

## CHAPTER 2

### Exploring the Himalayas at the Intersection of Modern Mobilities, Wellness Cultures, and Socio-Political Configurations

*Dr Indrani Das Gupta*

Assistant Professor, Department of English  
Maharaja Agrasen College (University of Delhi)

#### Abstract

Over the centuries, the Himalayas have often emerged as a central motif in representational discourses. For instance, photography, literary figurations, travel memoirs, tourism brochures, and postcard pictures available at several tourist information kiosks have sought to describe the mystical and sublime aura of the Himalayas. Configured at the confluence of territorial governance, leisure, and technological innovations, these modes of travel and tourism industries have sought in various ways to articulate the Himalayas. This chapter shall explore how the Himalayas have figured in varying times, framed in a logic of travelling mobilities suggesting continuities and discontinuities. While the central focus of this chapter lies in examining the world's leading wellness tourist resort- *Ananda Spas*, located in the foothills of Garhwal Himalayas, two other texts shall also be studied. These texts include the landscape photography of the famous colonial photographer Samuel Bourne and the early *Bhadralok* travel narrative written by Jaladhar Sen titled *Himalay* (1900). These three texts will discuss how the Himalayas are not merely an awe-inspiring geographical site but also a socio-cultural center that foregrounds the anthropocentric concerns of human existence. The Himalayan representations discussed in this chapter confront the vexed issue of colonial encounters, nationalist interventions, wellness cultures, and mobile global consumptive technologies. In trying to navigate all these varied depictions and discourses, the chapter locates the Himalayas as a fluid, dynamic, shifting symbol of modernity.

**Keywords:** *Himalayas, travel, modernity, wellness culture, consumptive technologies*

**Exploring the Himalayas at the Intersection of Modern Mobilities, Wellness Cultures, and  
Socio-Political Configurations**

**Introduction**

As Ed Douglas (2020) informs, the colossal Himalayan region extends to four thousand kilometers, from Kyrgyzstan in the West to Myanmar in the East, and houses various other famous mountainous ranges like the Pamir, Hindu Kush, and the Karakoram. Though not the most extended mountain range in the world,<sup>i</sup> Douglas notifies that the Himalayas comprise around 400 mountains whose height exceeds 7000 meters, and includes the 14 highest peaks in the world (2020, para.3). Even as the sheer size of the Himalayan range compels one to be awe-struck, or exult in an appreciation of its sublime beauty, or feel the “overwhelming and oppressive intensity” of this region (Douglas, 2020, para. 4), the Himalayas, as Namita Gokhale reminds us, “reveal[s] as much as it withholds” (2016, para.10). Constituting natural borders between many nations and states, the Himalayas occupy a central position in national and international governance, institutions, and policies.

While one rejoices in the majestic splendour of the Himalayas, this region has also seen a brutal war unfold between two of the world’s most populous nations- China and India- in 1962. In the tragic loss of lives in the last seven decades due to armed conflicts in Kashmir, the Himalayas emerge as the primary battleground of continued tensions between India and its neighbours. Strategic as the Himalayas are to the institutional military policies of nations surrounded by these massive mountainous terrains, its natural beauty, multifaceted diversity in flora and fauna are essential to save the Earth from the current climate crisis that besets global humanity. The ecological richness of this region is necessary to sustain diverse lives on Earth and reimagine the world in an alternate kind of “planetary consciousness” (Spivak, 2003).<sup>ii</sup> This ‘planetary consciousness’ overcomes the anthropogenic concerns that have seemingly destroyed the “ecological integrity of the Himalayan environment” (Pande, 2015, p. 3). Thus, the Himalayas operate as the nexus where diplomatic protocols, militaristic discourses, and ecological concerns intersect- making this vast region central to human civilizational ethos.

However, the Himalayan region, for all its socio-political and historical factors, is also significant in the way it is imaged and enunciated in various aesthetic forms and practices. The Himalayas are not configured as an inert presence. Instead, the Himalayas operate as an intersectional site of divergent

**Volume II Issue II July- December 2023**

opinions, perspectives, and representations. One of the oldest geographical terms in world civilization- the majestic Himalayas- referred variously as ‘*Himavat*,’ *Himavantas*,’ ‘*Himachala*,’ ‘*Himadri*,’ and ‘*Giri-raj*’- has appeared as an essential motif in various representational discourses. For instance, photography, literary figurations, travel memoirs, tourism brochures, and postcard pictures available at several tourist information kiosks have sought to describe the mystical and sublime aura of the Himalayas. Multiple global texts and various genres have captured the Himalayas’ multifaceted literal and metaphorical beauty and brilliance, and the representations of the heterogenous Himalayan region seem to be a never-ending saga. If ancient texts like the *Puranas* cast the Himalayas through its very unrepresentability (Bond and Gokhale, 2016), Amitav Ghosh’s rendition of the Himalayas transports us to the troubled political tensions that undergird the Himalayas in the Kashmir region (2016, para.21-30). For Rabindranath Tagore, the Himalayas condense a well of endless spiritual knowledge and truth that sustains human values (2016, para.17), while the stark, naked beauty of these massive mountains inspired Jawaharlal Nehru to reimagine the Himalayas as a material space of freedom and the site to read “the wisdom of a million years” (2016, para.4). These various representations borne out of varied travels and movements of civilization across ages cast the Himalayas, I argue, as a travelling metaphor- a landscape that projects both the ancient past and the mobile, trans-national turn of today.

Continuing with the postulation of the travelling metaphor, the Himalayas, I suggest, are symbolic of Marc Auge’s “non-place.” Non-place is, according to Auge, marked by “two complementary but distinct realities: spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure), and the relations that the individuals have with these spaces” (1995, p. 94). Auge’s ‘non-place’ created by ‘super-modernity’ are sites defined by relationality, historicity, and ephemerality. These are momentary spaces where intimate bonding is inescapably destroyed, and one is constrained by continual surveillance (1995).<sup>iii</sup> The conception of non-place, I argue, enables us to read the Himalayas not as a timeless narrative but as contingent on various factors, making these massive ranges as made up of a multiplicity of stories. Hence, the interpretations of the Himalayas cover a vast range of possibilities—from a utopian trope of potentialities of human civilization to symbolizing the failure of the narrative of development and progress and showcasing the splendour of divine grace to lamenting the loss of ecological richness. From a place of refuge and a site of wilderness, the origin of many human adventures testing the limits of human resilience, the ancient

**Volume II Issue II July- December 2023**

seat of ascetics and '*yogis/yoginis*'—the multilayered nature of the Himalayas bedazzles us all in its sheer complexity and contradictions.

Home to one of the most varied ecological landscapes in the world, the source of many legendary rivers of this region, and containing the highest and largest plateau of the world- Tibet- the Himalayas have been a source of many a myth and stories spun out of travelling voices for millennia. This chapter engages with few of these myths about the mighty Himalayas borne out of travel and the modern-day tourism industry.

**Travel as Forms of Mobility and Imaging the Himalayas**

At the forefront of many representational discourses,<sup>iv</sup> the figuration of the Himalayas has been informed by travel and the tourism industry. For Caren Kaplan, the idea of travel is located at the interface of “culture, leisure, and technological innovation” (as cited in Bell & Lyall, 2002), while Christopher Howard describes travel and tourism in terms of a “life-world” that draws upon the intersection of Husserlian modality of “earth ground and world horizon” (2017, para.24). That is, this massive mountain range appears within an assortment of meanings—at once specific and local, an aspect of its immediate horizon while also extending beyond its direct significations. It is rooted and moored to specific politico-historical interpretations and simultaneously open to a field of semantic possibilities.

The conception of travel, mobility, movements, and circulation permeates our contemporary culture and is central to the ethos of modernity and late modernity.<sup>v</sup> Travel or journey is often postulated as central to imagining of self, with Tim Cresswell claiming that the forms and practices of mobilities “[are] central to what it is to be human” (2006, p. 1), and Bærenholdt postulates whole societies as “governed through mobilities” (2013, p. 26). Moving away from the notion of beginnings, origins, and roots—the conception of culture and society in contemporary times rests upon networks and routes. A contradictory term- travel- understood as an aspect of mobility while being conjugal with the idea of displacement is also a mode that secures our socio-political climate. Travel acts as an operative mechanism and enables the redrawing of boundaries and identities. According to Kaplan, “travel is a theoretical practice, to theorizing subjects and meaning in relation to the varied histories of the circulations of people, goods, and ideas” (2002, p. 32). Adapting Kaplan’s theorization, the chapter elaborates that two trajectories can define travel. The first trajectory includes the literal

**Volume II Issue II July- December 2023**

framework covering distances and geographies, while the second embraces the metaphorical framework encased in how ideas, culture, and art engage in pluralities of mobile, travelling transactions. Travel emerges as an extension of our subjective imagination in conversation with things or people seen. Here, testimony or narrativizing is understood as essential to “authenticating the activity of travel” (Kaplan, 2002, p. 33). I argue that this act of authentication that travel includes has led to it being interlinked with representational discourses.<sup>vi</sup> Considered intrinsic to human civilization, travel and movements of explorers, nomads, refugees, intrepid travelers, the flaneur, and the tourist have shaped and reshaped our ideas of the Himalayas.

Christopher Howard claims that travel destinations are only comprehended through representations (2016, p.2). Borrowing from Howard’s theoretical description of linkages between travel and figuration of tourist centers, this chapter explores how travel in its various forms and practices from the nineteenth century to our post-millennial age represents the Himalayas. This genealogical mapping of the Himalayas’ consumption via travel and tourism industries cuts across colonial, anti-colonial, and global dimensions of modernity. While Howard’s reading of the multiple representations of the Himalayas spans “the Western encounter in the modern period” (2016, p.2), this chapter shall traverse western, Indian, and global receptive strategies to enunciate the Himalayas. Even as multiple other representations of the Himalayas are already available and are still forthcoming, this essay provides a generic understanding of how the Himalayas are invoked, revoked, articulated, and represented.

In its exploration of the interface of travel, various forms and practices of representations, this chapter analyzes the Himalayas as a multifaceted site of subjective, global, and metaphysical importance. Elaborating on what happens when Kaplan acknowledges travel as the paradigm of modernity (2002) and when performative logic seeks to articulate the Himalayas, this chapter focuses on the multiplicity of images and representations of the Himalayas. These images recreate the landscape being shaped by visual and literary narratives while simultaneously being shaped by the discourse of travel. These mutual inter-cultural, cross-cultural linkages become particularly relevant when mobility is bound to mechanisms of colonialism, nationalism, and globalization. At once, ephemeral and eternal, divisive and resplendent of connected histories, this is a landscape that speaks

**Volume II Issue II July- December 2023**

right back at us. This stunning mountain range appears as the epicenter of stories, images, ideas, and circulation of commodities.

I read the intersections of travel, pilgrimage, nationalist sentiments, imperialist understanding and the Himalayan geographical region in terms of phenomenological “structures of feeling.” While this term introduced by Raymond Williams in his seminal book *Marxism and Literature* (1977) sought to denote a dynamic social experience (p.132), in this chapter, I read this theoretical construct as essential to the idea of travel and the consumption of the Himalayas. Borrowing from Williams, the ‘structures of feeling,’ I argue, encompass the Himalayas in various forms, and partake of lived, embodied feelings and subjectivities borne of mobilities and institutional mechanisms of travel underlining the interpenetration and interactions of actors, practices, and political vectors. To decode this dynamic interface of actors, practices, and institutions that construe the Himalayan enunciations for us in times of modernity and late modernity, I shall examine three different representational texts. While the central focus of this chapter lies in examining the world’s leading wellness tourist resort- *Ananda Spas*- located in the foothills of Garhwal Himalayas, two other texts are also studied. These texts include the landscape photography and anti-picturesque travel narratives of the famous colonial photographer, Samuel Bourne, and the early *Bhadralok* travel narrative titled *Himalay* (1900) written by Jaladhar Sen. In analyzing these varied texts drawn from multiple traditions and times; the chapter offers to chart a secular cum sacred topographical fluid subjectivity that influences the Himalayan representations. The Himalayan representations in this chapter confront the vexed issue of colonial encounters, nationalist interventions, and mobile global consumptive technologies. In trying to navigate all these varied depictions, the chapter denominates the Himalayas as a fluid, shifting symbol of modernity, underpinned by the relationship of broader institutional practices and everyday experiences. Even as the major thrust of the essay will be on exploring how *Ananda Spas* have imagined, constructed, and produced the Himalayas, the other texts drawn from colonial and anti-colonial, regional background provide a context to situate the Himalayas vis-à-vis the post-millennial drawing of the Himalayas occasioned by *Ananda*. It facilitates a perspective to articulate the gaps and the silences evident in these texts while ensuring that channels of dialogues open up between heterogenous socio-political terrains.

**The Interface of Colonial and Nationalist Postulations of the Himalayas**

**Volume II Issue II July- December 2023**

Serially published between 1864 and 1870 in the London-based British *Journal of Photography*, Samuel Bourne's photographs of the Himalayas, as Sandeep Banerjee states, presents "a specific image of the mountains in late nineteenth-century Victorian India" (2014, p. 351). Bourne's textual and visual representation of the Himalayas, while cast as a "spatial product" (2014, p. 352) was nevertheless underpinned by social relations and political significations of the day. Instead of rendering the Himalayas as constitutive of the sublime rhetoric, Banerjee contends that Bourne's photography of the Himalayas positioned these massive ranges within the discourse of the dichotomy between hills and plains (2014, pp. 358-359). As a substitute of the rugged, wild, unfamiliar terrains of the mountains, the hills as a British and specifically Victorian space are defined, as Banerjee argues, as a domesticated, familiar terrain similar to other European mountain ranges (2014, p. 354-55). Hills, regulated by imperialist design, are instituted as an example of beauty and harmony, which is then contrasted with the chaotic, filthy space of the plains. (Banerjee, 2014, p. 359). Widely disseminated during the peak of the British Empire, Bourne's images of the Gangotri Glacier translated the cult of European imperialism in terms of the idiom of the picturesque. According to Banerjee, picturesque eschews the awe-inspiring, terrifying feelings evoked by the Himalayas, and simultaneously shuns the beautiful and soft hues of the landscape. Instead, the picturesque functions as a "mediator" between these two opposing feelings and emotions (2014, p. 353). As Banerjee rightly emphasizes, picturesque is constituted on the notion of 'discipline' that harmonizes irreconcilable opposites (2014, p. 353).

While Bourne's photograph of Mount Moira (Fig. 1) draws the Himalayan topography as sharply contrasted from the familiar environs of the plains, the scintillating brilliance of the Himalayas is evoked by a sense of non-presence.

<Insert Fig. 1 here>

Here, the rugged mountains are shown as devoid of any human presence, a world remote and distanced from human values, and yet, the very articulation of the photographic image renders the massive Himalayan region as a terrain conquered by the heroic adventurers and explorers like Bourne. The ruggedness and the sheer size of the mountain peak project an order outside the scope of human imagination. The sheer startling size of the mountain- grave and dignified- contrasts heavily

**Volume II Issue II July- December 2023**

with the paltriness of human affairs. This orientation of the mountains standing apart from the humdrum of mundane life becomes intensified in the second image by Bourne (Fig. 2).

<Insert Fig. 2 here>

Here, human presence, as Banerjee rightly argues, is presented as “microscopic,” denying the “locals of any agency” (2014, p. 354). This lack of agency ensconced in the figuration of the natives is a crucial tool operative in colonial politics. As per imperial politics, colonized land is underscored as empty or defined as constituting a lack of political will and action- leading the colonizers to intervene and bring about a solution. Furthermore, the insignificant presence of locals rendered microscopic disavows an experiential connection with the land. Banerjee reads this absence of local inhabitants and their quotidian experiences as “obfuscate[ing] the social relations that re/produce the landscape, besides those between the colonizer and the colonized” (2014, p. 357).

Published serially in 1893 in the Bengali periodical, *Bharati*, and in 1900 published as a travelogue, Jaladhar Sen’s *Himalay* describes the author’s journey undertaken to the Hindu pilgrimage centres of *Char Dham* in the Garhwal regions of the Himalayas. Similar to Bourne’s photographic image of the Himalayas, Sen’s travelogue casts the Himalayas as a spatial entity. However, Sen’s narrative provides a counter challenge to Bourne’s visual rendition of the Himalayas by vernacularizing the mountains and reimagining its spatial and temporal categorizations. Here, the spatialized significations are sharply distinguished from the “pre-colonial linguistic affiliations,” from the British colonial space to refashion a “regional ethno-linguistic affiliation and a secular Hindu geographical space” where Hinduism is “naturalized” to denote the sacred connotations of the Himalayan region as suggestive of a pan-Indian “civil” identity (Banerjee and Basu, 2015, pp. 610-611). Sen’s travelogue engenders a new conception of Indian national space, with its refracted meaning of a spiritual economy underscored in refashioning the *Bhadralok* identity as the epicenter of all values in the newly emergent pan-Indian consciousness.<sup>vii</sup> Sen’s travelogue forms a part of the corpus of travel narratives that would become quite famous in the next few years.<sup>viii</sup> His travelogue showcases a contradictory mindset with an acute awareness of being simultaneously a British colonial subject and a practitioner of Hindu rituals and ethos. Sen’s overarching thematic concern in his travelogue dramatizes the Himalayas as different from the pre-colonial vernacular regional identity. In sync with his Anglo-centric learning and *Bhadralok* identity, Sen’s evocation of the

**Volume II Issue II July- December 2023**

Himalayas was understood as superior to the earlier topographical and cultural imagination of the mountainous region. Simultaneously, the British cultural imagination of the Himalayas showcased in Bourne's photographs is transmuted in Sen's travelogue by including local people and their customs. Though these local inhabitants are called out for their lack of culture, yet these people are included in the putative Hindu nation-state drawn by Sen.

Moving on to the last section of my essay, I will elaborate on how *Ananda Spas*—a modern-day icon of high living and inner peace—positions itself within the larger discourse of representing the spectacular Himalayan region. This reading of *Ananda Spas* extends and builds upon the earlier significations of the Himalayas foregrounded in Bourne and Sen's travelogues, elaborating the affinities between colonial, regional-national as anti-colonial, and global, trans-national configurations.

**Ananda Spas: Embodying Travel as a Wellness Experience**

Described as World's Best Destination Spa by *Condé Nast Traveller*, UK in 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2012 and again, in 2013, 2014 and 2015 as World's Best Destination Spa by *Condé Nast Traveller*, India, *Ananda Spas* located in the foothills of the Himalayas and built on a 100 acres Maharaja Palace is, as their brochure informs us, surrounded by graceful Sal forests, overlooking the spiritual town of Rishikesh and the Ganges River valley. Amidst the peaceful environs of the Himalayan region, *Ananda Spas* integrates Ayurveda, Yoga, and Vedanta with international wellness experiences, fitness and healthy organic cuisines to restore balance and harmony for the elite global, trans-national citizens. The description of *Ananda Spas* found on the brochure invites global travelers to participate in a pilgrimage that is restorative, rejuvenating and governed by a *trans-national* sensibility where ancient and modern knowledges function in a synchronic manner. However, the figuration of the Himalayas that emerges in the glossy pages of the *Spas'* brochure and website is not framed as a simplistic phenomenological rendition of a spiritual economy. Instead, *Ananda Spas* functions in accordance with the consumptive practices of the global urban elites articulated by global capitalistic networks. The fact that this Spa is found in the estates of an erstwhile palace represents the Himalayas as a landscape divided by class and leisure concerns. Furthermore, the palace recalls the colonial and imperialistic accounts of the Himalayas as explored in Bourne's account. By default, it also casts the globe-trotting contemporary clients of *Ananda Spas* in same

**Volume II Issue II July- December 2023**

hues as Jaladhar Sen's rendering of the Himalayas- although secularized version of sacred ethnography of the Himalayas is now rendered in commercial registers.

Examining the *Ananda Spas* brochure, one gets an overwhelming feeling that a life-changing experience is about to begin. From its very tagline- "[i]n the infinity of life, take time out for the soul" (Brochure, p.1), the tourists are aware that *Ananda Spas* shall afford a retreat from the humdrum of life to manifest one's intrinsic possibilities. *Ananda Spa*'s major value in the eyes of the tourists lies in the fact that they would be able to indulge in luxury without bothering about the cacophonous noises that structures our society elsewhere. *Ananda Spas* is translated as a place that is cut off from the superfluities of life. Here, the Himalayas have been rendered for these global affluent tourists as a place to explore the exotic practices of Yoga and Vedanta in the lap of nature. Thus, nature and the Himalayas have been domesticated and claimed within our familiar, known epistemological traditions. The Himalayan region's wild and strange elements are merely a view to be seen amidst the commodities that govern the institutional practices of these rich people (Fig. 3 & Fig. 4).

<Insert Fig.3 here>

<Insert Fig. 4 here>

The Himalayan landscape is here represented as a panoramic vision without intruding or intervening in the luxurious activities offered to global customers for their 'soul enrichment'. The Himalayas are represented as a site that is regulated according to the demands and needs of their globe-trotting clients. The consumption of the Himalayas by such 'acts of seeing' render this massive range as colonized and controlled by capitalistic concerns. Here, images of the swimming pool and flowers arranged systematically in pots on the terrace of tourists' rooms afford a semblance of order and regularity amidst the harshness of these rugged terrains.

Tourism that functions and shapes the wellness paradigms of *Ananda Spas* are rooted in trans-national capitalism predicated on, as Barbara Grossman-Thompson and Benjamin Linder claim, differential access to social, economic and political power (2015, p. 184). The idea of sacred that percolates through *Ananda Spas* in the Himalayas is an approach to let the familiar and quotidian hold sway over the unknown and the strange. The Himalayas as the site of wild and sublime splendor

**Volume II Issue II July- December 2023**

here gives way to experiencing cultural attraction in a manner that participates in pseudo-authentic meaning exercises. Following Barbara Grossman-Thompson and Benjamin Linder's study, I read *Ananda Spas* as an institutional site governed by a mobile capital which nevertheless seeks to ground the Himalayas and its cultural ethos in a mechanism that seeks to naturalize the social stratification between the local and the global, the global north and the global south.

Examining *Ananda Spas* via the glossy images and textual explanations found in their brochure and website, which I identify as part of "media assemblages" (Leitchy, 2003), the Himalayas' figuration in *Ananda Spa's* brochure and website is underlined as exotic, wild, and yet regulated, and which "abstracts and caricatures Otherness as premodern, nonwhite, precapitalist, non-English-speaking, and summarily different" (Grossman-Thompson and Linder, 2015, p. 184). Representing *Ananda Spas* as negotiating distinct spatialized registers, this world-class luxury resort embodies, as Christopher Howard said, "as part of the more general discourse of modernity and a 'mystical East'" (2016, p. 2). The capitalistic logic structures this award-winning destination luxury spa resort. The details on the brochure and the images of different locales of this spa pasted on its website are imbued with social power. Even as nature is being romanticized, yet it is also conflated with images of the swimming pool and the flower pots kept on the terrace of one of the rooms inside the spa. These familiar images of the swimming pools and flower pots emerge as the primary attraction of the Spa whereas, the Himalayas are cast outside the frame of this world-class luxury resort. The Himalayan narrative is merely underpinned as "the locus of ethnic-cultural-heritage sight-seeing" (Heinen and Kattel 1992; Brown 1998; Bookbinder et al. 1998). The Himalayas have been distanced and isolated from these urban tourists who can afford to stay in this place. The Himalayas figure as merely part of a view and the experience so offered is curated by *Ananda Spas* to offer solace and the "symphony of balance" amidst opulence (Brochure, p. 2). Here, Yoga, Vedanta, Ayurvedic treatments offered to the high-flying global tourists are identified as illustrations of "quintessential ethnic-heritage" institutions defined by an Orientalist logic shaped by neo-liberal energies. The retreat is merely understood as a break, an interval after which life functions as it did earlier. The Himalayas function as a locus of ethnic-cultural-heritage sight-seeing (Heinen and Kattel, 1992). Here, the rhetoric and representational discourse that underlies how the Himalayas are consumed is, I argue, a play of the rhetoric of capital.

**Volume II Issue II July- December 2023**

*Ananda Spas*' figuration of the Himalayas renders the mountain range empty of meanings. It appears as a blank landscape filled in with images that excludes the tourist from the human reality, identifying the Himalayan landscape as a space to be possessed and colonized. The tourists are accorded a vantage position, a privileged position to examine, to view, to survey the topography and yet remain impervious to it (See Fig.3). As Pramod K. Nayar explains, "the tourist is the watcher who scans the landscape. The scanning confers a nearly panoptical power upon the watcher" (2003, 114). The tourist through his/ her acts of seeing is conferred power and the Himalayas figure merely as an aspect of consumption (Spurr, 1993, p. 12). It is as if the tourist's gaze, a modern-day colonizer, appropriates the wilderness and the grandeur of the mountains without relinquishing the comforts of urban living. Moreover, the "aestheticization" (Grossman-Thompson & Linder, 2015, pp. 193-195)<sup>ix</sup> project underlined in *Ananda Spas* brochure and the website renders the Himalayas as merely a painting shorn of its human, cultural and ecological meanings. The beautiful, serene pictures found on the website and brochure makes the Himalayas palatable and pleasing and thus, the best way to experience the mysterious and spiritual without losing hold over their capitalistic pretensions. The glossy, colourful aestheticized images while participating in discourses of sublime and picturesque, play a more significant role of "isolating the story *as* story from the relations of political and economic power" (Spurr, 1993, p. 48; emphasis in the original).

### **Conclusion**

These three different representations of the Himalayas depict how the changing scenarios of this sacred topographical landscape occasioned by travel blurs the boundary between sacred and profane and accommodates a variety of embodied practices, institutional governance and experiences. The different texts examined in this chapter emphasize the Himalayas as a social text to be interpreted; a cultural representation that in its restorative and at times sacred symbolism augments the subjective self of the tourist- the Hindu cum national cum regional pilgrim and the intrepid explorer. If Bourne's pictures cast the Himalayas as a place of a grandeur that is virtually an 'Other' to human civilization itself, and if Jaladhar Sen's travelogue seeks to use the Himalayas as a potent site of intervention in the production of a religious, vernacular identity, *Ananda Spas* emerges as a locale where Himalayas functions as a retreat, an escape from the humdrum, petty and exploitative city life, to heal and return with renewed vigour to the capitalistic ethos of our global life. Thus, the Himalayas emerge as a

**Volume II Issue II July- December 2023**

shifting symbol, constituted of meanings that fluctuate not with the meanings impinged on it but with meanings expunged from it.

*Ananda Spas* that speak of offering world-class wellness programs does not mention how the hotel stays and tourism industry emerge as one of the prime reasons of ecological imbalance. How the staged ‘authentic’ experience seeks to obfuscate the local histories and voices that are an integral part of this story. Even as we discuss changing paradigms of the Himalayan representation, nevertheless one can also see the continuity of silences surrounding the local populations and histories. The little hill people and their ways have been rendered mute or whitewashed in all the three narratives. Their cracks are used to reify the known ordinary experience of these travelers and simultaneously, perpetuate the status quo.

However, the meanings surrounding the Himalayas are not to be exhausted soon. Stories, images and representations of the Himalayas talking back in a way where unknown voices are heard are always very much in the horizon. And this chapter shows a world that obfuscates the ecological conscience and the local way of life through these three texts which in their individual ways articulate the colonial, anti-colonial and global post-millennial capitalist space, pointing also at the same time the way forward to tell stories of those local histories, customs, and traditions.

---

<sup>i</sup> The longest mountain range is the Andes, spread along the western edge of the South American region and spanning up to 7000 km.

<sup>ii</sup> Spivak’s planetary consciousness seeks to counter the universalizing tendencies of globalization and address the creative potential of literature and human subjects. Through its refusal to espouse the values of the Anglo-American neoliberal, capitalist system, Spivak’s planetary consciousness seeks to draw attention to connections between inter-species and intra-species.

<sup>iii</sup> Functioning as a crucial factor in the figuration of different Himalayan representations in this essay, the motif of surveillance articulates a framework where the mountains figure either as sacred, alluring, harsh, or enigmatic depending on the networks of production. Hence, the surveillance code enables varying modes of human socio-political conduct to emerge while the Himalayas appear as a symptomatic reading of such surveillance discourses.

<sup>iv</sup> Following J. Dewsbury et al., I read representations “as performative in themselves; as doings” (2002, p. 438). Discourses are read as a “system of language which draws on a particular terminology and encodes specific forms of knowledge” (Tonkiss 1998, 248).

<sup>v</sup> The definition of modernity has often been debated. Whether in its concerns with periodization or the confusion related to its distinctive elements or because it is connected to the homogenizing ethos of Western consciousness, modernity has often been underpinned by irreconcilable factors that deny a totalitarian meaning. Framed as contrary to the episteme of tradition and conventions—modernity—has been interpreted as a ‘novel’ constitution of human affairs. Late modernity as a term has often cropped up in Zygmunt Bauman’s work on liquid modernity (2000). Instead of designating the global age as a postmodern one, Bauman explores global conditions as continuing and developing the values of modernity. This

chapter positions the Himalayas in the discourse of modernity and late modernity, where travel and forms of mobility sought to refashion societies and politics.

<sup>vi</sup> Though the quest for authenticity has often defined spiritual journeys, in this essay the search for authenticity figures as the distinctive feature of representative discourses—closely connected and identifiable with travel.

<sup>vii</sup> Bhadralkos, roughly translated as gentle folks were products of colonial education and colonial state practices.

Belonging to the erstwhile Bengali elite (primarily the Brahmins and also included the rich or the upper-middle trading class), Bhadralkos were marked by ambiguities and contradictions. In their attraction towards and rejection of the colonial culture, Bhadralkos came to crystallize the paradoxical terrain of modernity.

<sup>viii</sup> Sen's travelogue along with Bharati's travelogue were the early instances of this genre. These travel narratives were followed by Prabodh Kumar Sanyal's *Mahaprasthan Pathey* [*In the Footsteps of the Pandavas*] and *Devatatma Himalay* [*The Divine-souled Himalaya*].

<sup>ix</sup> Aestheticization, as Barbara Grossman-Thompson and Benjamin Linder explain, is the obscuring of elements that do not fit in with the aesthetic standards of the global elite regulated by Western imaginaries (Grossman-Thompson & Linder, 2015, pp. 193-195).

### References

1. *Ananda in the Himalayas*. Brochure. <https://www.anandaspa.com/>
2. Augé, M. (1995). *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (J. Howe, Trans.). Verso. (Original work published 1992). Retrieved from [https://edisciplinas.usp.br/pluginfile.php/122106/mod\\_resource/content/1/Marc%20Aug%C3%A9%20Non-Places-%20An%20Introduction%20to%20Supermodernity%20202009.pdf](https://edisciplinas.usp.br/pluginfile.php/122106/mod_resource/content/1/Marc%20Aug%C3%A9%20Non-Places-%20An%20Introduction%20to%20Supermodernity%20202009.pdf)
3. Banerjee, S. (2014). "Not altogether unpicturesque": Samuel Bourne and the landscaping of the Victorian Himalaya. *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 42 (3), pp. 351-368. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24575886>
4. Banerjee, S., Basu, S. (2015). Secularizing the sacred, imagining the nation-state: The Himalayas in Bengali travelogues, 1856-1901. *Modern Asian Studies*, 49 (3), pp. 609-649. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24495446>
5. Bærenholdt, J. (2013). "Governmobility: The powers of mobility." *Mobilities* 8 (1), pp. 20–34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2012.747754>
6. Bell, C., Lyall, J. (2002). *The accelerated sublime: Landscape, tourism, and identity*. Praeger Publications. Retrieved from

[https://books.google.com/books?id=ZT1JtX0kVUUC&printsec=frontcover&dq=the+accelerated+sublime&hl=en&newbks=1&newbks\\_redir=1&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjTyIbi-OPyAhUK7XMBHd5HCXMQ6AEwAHoECAUQAq](https://books.google.com/books?id=ZT1JtX0kVUUC&printsec=frontcover&dq=the+accelerated+sublime&hl=en&newbks=1&newbks_redir=1&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjTyIbi-OPyAhUK7XMBHd5HCXMQ6AEwAHoECAUQAq)

7. Bharati, R. (2002). *Himaranya*. Mitra & Ghosh Publishers.
8. Bond, R., Gokhale, N. (Eds.). (2016). *Himalaya: A literary homage to adventure, meditation, and life on roof of the world*. Speaking Tiger. Z-library.com. <https://1lib.in/book/3516637/721477>
9. Bookbinder, M. P., Dinerstein, E., Rijal, A., Hank Cauley, H., & Rajouria, A. (1998). Ecotourism's support of biodiversity conservation. *Conservation biology*, 12 (6), pp. 1399–1404. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2989859>
10. Brown, K. (1998). The political ecology of biodiversity, conservation and development in Nepal's Terai: Confused meanings, means and ends. *Ecological economics*, 24 (1), pp. 73–87. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0921-8009\(97\)00587-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0921-8009(97)00587-9)
11. Cresswell, T. (2006). *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World*. London: Routledge.
12. Dewsbury, J. P., Harrison, M. R., & Wylie, J. (2002). Enacting geographies. *Geoforum*, 32(4), pp. 437–440. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-7185\(02\)00029-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-7185(02)00029-5)
13. Douglas, E. (2020). *Himalaya: A human history*. Vintage. Z-library.com. <https://1lib.in/book/8998239/5d3bff>
14. Ghosh, A. (2016). They make a desolation and call it peace. In R. Bond & N. Gokhale (Eds.), *Himalaya: A literary homage to adventure, meditation, and life on roof of the world*. Speaking Tiger. Z-library.com. <https://1lib.in/book/3516637/721477>

15. Grossman-Thompson, B., & Linder, B. (2015). Landscaping Otherness: The charm of inequity in Nepali tourism. *Verge: Studies in global Asias*, 1 (1), pp. 184-211.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/vergstudglobasia.1.1.0184>
16. Heinen, Joel T., & Bijaya Kattel. (1992). Parks, people, and conservation: A review of management issues in Nepal's protected areas. *Population and environment*, 14 (1), pp. 49–84.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01254607>
17. Howard, C. A. (2016). *Mobile Lifeworlds: An ethnography of tourism and pilgrimage in the Himalayas*. Routledge. Retrieved from  
[https://books.google.co.in/books?id=DEhNDwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=himalayas+and+travel&hl=en&newbks=1&newbks\\_redir=1&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwik7JyO7OPyAhVGT30KHSUmDdc4ChDoATACegQIBhAC](https://books.google.co.in/books?id=DEhNDwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=himalayas+and+travel&hl=en&newbks=1&newbks_redir=1&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwik7JyO7OPyAhVGT30KHSUmDdc4ChDoATACegQIBhAC)
18. Howard, C. A. (2018). Walking with the Gods: the Himalayas as dis(enchanting) landscape. *Transnational Frontiers of Asia and Latin America Since 1800*. Routledge.
19. Kaplan, C. (2002). Transporting the subject: Technologies of mobility and location in an era of globalization. *PMLA*, 117(1), 32-42. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/823247>
20. Liechty, Mark. (2003). *Suitably modern: Making middle-class culture in a new consumer society*. Princeton University Press.
21. Nayar, Pramod K. (2003). Touring aesthetics: The colonial rhetoric of travel brochures today. In S. Mohanty (Ed.), *Travel writing and the empire*, pp.112–25. Katha Books.
22. Nehru, J. (2016). Friends in prison. In R. Bond & N. Gokhale (Eds.), *Himalaya: A literary homage to adventure, meditation, and life on roof of the world*. Speaking Tiger. Z-library.com.  
<https://1lib.in/book/3516637/721477>

23. Pande, V. (2015). Anthropogenic landscapes of the Central Himalayas. Seminar at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, pp. 1-7.
24. Sen, J. (1996). *Himalay*. Mitra & Ghosh Publishers.
25. Spurr, David. (1993). *The rhetoric of empire: Colonial discourse in journal-ism, travel writing, and imperial administration*. Duke University Press.
26. Tagore, R. (2016). A vacation in Dalhousie. In R. Bond & N. Gokhale (Eds.), *Himalaya: A literary homage to adventure, meditation, and life on roof of the world*. Speaking Tiger. Z-library.com.  
<https://1lib.in/book/3516637/721477>
27. Tonkiss, F. (1998). Analysing discourse. In C. Seale (Ed.), *Researching Society and Culture*, pp. 405–424. Sage.
28. Williams, R. (1977). *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford University Press.
29. Zygmunt, B. (2000). *Liquid Modernity*. Polity Press.