

बाउको धुरी छैन

एवरेस्ट र अन्य हिमाली शिखरहरूको कथा शिखरबाट सुरु भएको होइन। यो कथा यहाँ, हाम्रो पहाडहरू—दाङ्जिङ, कालिम्पोड र सिक्किम—बाट सुरु भएको हो; नेपाल विदेशी अन्वेषणका लागि खुल्नु अघि नै। सिमानाहरू कोरिनु र मार्गहरू औपचारिक बनिनु अघि, यी स्थानहरू हिमाली यात्राका प्रवेशद्वारा थिए। यहाँ भर्ती, तालिम, व्यापार र जीवित अनुभवजन्म ज्ञानका केन्द्रहरू थिए। यहाँ पहाडहरूबाट १९२३ को पहिलो 'एवरेस्ट अभियान' मासहभागी छेतेन वाइदी र ग्यालजेन काजी जस्ता भरिया, मार्गदर्शक, व्यापारी र दुभाषेहरूले अभियानलाई अगाडि बढाए— एवरेस्टविश्वव्यापी विजयको प्रतीक बन्नु थेरे अघिदेखि नै बाटा, शिविर र बाँच्ने तरिकाहरू निर्माण गर्दै।

एवरेस्टका अभियानहरू साम्राज्यवाद र वीरताको विजयका रूपमा मनाइँदा, अर्को कथा भने शान्त रूपमा अघि बढिरह्यो। हाम्राहिमाली समुदायहरूले छोमेतुझा / सगरमाथा—हाम्रा लागि पवित्र पर्वत—भित्र हुँदै ती अभियानहरूको शारीरिक र भावनात्मकभार बोकिरहे। यो श्रम उनीहरूको जीविकापार्जन थियो, तर घरबाट टाढा, प्राः आत, पहिचान वा फर्कने सुनिश्चिताबिनाकोठारे जीवन पनि। उनीहरूले आर्थिक असुरक्षा र अनुपस्थितिको बोझ बोकिरहेका परिवाहरू पछाडि छोडे।

बाउको धुरी छैन आड छेरिड शेर्पाको पारिवारिक समृतिबाट आएको हो। उनी १९२४ को 'एवरेस्ट अभियान' संगी उच्च हिमालीभरियाको यात्रामा निस्किए र ६९ वर्षको उमेरसम्म हिमाल चढिएहो। उनको श्रीमती पासाड दिकी शेर्पाले आफ्ना छोराछोरीलाई भर्चिन—उनका बुवा “बाउको धुरी छैन”— अर्थात टाउकोमाथि छानो छैन। हाम्रो सांस्कृतिमा “धुरी” भनेको छानाको मेरुदण्ड हो। धुरी नहुनु भने ओत, स्थायित्व र विश्रामविहीन जीवन बाँच्नु हो।

Father has No Roof over his Head

The story of Everest and other peaks did not begin at the summit.

It began here in our hills—Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and Sikkim; long before Nepal was opened to foreign exploration. Before borders were mapped and routes were formalised, these places were the gateways to Himalayan journeys. Serving as centres of recruitment, training, trade, and lived knowledge. From our hills, porters, guides, traders, and interpreters like Chheten Wangdi & Gyalzen Kazi of the first 'Everest Expedition of 1921' carried expeditions forward—shaping paths, camps, and ways of survival long before Everest became a global symbol of conquest.

While the Everest expeditions were celebrated as a triumph of imperialism and heroism, another story unfolded quietly. Our Himalayan communities carried the physical and emotional weight of these expeditions, moving through mountains sacred to us—Chomolungma / Sagarmatha. This labour was their livelihood, but also a hard life away from home—often without shelter, recognition, or promise of return. They left behind families enduring economic precarity and absence.

बाउको धुरी छैन comes from a family memory of Ang Tshering Sherpa, a high-altitude porter who began his journey with the 1924 Everest Expedition and scaled peaks until the age of 69. His wife, Passang Diki Sherpa, would tell their children that their father had “बाउको धुरी छैन—no roof over his head”. In our culture, the ‘dhuri’ or roof ridge is the backbone of a roof. To have none is to live without shelter, permanence or rest.

The Confluence Collective (TCC) was born out of a deep-rooted conviction to curate a space to preserve, archive and retell the histories of the Darjeeling—Sikkim Himalayan region. We are a group of individual researchers and artistes, working together to create a collective space that has eventually taken the form of a Collective. As the TCC, we want to preserve our ancestral histories and in doing so curate localised archives of the place and community that makes up the Darjeeling—Sikkim Himalayas. The Darjeeling—Sikkim Himalayas has been in the heart of British Colonialism and continue to live with the consequences of this colonial history. Any effort at decolonising must begin with the recognition of this reality. Our histories have always been written for and we have always been ‘represented’, often distorting our stories and realities with cultural, historical, social political and legal consequences. Our vision for the Collective is to collectively re-imagine the hill societies— the people, community, and the region through the stories from the place— that offer new ways of ‘seeing’ and ‘imagining’ the place.

The
Confluence
Collective

बाउको धुरी छैन

Father has No Roof over his Head

Help Preserve the Stories of the
Darjeeling—Sikkim Himalayas:



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An exhibition sharing the narratives of mountain communities
whose lives and labour shaped early Himalayan exploration.

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Exhibition

Come witness stories of recognition, loss, and return where forgotten lives from early high-altitude Himalayan exploration are brought back into view.

For the first time in Kalimpong, historic expedition photographs are shown alongside deeply personal histories recovered through archives and family memory. Images once unnamed and held far away now speak directly to the land they came from.

Darjeeling to Chomolungma

This photo exhibition presents rare images from early Everest expeditions of the 1920s, tracing the journey from Darjeeling to Chomolungma (Everest). Focusing on the routes, resting places, and everyday labour along the way, the exhibition centres the experiences of local porters, guides, and animals who carried these expeditions forward. By bringing these archival photographs back to the region where many journeys began, the exhibition reclaims the history of Himalayan exploration through local perspectives and lived realities.

Ang Tsering Sherpa

Ang Tsering Sherpa (1904-2002), a 20 year old porter in the '1924 Everest Expedition'. Born in Nepal's Thame, he migrated to Darjeeling in 1920 seeking a livelihood. He would return four times to Everest (1924, 1933, 1952, and 1960), yet never to summit due to his deeply religious beliefs. In 1934, he joined the German Nanga Parbat expedition which would end in tragedy. Having suffered severe frostbite on his feet and hospitalised for over a year, he would stop climbing for almost two decades. Resuming only in 1952 and continuing to climb until 69 years of age as a Sardar. In 1954, he was part of the Daily Mail British Joint Yeti Expedition, accompanied by his son Dawa Temba. He was the first person to discover a footprint of the Yeti. He was highly decorated having received multiple awards like the German Red Cross, Himalayan Club Tiger Medal, and so on. But his life as a mountaineer was shaped by altitude, risk, and responsibility. There are multiple narratives of him adopting the children of deceased porters while extending a helping hand to porters. For him and many other locals, climbing mountains was not a dream. It was just another source of livelihood, but a dangerous and relentless profession, undertaken to sustain their families at home. His family members shared that Ang Tsering used to say, "We went to earn money. No one had the ambition to climb Everest".

Chheten Wangdi

Another story is that of Chheten Wangdi, an interpreter for the '1921 Everest Expedition'. Born in Darjeeling and later settled in Pedong, Kalimpong. Wangdi was an expert in all Tibetan dialects and English, an alumnus of Calcutta Boys' High School. He had an illustrious career, having served as a Captain in the Tibetan army and then the Indian army, stationed in Egypt during World War I. Post the Everest expedition, he taught Tibetan in the Delhi School of Foreign Languages and established Pedong's first flour and grain mill. Chheten Wangdi is also said to have been involved in aiding the recognition of Bhutia as a Scheduled Tribe. Remarkably, he was among the few non-European collaborators paid at par with his English counterparts, a rarity for the time. His story is a blend of intellect and cultural negotiation, highlighting the often overlooked local expertise that made the Everest expeditions possible.

Sherpas and Coolies

For centuries, life in the Himalayas has depended on human and animal labour to move goods across rugged terrain. Under colonial rule, this everyday practice of carrying loads became organised wage labour, especially in the eastern Himalayas. In Darjeeling, many porters often labelled coolies were migrants from Nepal and were celebrated for their endurance while remaining largely invisible in historical records. Colonial expeditions relied heavily on these labourers not only to transport goods but also to enable exploration and mapping of the region. Among them, Sherpas from the Solu-Khumbu region gradually became associated with high-altitude portering, a role shaped as much by colonial stereotypes and recruitment practices as by skill and experience. While Western narratives portrayed Sherpas as loyal and tireless companions, individual lives, risks, and losses were rarely acknowledged. This exhibition foregrounds the often-overlooked histories of Himalayan labourers human and animal whose work sustained mountaineering, empire, and exploration. It asks us to reconsider the celebrated story of the peaks by centring the endurance, resilience, and humanity of those who carried the weight of these journeys.

Events and activities

Alongside the photo exhibition, the programme includes talks, workshops, and interactive activities that deepen engagement with its themes. These sessions create spaces for reflection and dialogue around the histories and lived experiences connected to the Himalayas. Held in a region central to the organisation of early 1920s Himalayan expeditions, the programme brings together researchers, community members, families, and visitors to foreground local perspectives and encourage shared learning.

Activities

Making Butter Tea & Tsampa

with family members of the 1920s Everest expeditions
21st Feb, 2025 / 11:00am

Talks

The Sacred dimensions of Khangchendzonga

Pema Wangchuk Dorjee
22nd Feb, 2025 / 04:00-05:00pm

Migration & Labour in the Eastern Himalayas

Ambika Rai
24th Feb, 2025 / 04:00-05:00pm

Workshops

Myriad Ways of Looking:

Exploring Local Mountaineering Labour through Photographs, Objects, and Stories
Bibhusha Rai

25-26th Feb, 2025 / 11:00am-1:00pm



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