothers and their wife Draupadi in the *Mahaprasthanika Parva* of the epic *Mahabharata*, pilgrim routes have drawn believers to the ice-caves, glaciers, and lower peaks of the Himalaya (Chaudhuri 2018: 299).

Nature and religion have a close interconnected history. Nature-worshipping was the first form of primordial religion as humans were unable to tame and comprehend the exterior world. 'To know Nature was to know God...' (Williams 1980). Once humans could utilise and put nature to work, certain spaces such as mountains, lakes, and forests. etc. retained the sacred element. Mountains inherently possessed attributes that made humans feel minute in front of their gigantic structure. According to Arne Naess, mountains are solid, stable, unmoving and retain a certain greatness, calling forth "modesty" from the people who interact with them (Naess 2008). It invokes notions of divinity that draw people towards it. Almost in all religious discourses, mountains constitute this form of embodiment. God is the first absolute and Nature is its deputy or minister (Williams 1980). Consequently, Himalaya attracted a large number of pilgrims from various parts of the world to it and continues to do so even today. One could say that the earliest trekkers to the Himalaya were the pilgrims. Nature to them was a place of worship and travelling to them could help them connect to the Gods. There are numerous peaks and lakes in the Himalaya which are

considered sacred by many religions. Some mountain peaks like Mt. Kailash have never been summited to date because of the significance of the mountain to multiple religious faiths. Moreover, we find no oral or written record of anyone summiting a Himalayan peak in the pre-colonial era. A pilgrimage was the only form of the material connection between the mountains and the humans with religion as the primary mediator of the modalities of the relationship.

The calling of the mountains to the pilgrim and the mountaineer is based on a similar notion of mountains possessing transcendental awe. But a pilgrim doesn't have the desire to summit the peaks whereas a mountaineer is only there to reach the summit. Here lies the fundamental difference between a pilgrim and a mountaineer. The pilgrim's lifeworld is guided by religious faith which forbids her/him to summit a mountain. Pilgrimages are mostly collective ritualistic procedures that are systematically guided by religious doctrines and are often periodical. Ideas of nature are produced for them through the various religious scriptures. Mountaineering on the other hand began with overcoming religious superstitions (Hansen 2013). It symbolised the modern individual man⁷ who is not bounded by any religious structures. Mountaineering began in the European Alpine mountains and got associated with the Eurocentric ideas of modernity. A mountaineer was required to rid oneself off the religious beliefs that stopped a pilgrim to summit a mountain and embrace scientific temperament. Mountaineering got associated with conquest and mastery of human superiority over nature through science.⁸ Colonialism was also based on similar notions of modernity and mountaineering became a prominent feature of the colonial legacy. With the beginning of mountaineering in the Himalaya through the colonial intervention of the British Empire, Himalaya ceased being just a site for a pilgrim, but also for mountaineering.

Origin of Mountaineering

Mountaineering in any form didn't begin in the Himalaya. It has its roots in the European Alpine mountains. Mountain climbing is a cultural practice that has a social and political background and its origin was undeniably an outward expression of mid-Victorian middle-class life (Isserman and Stewart 2008: 28). Climbing a mountain to reach its summit, or in other words-mountaineering, appealed to a specific class in Britain. Eighteenth-century Europe witnessed major structural changes such as industrialisation and urbanisation. It reshaped human activity which got localised indoors from pastoral to industrial. Along with the domestication of individuals, it also

generated a lot of wealth and power in the hand of the new professional middle class. The basis of masculine identity that had dominated agrarian society was fading away along with access to pastorals and wild places (Taylor 2010). It was under this environmental and cultural context that mountaineering erupted as a new form of outdoor masculine activity.

Taylor notes that 'organised play offered young men a way to perform socially acceptable acts of dominance' (Taylor 2010). Sports offered young middle-class men the mobility to move beyond work and family and assert masculine identity through mountaineering. British middle classes viewed mountaineering as a character-building exercise (Hansen 1995). According to Hansen, 'climbing was preeminently a masculine sport. Scrambling provided exposure to bodily risk and danger for men whose daily life were governed by safety and security' (Hansen 1995). The wealth and the imperial culture got manifested into this new professional middle class, mainly composed of university-educated professional men who aspired to be mountaineers and become symbols of national pride. The new middle-class culture avoided traditional patterns of consumption and enhanced their standard of living by segregating themselves through leisure activities such as mountaineering. This form of recreation could set them apart and nature was the preferred setting (Taylor 2010: 20). A particular nature that symbolised aspects of a space that is still untouched by modernity, nature that is still pristine and natural. Nature that could allow the men to showcase their masculinity. That no human has ever been before or very few. In accordance, mountain tops could be classified under the Foucauldian concept of "*heterotopias*", a place outside of all places but can be indicated in reality. They reflect and speak about absolutely different from other places, which Foucault calls *utopias* (Foucault 1984). But unlike *heterotopias*, utopias are spaces without places, more like a mirror which takes an individual to a space which doesn't exist. Heterotopias on the other hand are real sites that are universal, cultural and temporal with a 'system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable' (Foucault 1984: 6). Along with the creation of wealth, technological developments, new forms of leisure activity, and masculine character-building exercises. The Alpine mountains were the closest *heterotopias* for the new middle class in Britain.

Mountaineering became a significant part of the imperial status and culture of Britain and railroads provided the means for quick transportation to the Alpine settings (Hansen 1995). Accelerated production, improved transportation and increased leisure time enabled the emerging middle class

the means to pursue play and reach the European mountains sanctums quickly through the railroad (Taylor 2010: 19). It almost gives an essence that mountaineering coincided with modernity, in other words, mountaineering was an enactment of modern sport. A mountaineer was modern and therefore could summit a mountain which was impossible earlier for various previously held obstructions.⁹ Altogether, the growing popularity of mountaineering in Britain led to the formation of the Alpine Club, the first of its kind, a mountaineering forum founded by British mountaineers in London, in December 1857.

The Alpine Club was an exclusive society open only to those with considerable means and a certified record of climbing achievement. Of the 823 members admitted between 1857 and 1890, not one hailed from outside the university-educated middle class (Isserman and Stewart 2008: 31).

Mountaineering is a *serious play*¹⁰, often life-threatening. The climber's engagement with nature produces an intimate knowledge that cannot be experienced through the distant gaze of the sublime (Taylor 2010:20). Unfortunately, not many could afford to travel to distant locations, trek to the base camps and then try to summit a peak. The expenses of climbing¹¹ are unlike any other sport, hence, only university-educated middle-class men could afford to experience nature intimately through climbing. The Alpine Club functioned as a gatekeeper in regulating and maintaining this class composition making themselves part of an exclusive group of climbers. It also formulated formal codes and ethics of how a climber should interact with the sublime. There have been contestations to the techniques and style of climbing from other European countries which led to the formulation of their nationalist mountaineering clubs.¹² The efforts of the Alpine Club and other subsequent national clubs that were formed in Europe institutionalised mountaineering as a formal sport. A series of books and journals began to be published under these clubs where the human entanglement with the non-human mountain was described from a mountaineering vantage point.¹³

The Alpine Club was exclusively male-dominated till 1974. This doesn't imply that women were absent, but they were marginalised leading them to form women's exclusive mountaineering clubs, such as the Ladies' Alpine Club, founded in 1907 (Morlado 2020: 728). Similar to most modern sports, mountaineering too was based on patriarchal notions as the public being androcentric. Hence, during its inception, mountaineering was primarily a male-dominated space. Alpine mountains became the 'Playground of

Europe'¹⁴ and climbers from various nations and clubs came to test their climbing approaches and skills in the Alps (Stephen 1871). Along with climbers, there were also guides. Guides were climbers and porters fused into one who was mostly from the neighbouring villages around the summit. They can perform various types of functions, such as carrying bags, cooking food, setting up tents and also guiding the way. 'Like twentieth-century Himalayan Sherpas, nineteenth-century European peasants accepted this fitful dangerous work because it was extraordinarily profitable' (Taylor 2010: 22).

Setting the stage for Mountaineering in Himalaya

Mountaineering as a formal sport was already in place by the early 1900s and had undergone numerous contestations for us to categorise it into a homogenous category would be futile.¹⁵ But one can trace dominant trends and major shifts in patterns. After summiting almost all major Alpine peaks, the mountaineering community were greatly allured to the Himalaya. Firstly, Himalaya was unclimbed, no human had stepped foot on the summits. Unlike the European mountains, the indigenous farmers and shepherds living close to the mountains never thought about climbing these peaks or formulating a sport around them. Secondly, Himalaya had the highest of all mountain peaks in the world.

All the terrors of high mountain region which, seen in the great peaks of the Alps, the Weisshorn, Dent Blanche, Matterhorn, Schreckhorn, and their like, gave them for so long the credit of inaccessibility, are here found in double, nay in treble, force and number. It is this appearance of inaccessibility which—more particularly in the eyes of the practised mountaineer—raises the impression caused by this chain to a loftier and severer pitch, and also, I may be allowed to add, perhaps increases its charm (Dechy 1880: 7).

Monsieur Dechy made the above remark during his travel to Darjeeling and Sikkim during the 1880s (Dechy 1880). The Himalaya was by far the toughest and highest European mountaineers had ever seen or faced bringing new dynamics to the sport itself. Leslie Stephen marks by calling this shift from the Alps to the Himalaya the end of the "glorious days of mountaineering" as a certain standard of colonial imagination of mountaineering was fading away (Stephen 1871). Common to cricket and football, mountaineering was no longer exclusive only to the British Empire. On the contrary, a major portion of the Himalaya was directly under the

British Raj which would give them exclusivity in terms of accessibility. It would allow the British mountaineers to be the first ones to set foot in the Himalaya and claim the Giants.¹⁶

Mountaineering in Himalaya has a distinct beginning compared to the Alps or Japanese mountains, where it began internally with a certain middle-class culture of sports and leisure.¹⁷ Since the local indigenous people considered the Himalaya sacred, climbing was a completely foreign intervention. It was initiated by the British Empire with the Great Trigonometrical Survey as the mountains first required themselves to be legible to modern humans through a positivist nomenclature. According to Moore, 'The job of science was to make nature legible to capital accumulation—transforming it into units of Nature and counterpoised to the forces of capital and empire' (Moore 2016: 86). Only then the Himalaya can be the highest mountain range in the world. Though the Himalaya was assumed to be the highest and Tibet was the roof or the third pole of the planet, its first exposure to the quantitative classificatory system of modernity was done by the British Empire.

The Himalaya overwhelmed any stable imperial gaze during the nineteenth and twentieth century (Colley 2010). Imperialism through colonialism along with euro-centric modernity in its crudest form was achieving mastery over global nature and its people (Smith 2012). Almost a common thread to colonialism, the British Empire was obsessed with mapping and classifying these mountains into fixed quantitative units. This process was initiated by first surveying the regions, leaving no space as *terra incognita*. The Himalaya holds exceptional romantic parallels of a lost homeland to the colonial imaginations.¹⁸ Mountains perceived as places for transcendence and divinity also came to be seen in science as sites of purity and vision (Dora 2016). Unlike the plains, which the colonials thought of it as diseased and unproductive, the high Himalaya were considered an excellent stage for various scientific experiments. However, the entire land mass of the Himalaya was inaccessible to the colonials. It could only carry out surveys till the boundaries of its empire, leaving out a major portion of Nepal and Tibet unexplored, which also included the highest peak in the world. Hence, to access these regions, they started training indigenous people in surveying techniques to record measurements. One could say that these indigenous surveyors were the first indigenous mountaineers or trekkers in the Himalaya which enacted a completely different form of entanglement with nature(mountain).¹⁹

As mentioned earlier, there were pilgrims even before the category of trekkers or mountaineers in the Himalaya but the way the surveyors interacted with the mountains was purely for scientific-cartographic exploration. Their main intention was to map the routes and find the base of the mountains. These indigenous people²⁰ were multilingual and could easily cross state-defined borders. It also accounts for the fact that people living in the high Himalayan regions were accustomed to long-distance travellers and seasonal migrants who traversed through the length and breadth of the mountain range making the state-centric borders extremely fluid. Rather, rigid boundaries were only applicable to the British. People were used to crossing the mountain ranges through high passes, facilitating trade between the Indian Sub-Continent and the Tibetan Plateau. Therefore, for colonials to engage indigenous people to survey the entire region was not surprising. What did change was the nature of interaction with the mountains or the form of work with nature was altered. For the very first time, indigenous people were made to go to regions that were considered sacrilegious for them culturally. Finding the base of the mountain to record its altitude was never necessary, forget climbing. The form of entanglement with the mountain for these indigenous surveyors changed from a distant adobe of Gods to a modern technological-driven motive to tame and conquer nature. It also symbolised the modernisation of indigenous people through these survey explorations. Because, often the colonised “other” and nature were grouped in the same category, conceived of being savages and required to be civilised/tamed/modernised (Smith 2012).

Nature to the local people ceased to exist just as a personified abstract God once viewed through the lenses of modernity. Humans right from primordial days have always been utilising and working with nature and it's fallacious to consider the engagement as harmonious, rather it was regenerative and self-sustained. Modernity derived from euro-centric discourse on Nature, was solely to determine the underlines positivist laws that govern it and unshackle the human from its domination. Once these could be discovered, the next process would be to overcome any difficulties that would impede its utilisation for a capitalistic process. The major hindrance for the indigenous people in viewing the Himalaya through this modern lens would rest on their religious beliefs about these mountains. The pilgrim's faith will never allow her/him to climb a mountain whereas the reasoning of the indigenous surveyor had undergone modernity's rationalisation. Himalaya, since the late 1800s started to have two parallel forms of entanglements with the mountain.²¹ Along with pilgrims, there were also surveyors. Explorations to the base of the mountains were in

search of scientific purity, towards the advancement of human knowledge and the potential to conquer and comprehend the all-natural process. Himalayan Giants were exposed to scientific explorations for the very first time by the colonials through indigenous surveyors. Along with techniques to measure altitude and distance, the surveyors were also trained to record anomalies in pressure, gravity and other variables. All these were done, to set the stage for British mountaineers to travel to the mountains with ease and attempt at conquering them.

Early Days of Colonial Mountaineering

After the height of *Chomolungma* or *Sagarmatha*²² was recorded by the British Great Trigonometrical Survey as the tallest mountain on planet Earth, the mountain was given a new name- Mt. Everest. Andrew Waugh, then the superintendent of the Survey named it after his predecessor, George Everest (Isserman and Stewart 2008). The formulator of the new nomenclature also required the mountain to have a human figure on top of it which was not the case for the indigenous people. This human figure represented a typical type form of power, primarily of European modernity and industrial state, of reason and rationality and hence being in a position to create history over indigenous people who never imagined climbing *Sagarmatha* or *Chomolungma*. It symbolised victory for civilisation over nature and showcased the true human potential of modernity. Mountaineering was based on European perceptions of rationalism, individualism, and capitalism which contrasted the modern industrial state with the pre-modern colonised world (Smith 2012). Also, as a sport, mountaineering was a part of nationalistic projects. Therefore, we can understand the angst of Mallory²³ when he made his famous remark about climbing Everest because “it’s there”.²⁴ Climbing Everest would prove the superiority of Western modernity and justify the need to civilise the ‘other’, along with making British mountaineers the first ones to claim these mountains. It would show the indigenous people that the mountains can be climbed with mountaineering being the expression of modern human potential.

Thus, it fell to the English barrister William Woodman Graham, whose Alpine record embraced almost every notable pass and summit, to make the first trip to the Himalaya for purely climbing purposes, “more for sport and adventure,” as Graham himself unapologetically put it, “than for the advancement of scientific knowledge.” (Graham cited in Isserman & Stewart 2008: 33).

In 1883, Graham along with his guide Josef Imboden attempted to climb Mt. Kanchenjunga, the closest Giant which was the closest to the British empire and could be easily approached and viewed from the colonial hill station of Darjeeling, announcing the arrival of the high Himalayan mountaineering. He did climb an unnamed peak and came close to viewing the mountain before cold and illness took over (Isserman and Stewart 2008: 33). They would soon realise that the Himalaya is unlike the Alpine mountains and that conquering them would require a larger intervention. For mountaineering to exist in the form of sports or adventure required these Giants to fall. Mountaineering became a nationalist project for the British Empire through large expeditions and almost military-style seizures to claim a living God. Though Graham was the first mountaineer, the credit was given to William Martin Conway as the pioneer of colonial mountaineering in the Himalaya (Isserman and Stewart 2008: 34). Conway fitted perfectly with the British middle-class professional who was also a member of the Alpine Club. Unlike Graham, Conway was a mountaineer who possessed the Victorian ethics of colonialism and his entry into Himalayan mountaineering was a complete colonial enterprise in search of scientific exploration. The Royal Geographical Society and the Royal Botanical Gardens granted Conway funds for his climbing expedition as ‘some satisfactory sort of scientific return’ along with the delivery of some high-level plants (Isserman and Stewart 2008: 37). Mountaineering, as imagined by the colonials and Alpine club, in the initial days was still based on the drive towards scientific explorations than what it exists in today’s contemporary form of adventure, sports or tourism.²⁵ Even though Graham was the first to summit a Himalayan Mountain, his achievements were never recognised by the Alpine Club which we already know has acted as the gate-keeper in protecting a particular breed of mountaineering ethics which coincided with Victorian modernity.

Conway decided to climb Mt. K2, located on the Western side of the Himalaya in 1892. He wanted to take an artist and a scientist along with him to the Karakoram to make sketches and perform scientific experiments as the entire expedition was being sponsored. But the “most important requisite” for a climbing expedition, according to Conway, was a guide (Isserman and Stewart 2008: 38). Though Mattis Zurbriggen, a Swiss-Italian was the formal guide, the services of Pabir Thapa and three other indigenous Gurkha soldiers were used by the recommendation of Charles Granville Bruce of the Fifth Gurkha Rifles (Isserman and Stewart 2008: 39). In the long history of Sherpas²⁶ as guides and porters in Himalayan mountaineering,

this was the first time in history that indigenous people were used directly to climb a mountain and help during expeditions. It is difficult to accurately come to a definitive causal explanation of the change in the mentality of local people that had allowed the Himalaya to be unclimbed for so many years. One plausible explanation rests on the fact that financial return was extraordinarily high for the local people as compared to other employment services they could fetch during that period. Throughout the expedition, Conway was more interested in scientific surveys and romantic explorations than climbing a mountain. Once viewing the mountain up close, he decided not to climb K2 and rather settle for a high point naming it *Pioneer Peak*, marking the expedition as a success (Isserman and Stewart 2008: 44).

Even though Conway was not successful in climbing a Himalayan Giant, he was the pioneer of the notable expedition/military style of mountaineering that facilitated the interaction between humans and mountains for another fifty years. He was also the first person in Himalayan mountaineering along with Charles Granville Bruce of the Fifth Gurkha Rifles (part of his climbing team) who 'hit on the enduring idea of native mountaineering support' (Isserman and Stewart 2008: 44). An institutionalised form of mountaineering began in the Himalaya after Conway's intervention. It was mostly carried out by the British Empire as they had unconstrained access to it. Summiting a peak became a nationalistic project for the empire and like any nationalist project, it wanted to conquer the other. Therefore, the style of mountaineering was analogous to a war where a military was sent for its seizure. Unfortunately for Himalaya, the abode of Gods, where no humans might have ever stepped, became the world's highest battlefield. The same was also true for the indigenous people who were used as pawns for sacrifice during the battle. One can say, the lifeworld of the high Himalaya was completely altered by Conway and his expedition. What followed him was a series of military-style expeditions to summit the Himalayan giants and like all wars, there also lies a long list of fatalities.

Conclusion

Himalaya, to the indigenous people living around it had always been sacred. The mountain tops were regarded as an abode of Gods. Even to the people far off, Himalaya was a place of pilgrim. Therefore, travelling to the mountains was mostly because of religious significance and climbing the top was considered sacrilegious. With the advent of colonialism and their positivist surveys, the height of Himalaya was recorded which made it the highest mountain range in the world. By then, mountaineering was a well-

established form of sports carried out mostly by the university educated upper middle-class professionals in Europe and America and had already summited the major Alpine peaks. This made the Himalaya as their next mountaineering challenge. But before mountaineering could take place, the mountains required to be surveyed and routes needed to be discovered. Hence, the colonial government started to train indigenous people to survey these mountains and later to assist them climbing the mountains. The religious significance that had forbid the indigenous people to climb a mountain was overthrown, thereby, slowly altering the entanglements people had with the Himalaya. Mountain climbing, be it for whatever motivation was not a reality nor a necessity in the lifeworld of the indigenous people. The colonial empire was able to tap into the pre-existing knowledge system and network of the indigenous people in order to survey these peaks. They also realised their worth if at all they were to succeed in climbing the mountains. Thus, employing them for these mountaineering expeditions were held on notions of being able to get labour for an extremely cheap price. On the flipside, the cheap price was internalised by the indigenous people through deeds of heroism for the colonial masters. Religion, which had mediated the relationship between the humans and the mountains was replaced by notions of modernity. Nature was no longer just a place of pilgrim but a place for adventure and conquer where the modern human can showcase the true human potential. Therefore, climbing a mountain would not only signify success for the mountaineering community but also a justification of colonialism's civilising project, based on domination of nature.

The Himalaya, once viewed through the modern lens of mountaineering would never be the same again. Conway was just the beginning. Following Conway, the later expeditions resulted in many deaths of mountaineers for the sake of climbing the world's highest mountains. These mountaineers were both European along with their fellow guides who were mostly Sherpas. The death tally of Sherpa mountaineers exceeds by far compared to their European counterparts. Today the Himalayan Giants are unimaginable, with people flocking in numbers to climb these mountains, resulting in the world's highest human traffic jams. Along with all its glory and pride, we also hear stories of multiple deaths every year during mountaineering expeditions. This ratio will only increase as mountaineering today has gone beyond exploration or sports; it is a part of global tourism mediated through heightened commodification of nature and exploitation of labour.

Notes

1. Though geographers have classified the Himalaya as having various ranges; Karakoram, Hindu Kush, etc. Some of the mountains fall under these ranges and might not be labelled as Himalaya. But they were created by the same orogeny as the ones falling in Himalaya. The problem is how we categorise and understand them. Therefore, many a time, Himalaya is written as Himalayas. The plural usage of the form is primarily derived during British Imperialism and their obsession with classifying and quantifying the “other”.
2. Martin Conway and his 1892 expedition of Karakoram is given the credit of the first Himalayan Mountaineering expedition. See, Isserman and Weaver, *Fallen Giants: A History of Himalayan Mountaineering from the Age of Empire to the Age of Extremes* (London 2008).
3. ‘Giants’ is taken from the title of the book, Isserman and Weaver, *Fallen Giants: A History of Himalayan Mountaineering from the Age of Empire to the Age of Extremes* (London 2008).
4. I have used non-human, mountains and nature interchangeably as it conveys the same meaning. Though in various discourses humans and non-humans are considered one, still there exists a thin line of difference between the two which acknowledges the presence of each other.
5. The participants are not just mountaineers, hence there lies a necessity to account for the various subjectivities of mountaineering. The paper will try to engage with a few of them.
6. See, Sara Shneiderman, *Are the Central Himalayas in Zomia? Some scholarly and political considerations across time and space.* (2010): 289-312; Bengt G. Karlsson, *Theory from the hills.* (2019): 26-30; Swatasiddha Sarkar, *Himalaya as Method.* (2023) in *The Routledge Companion to Northeast India* editors Wouters & Subba: 215-220.
7. Though there were many who had climbed Alpine Mountains, the credit for the first mountaineer and the first modern man is often given to Francesco Petrarca for climbing Mont Ventoux on 26th April 1336 (Hansen 2013).

8. Modernity and mountaineering are not singular monolithic concepts. They are the product of the various discourses that are in constant flux based on the time frames and points of reference while one reflects on them. These were the understandings of it during European imperialism.
9. The reasons for not summiting could be both religious or technological advancements.
10. The term used by Taylor and Ortner to describe the type of play involved in mountaineering. Serious because the risk of losing one's life is extremely high in climbing.
11. The expenses vary based on the climber. There lies a category of mountaineers called dirtbag climbers because their way of living is close to a hippie or a vagabond. Mountaineering is an expensive sport and there lies no such monetary reward for summiting a peak.
12. For more, see Taylor, *Pilgrims of the Vertical: Yosemite Rock Climber and Nature at Risk*. (Cambridge 2010).
13. This is still in the initial days of mountaineering where it doesn't fall under the category of adventure tourism.
14. For more on Alpine mountaineering, see Leslie Stephen, *The Playground of Europe*. (London 1871).
15. It will take another paper to discuss the internal changes and distinct approaches to various forms of mountaineering.
16. Being the first in the mountaineering community is an esteemed position. Not just the first to summit, but they have created multiple types of 'firsts', for example, the first to climb alone, the first to climb without supplementary oxygen and many more. For more, see Mazzolini. *The Everest Effect: Nature, Culture, Ideology*. (Tuscaloosa 2015).
17. See Karen Wigan. (2005), *Discovering the Japanese Alps: Meiji Mountaineering and the Quest for Geographical Enlightenment*. *Journal of Japanese Studies* 31(1): 1-26.
18. From setting up Hill Stations and tea plantations. For more reference on colonial representations of mountains, see Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*. (London 1996);

Pradhan, *Empire in the Hills: Simla, Darjeeling, Ootacamund and Mount Abu, 1820-1920*. (New Delhi 2017).

19. Some of the notable names include Nain Singh, Sarat Chandra Das and Hari Ram. Nain Singh was able to cross Nepal via Kathmandu and went to Lhasa, where he also managed an audience with Dalai Lama.
20. Included people from various ethnic groups. They were further segregated based on the survey they were going to undertake.
21. Only in terms of a pilgrim and a surveyor as these were the only ones to travel close to the mountains. Normal human life processes were carried out in other regions but people never ventured towards the summit. Primarily, because it was never required and going there was difficult. Secondly, because of religious sentiments.
22. Already existing names of Mt. Everest before it was surveyed.
23. George Leigh Mallory was a British Mountaineer who tried summiting Everest various times and died attempting it in 1924, along with his climbing partner Andrew Irvine.
24. A newspaper report by The New York Times, March 18th, 1923. Titled 'Climbing Everest is work for Superman: A member of former expeditions tells of the difficulties involved in reaching the top-Hope of winning in 1924 by Establishments of Base Camps on Higher Levels'.
25. The contemporary forms of mountaineering are a much later project in the Himalaya.
26. Sherpas are an ethnic community mostly from the Solu Khumbu region. Today the word has gone beyond its ethnic categorisation. Sherpa is also an occupational category which is associated with high-altitude mountaineering. It includes multiple kinds of jobs, like porter, guide, cook etc.

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