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Mountaineering Chronicles: Exploring Climbers' Experiences on the Ascents of Mount Everest and Mount Annapurna

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Abstract

Mountaineering possesses an inherent allure that captivates individuals invoking a deep fascination within the human psyche and mountaineering narratives demonstrate that the enthralling nature of this adventure sport brings a sense of inner peace and contentment to climbers' lives. By ascending towering peaks like Mount Everest and Mount Annapurna, they establish a profound connection with nature, pushing one's physical and mental boundaries, and acquiring heightened self-awareness and understanding of the human condition. Furthermore, mountaineering is regarded as a source of knowledge, power, purity, and faith. Despite the inherent risk, the reward of experiencing sublimity at the summit is worthwhile. Climbers passionately strive for a sense of fulfillment that can only be attained by reaching the top of the mountain, a world apart from everyday life.

Key words: Mountaineering, Mount Everest, Mount Annapurna, Sublime, Narratives

The human appetite for travel, a spirit of adventure and exploration, and a quest for the sublime and unknown have motivated many individuals to climb mountains. Mountaineering, defined as the art of ascending mountain peaks, is an audacious adventure that appeals to climbers worldwide who seek to experience the sublime. The natural aesthetics of the high hills, gorges, glaciers, falls, high passes, and overall topography create a mysterious, and enchanting scenery that inspires individuals to seek recreation and observe the scenic view. Climbers risk their life in thin air, frostbite, bone-chilling temperatures, avalanche, and high wind to reach the summit of these breathtaking landscapes. Among numerous awe-inspiring and noteworthy highlands in the world, the highest mountains such as Mount Everest, and Mount Annapurna capture the attention of mountaineers. This article focuses especially on the mountaineering narratives of ascending Mount Everest and Mount Annapurna and shows how ascending mountains can bring a transformation, a new sense of clarity, direction, and purpose to one's life.

Mountaineering chronicles are the features of mountain literature and encompass narratives of ascending mountains, including accounts of strange events that have occurred at the peak. In his work, *Mystery, Beauty, and Danger*, Robert H. Bates defines mountain literature as a reflection of climbers' diverse thoughts, and emotions. He states, "The pages of mountain literature reflect the varying thoughts and feelings of climbers and the multiple reasons why they climb: the search for beauty, scientific curiosity, love of the unknown, the thrill of pitting one's strength against nature, the joys of companionship in testing physical and mental struggle, and often religious devotion" (2). Bates notes that mountain literature provides a rich tapestry of an individual's thoughts, feelings, and experiences on climbing, presented in the form of narration. The mountaineers' awe-inspiring experiences, observations, feelings, and challenges are skillfully woven together through the use of flowery language, creating a literary history of the mighty- mountains and their conquerors.

The historical narratives of mountaineering present a chronological account of mountaineers and their significant expeditions. It is widely acknowledged that in the 18th century, where natural philosophers commenced undertaking field trips to the Alps in Europe, which became a popular destination for recreation. However, mountaineering as a distinct sport began to gain popularity only during the early 19th century. H.C. Sarin and Gyan Singh's article "Mountaineering in The Himalaya," published in 2007, expound upon the subject. They mention, "Mountaineering as a sport started in the Himalayas in 1883, with the climber W. W. Graham, who was the first European to come for the sole purpose of climbing for sport" (175). Sarin and Singh assert that mountaineering as a recreational activity began in the Himalayas in 1883 and Graham's visit to the Himalayan region marked a pivotal moment as he became the first European mountaineer to undertake such an expedition with a focus on sport. However, the global history of mountaineering traced back to the ascent of Mont Blanc in 1785. While climbing has existed since the beginning of human civilization, it only gained recognition as a sport in the 18th century. Notably, by the late 18th and 19th centuries, the Mountains of South America, North America, the Rocky Mountains, and African peaks were being ascended one by one. In the 20th century, mountaineering evolved into an international sport, with climbers, setting their sights on the highest peaks of over 8,000-meter, and within the following fourteen years, almost all the world's highest mountains received their first ascents.

On June 3, 1950, Maurice Herzog achieved the historical feat of being the first person to successfully conquer an 8,000-meter peak, Annapurna I. Herzog led an expedition of French climbers to the summit where the route up had never been charted, and using crude maps, picking out a possible line, the team selected a path for ascent. Similarly, on May 29, 1953, another significant milestone in mountaineering history was added when the New Zealand climber Sir Edmund Hillary and Nepali Tenzing Norgay stood on the top of Mount Everest, the highest mountain in the world. Then, in the spring of 1953, the great Austrian alpinist Hermann Bul reached the top of Nanga Parbat, followed by the Italian ascent of K2 the next year. Subsequently, Mountaineers from around the world embarked on expeditions, documenting their experiences in books, which became significant contributions to the literature of mountain and mountaineering.

The topography of the mountainous region is characterized by its awe-inspiring, magnificent, and indescribable. This is primarily due to the presence of various rows of mountain peaks, each possessing unique dimensions and sizes, as well as the presence of glaciers that create a visually striking zigzag pattern, along with the rivers and deep, narrow gorges. Claire Eliane Engel in her work, *Mountaineering in the Alps* asserts that the mountainous landscapes above the snowline is almost impossible to imagine, difficult to describe, and hopeless to paint. She states, "It is a world

apart, removed from earthly contacts, different from anything one may have seen elsewhere. When going high, one feels that one may catch a glimpse of the very features of Nature herself; and she has discarded the veils which she wears in setting less stark and bare” (179). Through this portrayal, Engel emphasizes the mountain’s significance by emphasizing its aesthetic beauty. Furthermore, the stunning view that this environment offers have the potential to evoke a sense of tranquility and peacefulness in climbers. However, despite the allure of the natural environment, scaling such high altitudes requires extensive training, unwavering courage, a belief in oneself, endurance, tolerance, patience, comradeship, team spirit, and the appreciation of physical exertion, which can transcend personal concerns and ultimately achieve a state of sublimity in life.

Exploration of the Climbers’ Narratives on the Ascents of Mount Everest and Mount Annapurna

Nepal, as characterized by its mountainous terrain, has long been a source of fascination for adventures, inspiring a sense of awe that has motivated mountaineers to explore its deep valleys and towering peaks. Over time, these pioneers in mountaineering have sought greater challenges by attempting to conquer uncharted summits. Within this context, this study is centered on the examination of mountaineering narratives or chronicles that depict the ascents of Nepal’s most revered peaks: Mount Everest and Mount Annapurna. Particularly, the exploration focuses on four distinguished memoirs, authored by individuals of both foreign as well as Nepali origins. By examining Sir Edmund Hillary’s *The High Adventure*, Jamling Tenzing Norgay’s *Touching My Father’s Soul*, Maurice Herzog’s *Annapurna: The First Conquest of an 8000-Meter Peak*, and Reinhold Messner’s *Annapurna: 50 Years Expeditions in the Death Zone*, this study seeks the climbers’ perspectives and experiences during their arduous journey.

The allure of Mt. Everest has long held a prominent position in the collective consciousness of mountaineers. Situated in the northeast corner of Nepal, on the border with Tibet, the summit of this awe-inspiring majestic peak is hidden by other impressive neighboring peaks. In his work, *Everest The Mountaineering History* Walt Unsworth refers to Sir Francis Young husband’s characterization of the mountain, stating:

Mount Everest for its size is a singularly shy and retiring mountain. It hides away behind other mountains. On the north side, in Tibet, it does indeed stand up proudly and alone, a true monarch among mountains. But it stands in a very sparsely inhabited part of Tibet, and very few people ever go to Tibet. From the Indian side, only its tip appears amongst a mighty array of peaks which being nearer look higher. (2)

Unsworth is elucidating the true essence and geographical positioning of Mt. Everest as nervous and shy by its height and ignorance. Despite that, it is perceiving the world as a proud monarch and independently attracts the mountaineers of the world.

Sir Edmund Hillary, a renowned New Zealand mountaineer, and explorer, recounts his extraordinary achievement of being the first person to set foot on the summit of Everest, in his memorable tale, *View from the Summit*. The book covers Hillary’s detailed account of the arduous and apprehensive struggle for reaching the peak. He vividly describes a breathtaking moment when he and his team crossed the south Col, he mentions, “With the wind behind us, we crossed over the south Col and looked down the great East or Kangshung Face as no one had ever seen it from the top before, and a very awesome sight it proved to be. We turned back into the bitter wind and had a fearful struggle reaching our tents again” (20). For Hillary, the wide and wild grotesque of the Himalayan peaks looked perilous and alarming, but at the same time visually awesome. He finds

stunning landscapes surrounding him and expresses the group's happiness and ease despite their tireless efforts. He asserts, "Despite all our efforts, we were a very happy and relaxed group. Our location was spectacular. Still rising above us was the craggy summit of Lhotse, but we could look over mighty Nuptse and see the superb peaks of Ama Dablam and Kangtega" (23). Hillary assumes that despite their strenuous journey, the spectacle of the mighty peaks doesn't diminish their sense of wonder and admiration. Anyway, Hillary's and Tenzing's hard work and feelings of confidence make them the first hero of the world that Hillary mentions:

We didn't waste any time. I started cutting steps again, seeking now rather anxiously for signs of the summit. We seemed to go on forever, tired now and moving rather slowly. In the distance could see the barren plateau of Tibet. I looked up to the right and there was a rounded snowy dome. It must be the summit! We drew closer together as Tenzing brought in the slack on the rope. I continued cutting a line of steps upwards. Next moment I moved onto a flattish exposed area of snow with nothing but space in every direction. Tenzing quickly joined me and we looked round in wonder. To our immense satisfaction, we realized we had reached the top of the world! (30).

This joyful expression manifests the climbers' profound excitement, elation, and triumph in creating a new history in mountaineering. Hillary's account displays a bond that exist between the climbers and the mountain and his vivid depiction portrays the extraordinary splendor and magnificence of the natural world. Hillary's account presents an awe-inspiring testament to the human spirit to triumph over seemingly insurmountable challenges in pursuit of adventure and exploration.

Jamling Tenzing Norgay, the son of the legendry mountaineer, Tenzing Norgay Sherpa presents a unique perspective on Mount Everest, in his work, *Touching My Father's Soul*, portraying Mount Everest as a revered guardian deity residing on the mountain. Within this narrative, Norgay intertwines his father's and his mountaineering story, forging a compelling connection between their experiences. He states, "Patience. Again I invoked my father's teaching on patience. He had reached the top only on his seventh attempt. Seven is lucky for our family and for the Sherpas. My grandmother Kinzom had seven sons, and my father had seven children. A party of seven is considered auspicious when travelling or working" (218). Norgay emphasizes on the continuity of their family legacy. He invokes his father's teachings on patience which shows the transmission of wisdom and values across generations. Moreover, the auspicious number seven within the Sherpa culture has a profound spiritual significance attributed to Mount Everest. Norgay's captivating depiction of the Himalayan region and the awe-inspiring sight of Mount Everest evokes both exhilaration and upliftment. He asserts, "The mountain itself came alive for me, as it had for him. He had waited and worked all his life for this moment, and the mountain rewarded him for his effort and patience: it changed from a lifeless, uncaring, and dangerous mound of rock--- into a warm, friendly, and life-sustaining being" (256). Norgay's account reflects his deep emotional connection to the mountain, which he perceives as a living entity. To him, embarking on the expedition to Mount Everest is a source of great excitement and his unwavering determination and courage enabled him to fulfill his long-cherished aspiration. Despite the challenges, Norgay realizes that in mountaineering, every action becomes meaningful because each movement is a matter of life and death. Consequently, he experiences a profound sense of bliss as the surrounding is compassionate and nurturing.

Another prominent mountain, Mount Annapurna I is located within the Annapurna mountain range of Gandaki Province, north-central Nepal. It is the tenth-highest mountain in the world, with an elevation of 8,091 meters above sea level. This mountain has earned a formidable reputation for

its treacherous and challenging ascent. In June 1950, Maurice Herzog, a notable French alpinist, achieved a momentous triumph by conquering Mount Annapurna I, marking the first ascent of an 8,000-meter peak. Herzog's remarkable expedition experience has been chronicled in his work, titled *Annapurna: The First Conquest of an 8,000meter Peak*, which has gained widespread recognition as the bestselling account of mountaineering endeavors. During the perilous journey, Herzog encountered undefinable beauty that deeply moved him as he recounts, "The snow, sprinkled over every rock and gleaming in the sun, was of a radiant beauty that touched me to the heart. I had never seen such complete transparency, and I was living in a world of crystal. Sounds were indistinct, the atmosphere like cotton wool" (143). Despite the tiring journey, Herzog remained astonished by the fascinating and awe-inspiring surroundings. Enduring an exhausting struggle, he and his companion persevered pausing every step, relying on their axes for support, as they sought to regain their breath and calm down racing hearts. Upon reaching the summit, Herzog and his friend were overwhelmed with unspeakable happiness. He expresses their emotions, saying, "The summit was a corniced crest of ice, and the precipices on the far side which plunged vertically down beneath us, were terrifying, unfathomable. There could be few other mountains in the world like this. Clouds floated halfway down, concealing the gentle, fertile valley of Pokhara, 23,000feet below. Above us there was nothing!" (144). The achievement of Herzog and Lachenal conquering this peak holds significant historical importance as it marks the first ascent of an 8,000 meter mountain. Herzog's significant contribution to the field of high-altitude climbing and his achievement firmly established his status as a legendary hero in mountaineering. Despite losing his fingers and toes during the climb, Herzog expressed his elation at the team's accomplishment and established his name among the most esteemed climbers of all time.

Reinhold Messner, a distinguished Austrian- Italian mountaineer, explorer, and author presents a captivating narrative in his work, *Annapurna: 50 Years of Expeditions in the Death Zone*. Within this narrative, Messner recounts his first ascent of the Northwest Face of Annapurna in the year, 1985. The endeavor was marked by significant challenges, characterized by its steepness, objective dangers, and risks of rock falling and bad weather. Even for an experienced mountaineer like Messner, the landscape of Annapurna instills a sense of fear. In his narrative, Messner explains the trail of the descent from the peak, which he found even more precarious than that of the ascent. Messner explains, "It was more problematic than the ascent and very risky, particularly after a fresh fall of snow. The face is concave, and all the avalanches meet up in the middle section of my proposed route, which meant that if the weather suddenly took a turn for the worse, the wall could become a mantrap" (107). Despite these challenges, Messner and his team made conquering a new route on Annapurna. Messner's colleague, Hans Kammerlander acknowledged the danger of Mount Annapurna stating, "Annapurna is a mountain that always poses a threat: constant rock fall, constant avalanches, constant wind" (108). As Kammerlander, climbers on Annapurna face numerous threats such as lightning, snow storms, rock fall, quick-changing weather, and avalanche that pose grave risks to their safety. Messner beholds the stunning vistas of Machapuchare and Dhaulagiri. In his account, he reflects, "We could not see much from the summit. Mchapuchare appeared for a brief moment from behind a gray veil of mist, there were tatters of blue sky and Han's ice-encrusted face. A huge bank of clouds hung before and above Dhaulagiri. Like an island" (124). Messner describes although the visibility from the summit was limited, the Himalayan peaks evoke a sense of enchantment and captivation. Regardless of, encountering numerous challenges, Messner successfully attains the summit and in the process arrives at a profound epiphany concerning the limited knowledge of himself, his body, and the mountain itself. He asserts, "It is only above

26,000 feet (8000m.) that I realize again and again just how little I do know about myself and my body, myself and the mountain” (131). Messner’s realization of his body and mind in the face of the massive force of nature indicates the insignificance of human beings when compared to the grandeur and power of the natural world.

Thus, Mount Everest and Mount Annapurna have consistently held a captivating appeal for mountaineers by their awe-inspiring peaks which offer profound insight into their physical and mental capacities. These majestic mountains help in the comprehension of nature, and fostering a harmonious relationship with the natural environment. Furthermore, the challenging ascents of these summits provoke self-discovery and transformation, realizing the extent of their struggle, and sublime experiences. As mentioned in the introduction of *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful: Edited with an Introduction and Notes* by J. T. Boulton, the concept of sublime as defined by Edmund Burke, “where objects are such as are capable of inspiring awe and terror, their suspense and uncertainty are powerful causes of the sublime...” (CVI). As Burke, the sublime emerges in situations where objects possess the ability to inspire awe, terror, suspense, and uncertainty are the powerful catalysts for evoking the sublime experience and mountaineering activities help in the production of emotional responses such as awe, terror, suspense, and uncertainty.

Methodology

This article mainly examines mountaineering narratives authored by mountaineers and writers with a particular emphasis on their accounts of ascending Mount Everest and Mount Annapurna. The primary objective is to explore how these mountaineers perceive these high mountains and articulate their sublime experiences through their writings. To achieve this, this article uses a qualitative research design, following the MLA 8th edition as guidelines. It employs both descriptive and analytical approaches combined to examine the body of mountain literature. It builds on the critical interpretation and analysis of the primary texts and revolves around exploring the sublime aspects associated with mountains and mountaineering. The theoretical tool employed in this study is the concept of the sublime, with a special focus on the ideas of Edmund Burke. The article selects Sir Edmund Hillary’s *View from the Summit*, Jamling Tenzing Norgay’s *Touching My Father’s Soul*, Reinhold Messner’s *Annapurna: 50 Years Expeditions I the Death Zone*, and Maurice Herzog’s *Annapurna: The First Conquest of an 8,000meter Peak*. This study undertakes a critical interpretation and analysis of these primary texts regarding different perspectives on mountain climbing and shows that mountaineering is not merely a physical pursuit of conquering a mountain, but rather a quest for the sublime in the mountain and achieving sublimity in life

Conclusion

The majestic aesthetics of high mountains have a compelling allure that captivates mountaineers with their grand, awe-inspiring vista. The ethereal and otherworldly sight created by the flurry of snow in the white, offers a meditative setting, reconciling images of beauty and horror that produce awe, ecstasy, amazement, and the feeling of upliftment. The perilous yet breathtaking ice pinnacles create a superb view, simultaneously invoking challenges and hazards that evoke a blend of joy and terror, ultimately culminating in an aesthetically satisfying experience. Such encounters not only produce the sublime but help individuals discover new energy and direction in life. Through mountaineering, climbers discover themselves in nature and gain a better understanding of their place in the world. Their experience in nature can take them beyond

themselves and onto the path toward sublimity.

The allure of Nepal's topography, with its enchanting landscapes and snow-capped peaks, plays a significant role in attracting travelers and adventurers to embark on a mountaineering expedition. Mountaineering in the high-altitude mountains is risky and challenging due to the treacherous topography, including the snow-peaked Himalayas, breathtaking glaciers, and treacherous crevasses. Despite the perilous nature of mountaineering, mountaineers who engage in the adventurous sport perceive the act of reaching the summit as an aesthetically sublime experience that facilitates mental and emotional healing and evokes a sense of elevation and transformation within individuals.

The process of ascending mountains, such as Mount Everest and Mount Annapurna, can be perceived as a profound journey toward self-discovery and transformation. Whether one engages in trekking or mountaineering, these endeavors are recognized as a transformative experience that enables individuals to gain new insights into one's own identity and existence. The captivating landscapes surrounding these mountains not only captivate travelers and mountaineers alike but also offer a fresh perspective on life and the pursuit of personal truth. As in *Mountaineering in the Alps*, by Claire Eliane Engel, it is asserted that a great ascent allows an individual to discover their true personality. She states that there is always one discovery to be made in each new ascent: that of one's soul. A great ascent enables a man to find his personality, as do few other experiences in life. An exhausting expedition compels him to throw his whole body and mind into action. It indicates that climbing does have a transformative experience, which offers a profound sense of self-realization and self-discovery. By venturing into the unexplored region, individuals can uncover their true personality. The arduous and strenuous expedition changes the climbers completely by making them conscious of their condition and loneliness in this unmeasurable universe.

The mountaineering experiences documented by Hillary, Jamling, Herzog, and Messner, offer profound insights into the application of the lessons learned during expeditions to life as a whole. Their narratives describe the inherent universality of human struggle and aspirations. The mountaineers' acknowledgment of risks, dedication, and persistent hard work, embrace risk in various aspects of life for personal growth and transformation. The desire to explore the unknown and conquer the unconquerable drives them to seek new horizons and conquer the summits of life's challenges.

Thus, the experience of the sublime extends beyond philosophical contemplation and accepts significance in the realm of mountaineering. In this context, natural objects and landscapes are considered sublime due to their ability to simultaneously attract and repel, and evoke a sense of fear and infinity. The sublime experience encountered by these mountaineers enables them to discover within themselves a capacity for resistance and courage to measure themselves against the omnipotent forces of nature.

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