An aerial photograph of a Himalayan valley. In the foreground, a small village with numerous buildings, some with red roofs, is nestled in a green valley. The middle ground shows steep, green slopes leading up to a range of rugged, snow-capped mountains under a clear blue sky. The overall scene is a high-altitude mountain landscape.

EXPLORING THE HIGHLANDS OF HIMALAYA

HARISH KAPADIA

Foreword by Sir Chris Bonington

EXPLORING THE HIGHLANDS OF HIMALAYA



HARISH KAPADIA

Sketches by

GEETA KAPADIA

Foreword by

SIR CHRIS BONINGTON



INDUS
PUBLISHING COMPANY

To

Lt. Nawang Kapadia

He loved the Himalaya and gave his life defending them
'It is better to die in valour than be a coward'



Let those who come after,
see to it that these names be not forgotten.
For they who at the call of duty,
left all that was dear to them.
Endured hardships, faced dangers
and finally passed out of sight of men.,
In the path of duty and self-sacrifice.
Giving their lives that we might live in freedom

Tribute of the Madras Regiment (Indian Army) to its brave soldiers.



LT. NAWANG KAPADIA

“The World is a fine place and worth fighting for”
–Ernest Hemmingway

Nawang joined the prestigious Officer’s Training Academy of the Indian Army, Chennai, in August 1999 and was commissioned as an officer on 2nd September 2000. He joined the 4th Battalion of the 3rd Gorkha Rifles, and he was proud to be amongst them.

He was posted to Kupwara in the troubled valley of Kashmir where he participated in operations. While rescuing a jawan comrade Lance Naik Chitra Bahadur he was killed by a single terrorist bullet at 1110 hrs on 11-11-2000, “The Remembrance Day” (in UK and Europe) or “The Veteran’s Day” in the USA, Guru Nanak Jayanti in India, (*kartik* full moon). He was cremated with full military honours at Mumbai on 14th November 2000. Nawang leaves behind his grieving parents Geeta and Harish, brother Sonam and sister-in-law Charu, and many friends in Mumbai and in the army.

Nawang Kapadia, born on 15-12-1975, studied in the New Era School and the St. Xavier’s Boys’ Academy in Bombay. He graduated as a Bachelor of Commerce from the Jaihind College. He joined the family cloth business for a year. But since childhood Nawang had a desire to join the Indian army. He trekked extensively in the Western Ghats and in the Himalaya. He visited the Siachen glacier during an expedition and met many army officers, which helped him to make up his mind to join the army, specially the Gorkha Regiment.

His soul will rest in peace having achieved what he wanted to in service of the country.

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FOREWORD

The first time I climbed with Harish Kapadia was in 1992 when we co-led a joint Indian–British expedition to the Panch Chuli range. It was the start of a good friendship and led to two more successful expeditions, one to Spiti and the other to Ladakh. I came to know Harish well, to respect him for his vast knowledge of the topography and history of the Himalaya, to delight in his wonderful sense of humour and to enjoy the fruits of his ability as an organiser, that ensures a smoothly running trip and superb food.

All trips start from his home in Mumbai, with early morning training on the race course, comprising a brisk walk or run round the track followed by Yoga exercises. Then comes a superb breakfast of *Masala Dosa* and some sight-seeing in this vibrant city. The journey to the mountains is by train, an experience in itself, and then the trek and climb with a group of porters whom Harish has employed annually over a period of years. He has organised joint expeditions with the French, British, Japanese and Americans—in all of them sharing the cultural and mountaineering backgrounds of different societies.

He has worked tirelessly for the good of the mountaineering community, as editor of the *Himalayan Journal* and as an active and thoughtful member of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, who awarded their Gold Medal to him in 1993. His work has been recognised internationally by the Alpine Club, the world's oldest mountaineering institution, which made him an honorary member in 1996 and by the Royal Geographical Society which

awarded him the prestigious Founders' Medal in 2003.

His enthusiasm for exploration is boundless and every year he makes several trips to the Himalaya for ever-widening his huge knowledge of the world's greatest mountain region. This book is a beautifully illustrated and comprehensive overview of the history of exploration in the Indian Himalaya. It is an essential companion to anyone trekking or climbing in the area, or for that matter anyone interested in the Himalaya, for the detailed and accurate background reading that it offers.

SIR CHRIS BONINGTON

CRAZY ABOUT THE HIMALAYA AN INTRODUCTION

*They say travel broadens the mind;
but for that, you must have the mind.*
—G.K. Chesterson

I have been going to the Himalayan range now for close to four and half decades. Friends often ask me if I have had my fill of it all. "Doesn't it get boring and repetitive looking at same peaks, going through similar valleys with a similar sound of rivers?" I now ponder over the "why" of it.

They do not realise that literally the Himalayan range is not just the mountains but more than that; there are so many aspects to trekking, climbing and travelling in the range that one lifetime is not enough to do total justice. For a start there are so many valleys and peaks that one cannot possibly see them all, let alone climb them. Each region has its ethnic groups with distinct traditions, language, dress, religion, and temples and steeped in their own legends. Each of these regions was explored at different times, by colourful and strong personalities. Their wonderful writings are the major record of these areas. Gaddis (Hindu shepherds) and Gujjars (Muslim shepherds) roam these ranges, there are various tribes who live here for generations and like in all spheres of life there is also the politics of the Himalaya!

12 | *Exploring the Highlands of Himalaya*

The range has witnessed many events. There have been so many wars, with the highest battlefield, the Siachen glacier still simmering. Many traders have gone across its high passes, pilgrims have travelled for solace, and saints have stayed here to uplift the human race. Conquering armies were trapped in snow, mountaineers have died and great epics of rescue and survival have been enacted.

The Himalaya is also home to large variety of flora and fauna, unique glaciers, lakes and rivers. How the major rivers like the Ganga and Indus have carved their way in and across the range is mind-boggling. The amount of water they carry is salvation for the hot and hungry plains of India. The explorations of their course, especially that of Tsangpo/Brahmaputra was a challenge stretching across almost two centuries involving human expertise of the highest order.

Around this, the aura of the Himalaya has grown. Institutions study and dissipate knowledge about it, train people for the sport, encourage the young to climb mountains. There are railways, which climb to its lower slopes, the range has been classified in sections, its geology and geography has been dissected, and science has taken keen interest in its environs. In present days there are forestry movements and conflicts between men and mountains, those utilising the produce, and those that try to protect it. The onslaught of trekkers and tourists is part of this, causing a cultural juggernaut. All these aspects have also produced a vast body of literature and books, which are valuable references and a pleasure to read. The bards have sung praises of it with insights that only an imaginative mind such as theirs can have.

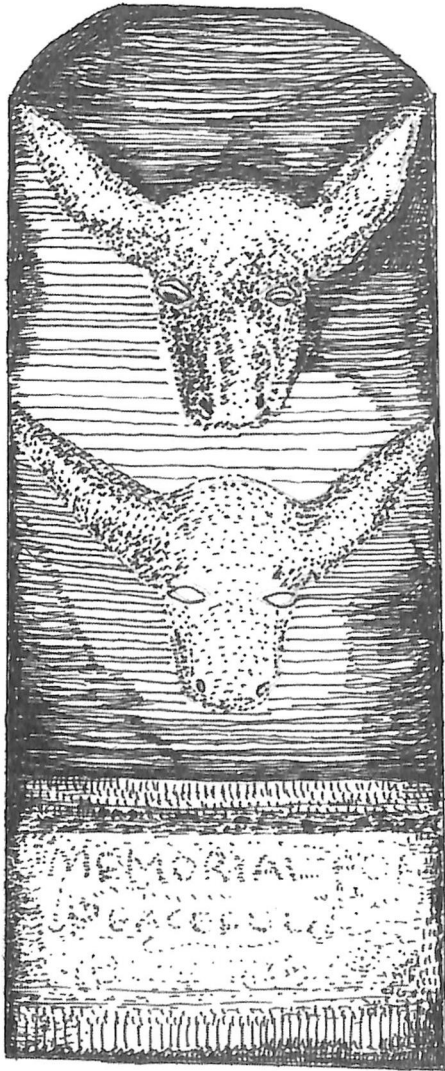
With such diversity how can one ever 'finish' with the Himalaya! For me if it all began as a physical challenge, it soon turned into an intellectual enquiry. Perhaps when it becomes a spiritual quest then the need to visit may be less compelling—but 'perhaps'!

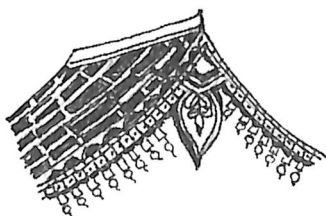
One of my successful trader-friends recently visited the Himalaya for the first time in his late middle age. On returning,

he said to me, "I always thought that you were crazy for taking long breaks for climbing and giving up so much business. Now after my first views of the snows, I admit that it was not you, but I who was crazy for not visiting the range earlier!" There is vast diversity that awaits any visitor, particularly in the highlands that lead to greater heights. Exploring their hidden treasures is as much a pleasure as exploring the high Himalaya.

Mumbai
May 2006

HARISH KAPADIA





CHAPTER

1

INDIAN HIMALAYA

THE NAGADHIRAJ

We think of mountaineering as an expression of a man's strength and health. There is no more need to explain his motives than there is a search for the 'élan vital' of life itself. To do is to touch chords, which should remain hidden in the inmost recesses of the human heart. One thing only stands clear and irrevocable before any mountaineer: the goal. And the greatest goal of all is the mighty Himalaya. No mountaineer can ever forget them, or lose the chance of pitting his strength against them when he feels the moment ripe.

—Paul Bauer on visiting the Indian Himalaya
in 1930, *Himalayan Campaign*

The Indian Himalaya extends westward, roughly from the point where the Brahmaputra river flows into Arunachal Pradesh. Dense forests pervade the eastern areas till the Bhutan border; the thick vegetation is probably the reason why high peaks such as Kangto (7042 m) and Nyegi Kangsang (6983 m) in Arunachal Pradesh have not been attempted through India. To

the west of Bhutan, the Indian Himalaya constitutes Sikkim, Kumaun, Garhwal, Kinnaur, Kullu, Kishtwar and Kashmir, and further north and north-west the trans-Himalayan regions of Spiti, Lahaul, Ladakh and East Karakoram. There are no Everests in the Indian Himalaya, and the only mountain higher than 8000 m is the Kangchenjunga in Sikkim. However, the innumerable peaks, many of them above 7000 m, the challenging routes, the glaciers, the dramatic gorges and the unexplored valleys form an area of unrivalled beauty and ruggedness that offers numerous challenges to the intrepid explorer. With all the high peaks in the Himalaya

GENERAL INFORMATION

Area: The Himalayan range extends from Arunachal Pradesh to the Eastern Karakoram. From Arunachal it goes west towards Sikkim (with Bhutan in between) to Kumaun (with eastern and western Nepal between the two) and on to Garhwal, Kinnaur, Spiti, Kullu, Lahaul, Kishtwar, Kashmir, Zaskar, Ladakh, East Karakoram and the Siachen glacier. It covers about 2500 km. The range is spread across five states of India namely Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Uttaranchal, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir.

Sections: The Eastern Himalaya, the Central Himalaya, and the Western Himalaya.

Rivers: The whole Himalayan range drains into different rivers. The Eastern Himalaya (Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim) rivers flow into the Brahmaputra. The Central Himalaya (Kumaun and Garhwal) rivers flow into the Ganges. The Western Himalaya (Kinnaur and Spiti) rivers flow into the Satluj. In the far-Western Himalaya (Lahaul, Kishtwar, Kashmir, Zaskar, Ladakh and East Karakoram) rivers flow into the Indus through its various tributaries.

Important Books: *Abode of Snow* by Kenneth Mason, *Himalayan Gazetteers* by E.T. Atkinson, *Exploring the Hidden Himalaya* by Soli Mehta and Harish Kapadia.

Major Explorations: Early Indian travellers, the first British explorers were Gen. Charles Bruce (1897), Sir Francis Younghusband (1887 and 1889), followed by many others.

Facets: Peaks, Surveys, History.

being climbed often, perhaps the paradigm shift in the climbing attitudes will start from here to climb smaller but challenging mountains.

Today's mountaineer owes a great debt to the travellers and surveyors who went before him, exploring regions that were unknown, unmapped and entirely inhospitable. Driven by wanderlust and the urge to chart out new territories, these brave explorers made difficult journeys and were ill equipped to face the hardships that came their way. Nothing had prepared them for the unforgiving terrain, the harsh climate and the deteriorating health conditions caused by high altitudes. Their efforts to gather information were further encumbered by the suspicion and hostility of the local people, who were averse to any foreign presence and were unwilling to share their knowledge of these ranges. Unequipped with the modern gear that mountaineers are blessed with today, they had very little to depend on except their courage and their will to survive.

People had been traversing the Himalayan ranges as far back as the 17th and the 18th centuries, especially the Jesuit fathers who crossed high passes such as the Mana in Garhwal, the Rohtang in Kullu and the Baralacha La in Lahaul during their missionary journeys to Ladakh and Tibet. Local villagers too had been travelling in this region for trade and pilgrimage. However, explorations began in earnest only in the 1850s, long after the arrival of the British in India. For most of the 19th century, Britain and Russia were preoccupied with the Great Game in Asia, and to counter Russia's plans of expanding south through Karakoram and Kashmir, British explorers such as Sir Francis E. Younghusband made reconnaissance tours to the Karakoram. In his famous 1887 expedition, Younghusband crossed the Great Karakoram range through the Mustagh pass at 5490 m, to the far west of Karakoram pass, reaching the Baltoro glacier south of K2, and Baltistan and Kashmir.

Other significant journeys to the Karakoram were made around the 1820s by British explorers, William Moorcroft and George

Trebeck, who journeyed from Shimla, crossed the Baralacha La into Rupshu in east Ladakh, moving on to Karakoram pass, thus linking the region to Central Asia. In 1914, Sir Filippo de Filippi, an Italian traveller, explored the Rimo glacier in East Karakoram, and Dr. Ph.C. Visser and his wife reconnoitred the Saser mountain group in 1922, moving west and extensively surveying the region in their subsequent journeys till 1935.

Explorations continued in other remote areas of the Himalaya in the latter half of the 19th century, making these regions more accessible. Around 1865, G.W. Traill, the deputy commissioner of Kumaun, crossed a difficult pass (5312 m), named the Traill's pass after him, on the ridge between the Nanda Devi and the Nanda Kot, thus opening another trade route to Tibet. Towards the east, in Sikkim, Major L.A. Waddell, from the Indian Army Medical Corps, made several journeys between 1886 and 1896, and in 1890, Claude White, Sikkim's first political officer, reached the Talung glacier from Guicha La, moving towards the Teesta river, closely surveying the area. A large expedition in 1899 led by the British explorer, Douglas Freshfield, explored the region around Kangchenjunga (8586 m), recommending its north-west face for an ascent. Vittoria Sella, the expedition photographer who accompanied him, brought back detailed photographs of the peak.

SURVEYS, SOLDIERS AND MOUNTAINEERS

Exhaustive surveys complemented these initial journeys, and soldiers further opened up the region. The most famous was the Francis Younghusband army expedition in 1903-04 across Sikkim to Tibet that enabled surveyors to demystify this area. During the Great Game period, surveyors systematically reconnoitred and mapped each region, and the 'Pandit' explorers ('Pandit' means a learned man) dominated the scene between 1865 and 1885. Recruited and specially trained in surveying techniques in Dehradun by the Survey of India, they penetrated territories such as Nepal, Tibet and Karakoram, which were inaccessible to foreigners, and adopted the religious and cultural practices of the

region, bringing back valuable information that helped in charting out the area.

A technique that was pivotal in the mapping of the Himalayan region was the gridiron system of triangulation, conceived by Sir George Everest, after he succeeded William Lambton, the founder of the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India, in 1823. This system formed a rigid framework for a detailed survey and paved the way for modern maps. The surveyors worked in difficult conditions, and equipped with very basic apparatus, they climbed several of the peaks to establish the triangulation points, setting up observation stations wherever required. Many of them such as Fazl Elahi, Grant Peterkin and Khan Saheb Afraz Gul Khan played an important role in surveying this largely unexplored area in the early 20th century.

Reconnaissance established the nature of a region; surveyors and soldiers made inroads into what had been an impenetrable terrain; now it was the turn of the mountaineers. The first organised expeditions arrived in the 1920s, gravitating towards Mount Everest, which at 8848 m is the highest peak in the world. One of the early expeditions to the Everest took place in 1924. As Nepal was not open for exploration from 1885 to 1949, all Everest expeditions prior to it attempted the peak from the north, passing through Sikkim to Tibet and on to the base of the mountain.

Being a convenient starting point for Everest, and containing within its territory the formidable Kangchenjunga, Sikkim was one of the first areas in the Indian Himalaya to receive serious attention. In 1930, an expedition led by Professor G.O. Dyhernfurth, a German explorer, crossed the Zemu glacier to approach the Kangchenjunga by its north-west face, as recommended by Douglas Freshfield in 1899. This attempt proved to be unsuccessful, however, the team moved north, making first ascents of Jongsong (7483 m), Nepal Peak (6910 m), Chorten Nyima (6927 m) and Ramthang (6701 m) along with a number of lower summits, thus covering the northern reaches of Sikkim.

Further east, in North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), now Arunachal Pradesh, in the year 1913, Captains F.M. Bailey and H.T. Morshead journeyed an area not explored before and ever since. They crossed the Dibang watershed, and moving northwards, into Tibet, travelled along the Tsangpo river to Chayul Dzong, from where they turned south to enter India, coming down to Bomdila village in Arunachal Pradesh. The route they took was named the 'Bailey Trail', and the Chinese army in 1962, swept down part of this route, almost reaching the plains of Assam. The botanical explorations of naturalists F. Kingdon Ward and F. Ludlow in the Subansiri headwaters acquainted the people with Arunachal Pradesh, the farthest eastern section of the Indian Himalaya. The Arunachal Himalaya¹ also remained largely unexplored as none of the high peaks such as Kangto (7042 m) and Takpa Siri (5735 m) could be easily approached due to the thickly-forested valleys.

With the establishment of the Himalayan Club in 1928, the Indian Himalaya saw an influx of British and European climbers. The club's objective was to encourage and assist mountaineers in their quest of conquering high peaks and to perpetuate knowledge about a region that still remained vastly unexplored. In 1931, a strong team led by Frank S. Smythe, a British explorer, climbed Kamet in Garhwal. At 7756 m, it was the highest summit to be scaled at that time. In 1936, H.W. (Bill) Tilman and Noel E. Odell, British mountaineers, overtook this altitude record by making an ascent on Nanda Devi (7816 m) in Kumaun. Another major European expedition explored the Gangotri area in 1938, reaching several high peaks and paving the way for other mountaineers.

1. Earlier this range was classified as the Assam Himalaya, a general classification. With formation of the State of Arunachal Pradesh it is appropriate to call this range with the new name as all high peaks lie here. For detailed classification refer to Appendix 3.

AFTER INDIAN INDEPENDENCE

India's independence in 1947 proved to be a landmark event in Himalayan mountaineering history. The occasion was marred by the country's partition that left many areas outside the purview of Indian mountaineering. Also, it seemed as if it was the end of the sport in the subcontinent, which had almost entirely been a British preserve till now. However, a few British climbers such as J.T.M. Gibson and R.D. Greenwood stayed behind and devoted their time fostering the growing Indian interest in mountaineering.

The 1950s began with a long Himalayan exploratory trek organised by four Scottish mountaineers. It was led by the legendary explorer W.H. (Bill) Murray, who was responsible for generating a great deal of interest in the range. The team travelled from Ranikhet in Garhwal, climbing the Uja Tirche (6202 m), attempting Bethartoli Himal (6352 m) in Kumaun and travelling further east via the Unta Dhura pass. They took the Ralam pass moving on to the Darma valley, taking a close look at the Panch Chuli group of peaks, and in this way covered the entire eastern Kumaun area.

In 1951, an expedition organised by R.D. Greenwood and Gurdial Singh climbed Trisul I in Kumaun. Gurdial Singh performed a head-stand (*shirsasana*) and R.D. Greenwood a hand-stand (a pose of yoga) to match his effort on this 7120 m high summit, marking the subtle shift in attitudes to mountaineering. This was the beginning of the age of mountaineering for the Indian climbers. Expeditions were taking on a different hue as they were no longer driven by the need to survey an area, and more and more people were beginning to climb for adventure.

In 1952, the highest peak at the head of the Gangotri glacier in Garhwal, Chaukhamba I (7138 m) was scaled for the first time by a French team. A year later, on 29 May 1953, Sir Edmund Hillary and Tensing Norgay made the first ascent of Mount Everest, as part of a British team led by Lord John Hunt. Tensing

Norgay, an Indian, was the first to have climbed the Everest, and this momentous event gave a great fillip to a sport still in its infancy. The ascent of Kangchenjunga by a British team of four summiters led by Charles Evans followed in 1955, marking the rush to conquer the world's highest mountains that had begun in 1950, with the ascent of Annapurna I (8091 m) in Nepal. With no peaks above 8000 m at that time, Sikkim being an independent kingdom, India was spared this deluge, although climbing continued on several excellent mountains. The uncharted territory of Spiti in Himachal Pradesh was explored in 1955 and 1956 by Sir Peter Holmes' small British team, which climbed Ratang Tower (6312 m) and examined eight other smaller peaks. With each passing decade came further knowledge about the Indian Himalaya.

The establishment of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation in 1958 based on the successful expedition of Cho Oyu (8153 m) on the Nepal-Tibet border, encouraged Indian climbers, although the death of one of its members due to carelessness, emphasised the need for observing safe practices. By the end of the decade Indian mountaineers had begun to take on the challenge of high peaks on their own; Nanda Kot (6861 m), climbed by an Indian team in 1959, was a case in point.

If the 1950s was the decade of awakening, the 1960s took off with a vengeance, with several expeditions being undertaken by small Indian parties. However, after the 1962 war between India and China, many areas such as the Nanda Devi Sanctuary in Kumaun, Ladakh in western Himalaya, and Arunachal Pradesh in the east, came within the 'inner line', restricting the movement of mountaineers. During the first half of the decade, three attempts were made by Indian mountaineers to reach the summit of Everest. The first expedition in 1960 was led by Brigadier Gyan Singh, and was followed by Major John Dias's attempt in 1962. However, it was the 1965 team led by Captain M.S. Kohli that was successful, managing to put a record nine climbers on the summit, a feat rarely possible given the logistics involved.

Between 1961 and 1967, the Kullu region in Himachal Pradesh saw a great deal of exploration, and Robert Pettigrew, a British mountaineer, climbed several peaks in the area. In 1966, an Indian army team ascended the remote and unknown Gorichen (6488 m), one of the first ascents in the North East Frontier Agency. By the end of the 1960s, all areas in the Indian Himalaya had been identified, and many peaks above 6000 m had been climbed.

The run for scaling the 8000 m high peaks that had begun with Annapurna I, ended in 1964 with the ascent of Shisha Pangma (8013 m) in Tibet. Attention was gradually shifting to smaller peaks and harder routes instead of the most straightforward ones, and the 1970s were witness to this trend. Sir Chris Bonington demonstrated this paradigm shift in attitudes when he scaled Annapurna I via the difficult south face even though an easier route was known. His team continued with this approach by climbing Everest in 1975 from the south-west face, the 'hard way up' as he called it, instead of the tried and tested South Col route.

In 1974, Ladakh, to which entry had been restricted after the 1962 India-China war, was thrown open for exploration, and in 1975 Sikkim became a part of India, thus making accessible vast areas for climbers and trekkers. The decade which had begun with India's war with Pakistan in 1971, ended with three army expeditions into the restricted Siachen glacier in Ladakh; the Teram Kangri group in 1978, Apsarasas in 1980 and Saltoro Kangri I in 1981, bringing to fore the unpalatable fall out of political tensions along the border. However, this decade would be primarily remembered for the climbs that had been achieved, particularly by small Indian teams.

LAST TWO AND A HALF DECADES

By the 1980s, Indian mountaineers had carved out a distinct place for themselves, and they were climbing for adventure. More than fifty Indian expeditions took place in a year, not to mention the

hundreds of treks. Some of these were more structured as they were organised and funded by government agencies such as the Indo-Tibet Border Police, the Indian army or the Indian Mountaineering Foundation. There were also the small expeditions arranged by private enthusiasts, who carried on regardless of meagre financial resources, lack of equipment and bureaucratic hurdles, pursuing their passion to explore uncharted areas and scale new heights.

Indian mountaineers also teamed up with their foreign counterparts to achieve common goals. These joint expeditions could be happy as well as troubled experiences as differences in styles of climbing, culture and personalities had to be resolved. An Indo-French expedition successfully attempted Sudarshan Parvat (6507 m) in the Gangotri area in 1981, and in the same year, an India-New Zealand team undertook the traverse of the entire Himalayan range. They were followed by an Indian army team, which completed another traverse of the range in 1981. Difficult peaks in remote areas were being approached through challenging routes; some of these were the Thalay Sagar in Garhwal, Hagshu in Lahaul and Phabrang in Kishtwar. Indian teams explored Spiti again in 1983, 1987 and 1993, after Sir Peter Holmes' journeys in 1955-56 and the peak of Gya (6794 m) was discovered and photographed from close quarters. From 1984, Indian troops were permanently stationed on the long Siachen glacier surrounded by high peaks, curbing exploration and climbing in a region that held so much promise. The Nanda Devi Sanctuary was once again closed off in 1983 for foreigners and Indians alike.

The advent of the 1990s saw a change in the attitude towards the mountains. If earlier the motto had been 'mountain for millions', there was now a call for the protection of the ranges. The summits had steadily become more accessible with better roads and several trekking and climbing expeditions being arranged by agents. All this exerted a lot of pressure on the fragile ecosystem, and some areas such as the Nanda Devi Sanctuary remained closed, creating a furore among the local people as it

deprived them of grazing rights and earnings from expeditions. Environmental issues were gaining importance and various forums were organised to press home the need for more environment-friendly expeditions.

In 1995, it was claimed that the summit of Nyegi Kangsang, at 6983 m, a high peak in the Eastern Himalaya, had been reached—an assertion that proved to be wrong. The probe that ensued marked the culmination of an academic interest in these ranges that had begun with a thorough examination and refutation of an erroneous claim made on the Nilkanth in 1961. A false claim could result from incomplete or incorrect information, inaccurate maps, bad weather conditions and sometimes, unfortunately, it arose out of dishonourable intentions. Much study goes into disproving any such wrong claim, and in each case the Indian mountaineering community rose to the occasion, with enough expertise to correct the mistaken mountaineers.

As the century was drawing to a close, a women's team traversed the Himalayan range from east to west in 1997. After difference of opinion they broke up in two teams, one reaching the Indra Col on the Siachen glacier and the other, Karakoram pass. But more than that, steep, rocky and difficult peaks were being climbed—Parvati Parvat and Dibibokri Pyramid in Kullu and Arwa Spire and Arwa Tower in Garhwal. However, the Kargil war between India and Pakistan in 1999 disrupted mountaineering in the Indian Himalaya, as had the earlier wars with China (1962) and Pakistan (1947, 1965 and 1971). These unfortunate developments played havoc with the environment, destroying the flora and fauna, and in fact the very fabric of life in the region. Gurdial Singh expressed the anguish felt by millions when, in a private conversation, he said: "We are talking of war, men, material, territories and economics, but who is going to look at the environment, destruction of thousands of species of plants, of mountains being fired upon, of birds, of flowers and of long cultures which are now lost and which cannot be protected?"

At the turn of the new century, climbing in the Indian

Himalaya continued unabated. In 2000, Rimo IV was scaled once again after 1984, the Karakoram pass was reached, and so was the Col Italia after almost seventy years of its first crossing in 1930. Discussions about the opening of the Nanda Devi Sanctuary were on, and two defence teams visited the Sanctuary in 2000 and 2001 to study the effects of closure, and climbed the Nanda Devi. In Ladakh, near the Pangong lake, many remote peaks such as Kangju Kangri (6725 m) and Kakstet were scaled by an army team in 2001. The valley of Arganglas was explored for the first time by an international team that included Indians, and its two American members ascended the steep rock of Yamandaka (6218 m), one of the finest climbs to kick-start the century. Shivering, at a height of 6543 m, was descended by skis in 2001 in a pioneering effort, and the first ascent of Tirsuli West, the last unclimbed 7000 m peak in the state of Uttaranchal, was achieved in the same year.

The sport continued to thrive in 2002, marked by the United Nations as the International Year of Mountains. Peaks such as the Ramjak (6318 m) in Zanskar, Suj Tilla (6373 m) in Kumaun and Padmanabh (7030 m) in East Karakoram were climbed for the first time this year. In the last three years the same trend continues with climbs of Argan Kangri (6789 m), Karpo Kangri (6540 m), repeat ascent of Chiring We (6559 m) and a new stunning route via the north-west buttress of Thalay Sagar (6904 m). The icing on the cake was provided by an exploration of the "S" bend on the Tsangpo from Assam. The bend from where the Tsangpo flowed into India, known as the Siang, was physically reached, completing the age-old exploration. In the Subansiri upper reaches, an Indian team explored the historic routes to Takpa Siri, a mountain holy to both the Tibetans and Arunachalis.

However, exploration in an area as vast as the Indian Himalaya is far from over, and many summits still stand unconquered, beckoning the mountaineer to take on their challenge.