

MSL: A Study of Three Corner Complex with Special Reference to the Sherpas of Khumbu and Mt. Everest Expedition

-Dr. Ramesh Raj Kunwar

Mountaineering anthropology is the next important field of Himalayan study. It is important because it studies inter-ethnic relationship in terms of culture exchange, their association with nature, environment, native culture, and nature-man-spirit world of the surrounding area. Most of the Himalayan anthropological works are confined upto 4000m from the view point of fieldwork. But, this does not mean that those anthropologists have not done trek up to 5,400 m (Everest Base Camp). However, mountaineering anthropological work is quite adventurous and dangerous because there is much risk.

In this article the abbreviation of the letters MSL refers to the M (Members)-S (Sherpas)-L (Liaison Officer). These three groups have their own values, functions, concepts, personalities, languages and cultures. An expedition team in Nepal is composed of Members (foreigners), Sirdar, Sherpas, kitchen boy, mailrunner, Liaison Officer and the porters who will be deputed from different

organizations. The three groups should have intimate relations in terms of mutual interaction, interdependence, coordination and cooperation all of which finally constitutes a complex. This trio-complex relationship was the subject of the study during my stay (5 months) at Everest Base Camp with many expedition groups (Newzealand, Dutch, Czechoslovakia, Nepal Police cleaning camp in Mt. Everest and Korean in Pumari Himal in autumn season 1984; Korean and French Everest Expedition groups in winter season (1984-85). At that time I was the appointed liaison officer to the Korean Pumari Expedition in autumn season and French Everest Expedition in winter from H. M. G. Ministry of Tourism-Nepal. This study is confined to Khumbu region and the Everest expedition. There were more than 50 climbing Sherpas, 5 liaison officers (Capt. Shailendra Bahadur Khadka, Capt. Jivan Gautam, Capt. Puru Bista, Late Inspector Yogendra Thapa and Inspector Keshab Baral)

and about 75 climbing members who were the sources for this study.

Many experts (Fisher, 1879, 1986; Pradhan 1981; Jefferies, 1982; Bjonnes, 1983; Pawson et al, 1984; Furer-Haimendorf, 1984) have studied the impacts of tourism in the Khumbu region: the changing aspects which have now a days become a stereo-type of research work, particularly in the Khumbu region of Nepal. But no one, except Michael Thompson (1983), has studied the high altitude activities of the Sherpas and their association with nature (the Himalayas) and spirits (supernatural beings), and the inter-relationship between three corner groups in the context of Himalayan expeditions as well as the sociological situation of a Himalayan Base Camp.

I decided, therefore to study the high altitude activities of the Sherpas, their relations with the members and liaison officers; also their mutual interactions among each other, focussing on the Everest Expeditions group in its mountaineering aspect on high Himalayan anthropology. I will apply the concept, "Nature - Man - Spirit Complex", of L. P. Vidhyarthi (1963) under the theme of cultural ecology and functionalism. The basis of this study is direct observations, existing literature and unstructured interviews. I have also tried to document some problems that were created during expeditions. Thus, by realizing them, I have analysed the causes and effects, judging, pros and cons of many situations, events and activities of the native people and other team members. This study is therefore concerned with the culture and environment of the Khumbu region in one aspect and the three corner groups on the other. I hope that this study will be helpful to alpinists, Trekking Agencies, the

Government, researchers and the other readers. Though I was a liaison officer to certain groups, this study is carried out not from the perspective of a liaison officer but of a researcher.

Ethno-cultural Distribution of Nepal

Nepal is inhabited by multiple ethnic groups, who tolerate religious differences among each other. The country's total population is approximately 16 million. The lowest part of this country lies at 50 m and the highest part reaches 8,848 m (Sagarmatha). The ethno-cultural distribution of the country consists of four major groups and cultural areas which are as follows: (i) Tibetan Buddhist culture in the Himalayas-Tibetan type of Nepalese people (the Sherpas, Manangis, Lopas, Nyimbis, Jirels and other Bhotias), (ii) Hindu culture in the hilly and plain regions (the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, etc. (iii) Two-layered cultures in vertical level (the Gurungs, Magars, Rais, Limbus, etc) and (iv) Newar culture in Kathmandu Valley. People, as Kawakita (1980. 1-2) writes, under Two-layered cultures, "occupy rugged precipitous mountains and their occupation is based on land cultivation, pastoralism and the forest preservation for hunting, farming (tree leaves are important as fodder) and water preservation." Hindu-Culture is an Orthodox Brhmanism whereas the Himalayan culture is dominated by Tibetan Buddhism as well as spiritism.

When the members are in Kathmandu, they see primarily the Newar culture and urban environment. After leaving Kathmandu for the Himalayan region, they will pass through Hindu culture, two-layered cultures, and finally reach the Himalayan Buddhist society.

The People and Environment of Khumbu

Nine hours drive along a motor road links Kathmandu to Jiri, via Lamosangu and Charikot. From there it takes seven, to eight days with hill porters upto Namche bazar. It takes another seven days with laden yaks or *dzopkyos* including two days rest for acclimatization, to reach Everest Base Camp. This is only a matter if there is no plane service at Lukla. Mostly people have to walk from Jiri during monsoon season. Otherwise there is Twin-Otter (17 seats) daily services from Kathmandu to Lukla, from where it takes nine days by foot, including two days rest, to reach Everest Base Camp.

The Khumbu region lies in the north-eastern part of the country between $27^{\circ} 45'$ and $27^{\circ} 55'$ N, $86^{\circ} 50'$ E, immediately adjacent to the Tibetan border. In the triangle enclosed by the rivers Dudh Koshi and Bhote Koshi are the villages of Namche Bazar (3,440 m), Khumjung (3,243 m), Khunde (3,840m), Sanasa and Tashinga (3,400 m); in the upper Dudh Koshi Valley are Phortse, Pangboche (3,900 m), Feriche (4,243 m), Dingboche (4,412 m), Devuche (3,760 m), Milingo (3,820 m) Tyangboche (3,867 m) and Fungityanga (3,250 m). In the valley Bhote Koshi are Thame (3,800 m), Thamo and Thamote collectively known as Thamichok.

The climate of this region is wet and humid during the monsoon: June-September, and dry and cold during winter, October-March. There is an average of two to four feet of snow mostly during winter.

Khumbu is situated in north Nepal in the Solukhumbu District of the Sagarmatha zone. The entire region above Jorsale comprising approximately 1113 sq. km. or 460 square miles, was declared as

National Park in 1976. The park entrance station is at Jorsale. The Park entry fee of 60 Rs. is required of all trekkers but not of expedition members. The park boundary extends north-west from Jorsale to a point just south of Tashilabtsa pass and northward to the border (Nangpa-La) of Tibet. The Nepal-Tibet border marks the Park's northern boundary eastward to the peak pethangtse (6,710 m), thence to Jorsale in a southeasterly direction (Pwason et al, 1984:24). Politically the Khumbu region is divided into two village Panchayats, known as Namche village Panchayat and Khumjung Village Panchayat.

This area is inhabited by the Sherpas, the high altitude-dwellers of the world. Their ancestral homeland is the Kham region of eastern Tibet, 1300 miles from Solukhumbu. They first migrated to Nepal in 1533 A. D. (Oppitz, 1974).

In the beginning and up to 1959, their subsistence was largely dependent on caravan trade with Tibet, oasis cultivation and pastoralism within their settlement area. But in recent years, tourism and international mountaineering have replaced trade with Tibet as a source of cash income (Jefferies, 1984:4). The Sherpas have shown a remarkable adjustment to the changing economic conditions and have monopolized the job market in mountaineering and tourist trekking (Pradhan; 1981). Tourism has brought a new economic wealth to most of the Sherpa households (Fisher, 1979). Today there is high exposure to "modern" ideas, rapid diffusion process through greater mobility and exposure, increasing knowledge about outside life and high expectations for a better "life" (Bjonness 1983 : 267) She further writes that "over the years there have been changes in the socio-cultural pattern and the impact of tourism has changed the power

structure in the society" (Ibid). In general terms, the direct result of increased affluence from tourism has been increased ecological degradation (Jefferies, 1984: 3). If rapid and uncontrolled westernization follows their culture will quickly disappear (Jest, 1981:100). In judging pros and cons of recent developments in Khumbu, one must never forget that two generations ago Sherpa social life was comparable to that of medieval Europe while today, a village such as Namche Bazar resembles in many respects minor tourist resorts in the Austrian or Swiss Alps (Furer-Haimendorf, 1984:114).

Vegetation

Forests in Khumbu range from below Lukla upto tree line (approximately 4000 m), comprising sub-alpine and alpine plant communities. The forest is thin, to some extent it is composed of mainly fir, birch, pine and rhododendron on more inaccessible slopes. The several types of rhododendrons the white flower *R. comparulatum*, the yellow *R. campylocarpum*, the purple *R. nivalis* can be seen at about 13000 to 15000 ft. from May to July. Above 3,900 m shrub communities occur with *pinus*, *excelsa*, and several species of juniper and dwarf rhododendrons such as *R. setosum* and *R. anthropogan*. Much of high altitude vegetation like juniper does not regenerate easily or quickly in such a harsh alpine area: "a Juniper bush may take 60 years to grow to 35 cm above ground level" (Jefferies, 1984: 2). Still up to 4,800 m some portion of the land is covered by herbaceous plants including grasses and sedges.

Wildlife

The seasonal birds such as the golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), Black-throated Thrush (*Turdus ruficollis*), white-throated

Redstart (*Phoenicurus schisticeps*), Rose-breasted Pipit (*Anthus roseatus*, Lammergeir (*Gypaetus barbatus*) and Himalayan Griffon (*Gypshimalayensis*) can be seen in Khumbu occasionally (Fleming, 1978:18). Another important bird is the Danphe, Impeyan Pheasant (*Lophophorus impejanus*), which is found in and around Tashinga, Sanasa and Tyangboche. Similarly, Himalayan Tahr (*Hemitragus jemlahicus*), Musk deer (*Moschus moschiferus*), wolf (*canis lupus*), Barking deer (*Mountaicus muntjak*), Himalayan bear (*Salenarctes sp.*), jackal (*canis aereus*), etc. live in the park.

Mountain Peaks in Khumbu

The Park includes Mt. Everest, the highest peak of the world (8,848 m), Nuptse (7,879 m), Lhotse (8,510 m), Lhotse Shyar (8,383 m), Khumbutse (6,640 m), Lingtrentse (6,608 m) Pumori (7,145 m), Chooyu (8,153 m), Amadablam (6,858 m), Thamserku (6,608 m), Khangtega (6,899 m), Kwangde (6,187 m), Gyachungkhang (7,922 m), Number (6,954 m), and Labuje Peaks (6,110 m; 6,145 m; and 6,169 m), Taboche (6,542 m.) There is one small peak which is known as Khumbu hyulha (5,883 m) located in the middle of Khumbu proper. This is considered a sacred peak and regarded by the Sherpas as their village god. Mt. Everest is known by different names. In Nepali it is called Sagarmatha (head in the sky). In Chinese it was previously called Jolmo Lungma and now they call it Qomolungma. The Tibetans gave it the name Chhomolungma (Goddess Mother of the Earth). However, the most elucidative name is said to be found in Tibetan sacred writings as Mi-ti Cha-pu Long nga which means, 'you can not see the summit from near it, but you can see the summit from nine directions, and a bird which flies as high as the summit goes blind' (Gurung: 1978). The Sherpas call it *Meaalhobsang* considering it as

Mother Goddess' of their community. "For Generations Sherpa mothers have described Mount Everest to their children as a mountain so high no bird can fly over it" (Singh, 1962: 371). In 1852, survey officials determined the exact height of what was shown as peak XV on Survey of Indian maps and were surprised to find that they had discovered the highest peak in the world (Ibid). "... and it was only in 1865 that the peak was named Mount Everest after a surveyor General of India" (Gurung: 1968). In 1933 Marcel Kurz applied an apt metaphorical name 'Globe's Third Pole' to the peak (Ibid).

Sherpa Religion

Their religion is completely dominated by the Tibetan Buddhism which is a latter development of Indian Buddhism of the Mahayana sect. Tibetan Buddhism entered into Tibet in seventh century A. D. during the time of Strong-tsan-Gampo (615-650 A. D.). It was Shantarakshita (entry date to Tibet, 743 and 749-762 A. D.) who first preached the new religion (Buddhism) in Tibet. But Padmasamvhava (entry date to Tibet 749-?), is recognised as the founder of Tibetan Buddhism and is religiously known as Guru Rimpoche among the Tibetan Buddhist groups. In Tibetan Buddhism the lama is considered as one of the important figures in their society, thus some Europeans called it, Lamaism. As Stein writes, "This form is often called 'Lamaism' from the important part played by the Lama (bla-ma), a term not denoting just any monk, but a person's spiritual master or teacher (guru) alone. We shall find that his role is indeed uncommonly important, even from a doctrinal view point (Stein, 1972: 174).

This religion comprises four major sects which are as follows: *nying-ma-pa*, *ka-gyud-pa*, *sakya-pa*, and *gelug-pa*. Among the different

sects, the Sherpas believe in *sang-ngak* subject of *nying-ma-pa* (unreformed tradition of Tibetan Buddhism) "... .. concentrating on fierce rites of destroying and exorcising demons" (Ortner, 1978: 166). The monuments (gompa, chorten or stupa, mani, prayer-stones, and prayer flags) are also the focal point of their religion. As Jest writes, "The monuments, religious ceremonies and festivals are only the visible portion of a complex web of beliefs and Buddhism Mahayana is part of the most visible and demonstrative aspect" (1985:18). There is close contact between laity groups and the lamas only in socio-religious spheres. Thus lama plays an integral part in the society as he is treated, according to the time and situations, as a ritual master, spiritual teacher (religious specialist), advisor, doctor, medicinal man, foreteller, astrologer, wizard, etc. Among the lamas, the reincarnated lama, *tulku*, is highly respected in their society. "Reincarnation is a form of rebirth consistent with the Karmic view of existence that is central to Tibetan Buddhism. This particular coloboration, called Mahayana Buddhism, holds that men and divinities destined for Buddhahood reject total enlightenment in order to return to the world of sentiment beings and to help other men along the slow path of salvation. In order to do this some take human forms, moving from one body to another in a continual series of predestined rebirths" (Aziz, 1976: 347). Though Gautam Buddha is highly regarded as the supreme god, in every walk of life Guru Rimpoche is invoked for their existence. "Om Mani Peme Hum" is their sacred mantra (hymn) which is invoked several times a day. Seclusion is generally spent with the above mentioned mantra either at home or in the monastery. Belife in spirits (Supernatural forces) is also common among the Sherpas. "They give expression to their

belief in the interaction between men and the supernatural powers constituting the Buddhist pantheon" (Furer-Haimendorf, 1964: 96). A village married lama is regarded as their ritual master whereas the unmarried lama of monastery is more respected than the former one. The monastery is another important institution to which Goldstein and Tsarang rightly observe, "Thus while the monastery is a spiritual haven for withdrawal from the temporal world and for renunciation of its materialistic and sensual values, it is simultaneously an instrument for bringing Buddhist ideas and beliefs to that very same temporal world of the lay population" (1985: 15). People generally circumambulate gomba, chorten and mani always from their right side for the purpose of gaining religious merit, *sonam* and *fayen*. These are the general themes of Sherpa Buddhist religion.

Climbing History of the Sherpas

Stan Armington (1979: 21-22) writes: "Sherpas although they lived near the high Himalayan peaks, never set foot on them, except to cross high passes on trade routes, until the British began to introduce the sport of mountaineering." Though they did not consider mountain climbing as sport, they lived in high pasturelands and often crossed over Nangpa-La (5,776 m) a trade route to Tibet, proving that the Sherpas were well adjusted to the Himalayan environment. Their habitual acclimatization made climbing to high altitudes relatively easy. As a result of this they have become some of the most well known alpinists in the world.

The earliest reference to Sherpas in the annals of mountaineering occurs in 1907 when it is recorded that Dr. A. M. Kellas recruited

a few Sherpas from Darjeeling to accompany him to the Sikkim Himalayas as high-altitude porters (Kohli and Berghese, 1962: 61.) Ahluwalis also writes: "In 1907, A. M. Kellas introduced the Sherpas to climbing" (1982: 38). It proves that the whole credit is given to Dr. Kellas for their affiliation with the mountains. It was also 1907 that surveyor Nath Singh visited the Sherpa country to sketch the southern slopes of Sagarmatha (Everest), to make plans for the British to climb from the Nepal side. It was abandoned however in 1909 and the Sherpas first came into prominence in 1921 not only in India but also in Europe, when they were first hired for the reconnaissance of Mt. Everest from the Tibetan side. In those days Everest expeditions started from Darjeeling, India, where a number of Sherpas were living. The Sherpas of Khumbu would also go to Darjeeling searching for jobs. Later, the climbing members were quite impressed with the Sherpa's tremendous strength, selfless devotion to their job, frankness and cheerful appearance. By their profession, they were porters but the team members would not hesitate to consider their valued friends. True virtually every expedition book is full of praises for the Sherpa's fortitude, cheerfulness and dependability; but at the same time there is always something stereo-typed about this handsome expression of of credit (Thompson, 1983: 301). It was Sherpa Chhettan who first acquired the title "Tiger". Chhettan was recruited by General Bruce for the second Everest Expedition in 1922 and served as personal servant to Finch (Kohli and Verghese, 1962:63).

So far as the historicity of the Sherpas in touching their foot on Everest is concerned, Satyal (2041, 15th Kartik: 4) has written on the ground of the book *Everest* by Walt Unsworth

(1981) that it was Rinjin who first climbed *Everest* (not on the top) in 1933, May 12. Before 1949, Nepal was not open to the international climbers. "Ever since the country was opened to climbers in 1949, Nepal Himalayas has become a great theatre of mountaineering activity and their drama of success and failure have provided impetus to more men to meet the ultimate mountains" (Ministry of Tourism, 1984: 1). Till 1984 about 200 Sherpas have completed the Mountaineering School of Manang. Few Sherpas have done advanced courses from Darjeeling, France and other European. Still there are many Sherpas who have not done even a basic course in mountaineering but they still climb. Altogether there are not less than 400 Sherpas who are employed full-time in mountaineering. The Government of Nepal has opened 122 peaks out of 1310 above 6000 feet for the international climbers. There have been about 700 expeditions large and small during the period 1959-1985. Among these, *Everest* has now been successfully climbed but not conquered or "vanquished" by a total of 175 to 180 men and 5 women from 19 nations (Hawley, 1870; Deep, 1985:32). In the history of Nepalese summiters, NMA (Nepal Mountaineering Association) records that the first man to reach the summit of *Everest* was Phudorje on 29th May, 1965 during the third Indian *Everest* Expedition (Sharma: 1984). Tenzing Norgay Sherpa (summit date 29th May, 1953), however, is unforgettable man in the climbing history of Sherpa *Everest* summiters. Till 1985 spring season, there are 27 Sherpas (including Tenzing Norgay) who have conquered *Everest*. Later on the two new faces - Ang Karma Gurung (Sherpa) and Narayan Shrestha also got the summit of *Everest* in 1985-autumn season from Tibetan side. Among them Sundare Sherpa,

30, Pangboche has conquered it four times, setting a record not only in the Sherpa climbing history but also in the world history of mountaineering.

Terminology

Nowadays many trekkers and mountaineers get confused with the word Sherpa. They consider that those who involve in trekking agencies are all Sherpas. Actually, there are two similar terms known as 'Sherpa' and 'sherpa'. The first term 'Sherpa' refers to the ethnic group and the other term 'sherpa' refers to the job status of one who carries loads in an expedition, i. e. a high altitude porter or helper to the trekkers and sirdars in trekking. The second term 'sherpa' can be of any ethnic group. In *Everest* however the job of the sherpa is handled almost entirely by the Sherpas. For example there were very few non-Sherpas who were getting jobs as high altitude porters in the *Everest* expeditions. There were only three non-Sherpas belonging to the Rai and Gurung community compared to 50 sherpas in 6 to 7 Expeditions. Thus, most of the high altitude porters are of the Sherpa community. In many trekking groups and expeditions; the jobs of the cook, kitchen boy and mailrunner was handled by the Tamangs. No doubt, the Sherpas also handle this job. Those who do not have relatives in trekking agencies bearing a post of sirdar, become porter and those who have relatives or neighbours bearing a post of sirdar, get the job of kitchen boy as their first job in trekking and mountaineering field. Gradually they become cook, sherpa and then finally sirdar. But, to be a sirdar (mountain guide), one should be capable of coordinating the whole situation: finding routes, controlling the staff, assuring the member's security, sincerity towards the rules and regulations of the

agency, having a minimum knowledge in three R's and arranging the porters etc. His main duty is to please the members by providing good service throughout the trekking or expedition period. Though the sirdar's job is hard one, it is thereafter not difficult to earn money. The cook earns a small salary in comparison to the sirdar. Though his duty is also hard one, but he also can earn some money indirectly. Rest of the others (Sherpas, kitchen boy, mail runners and the porters) get just salary and gifts from the members.

The Sherpas use the term *rongba* for lowlanders, *acharya* for the people of Tarai due to the uses of *dhōti*, *falbu* for the Newars, *gyagare* for the Indians, *yashyang* for the dhakres or the porters (Rais), *nubripa* for the people of west Nepal, *Pheipa* for the Tibetans, *tyepa* for the upper Tibetans above Lhasa, *mepa* for lower Tibetans below Lhasa. They have special terms for two groups *mik karu* (white eye) for light eyes or blond hair (European or American people) and *mik nakpo* or *songu mi* (black eye) for the government officer or liaison officer or leading staff but non-Sherpa. But in common language they use the term *saheb* for the members, *bada saheb* for the group leader and *kaji saheb* for the liaison officer.

Base Camp Food

The sherpas are very particular about food on the expedition. According to them, if the food is good, climbing is good. If the food is not good it is not possible to climb to high Camps with heavy loads. Whereas it is not possible to arrange special food for individual tastes, it is possible to arrange local food which is available in Khumbu. Dal Bhat and vegetable curry is common among Nepali groups including the liaison officer. During my stay, many liaison officers did not like to eat

European foods regularly. But they also do not like to complain about their food problem to the members which is a characteristic of Nepalese culture. If there is plenty of rice-dal, vegetable curry, the liaison officer too will be very happy. So far as yak steak is concerned, that is very popular in Khumbu and there is a high demand among the trekkers and expedition members. While it is illegal to kill cattle, meat can be eaten from animals which have died from natural causes and in fact beef is more commonly eaten than expensive mutton or chicken (Lang and Lang, 1970: 5). The majority of liaison officers do not take Yak steak which is not their cultural food. So, naturally they hesitate to eat other foods with Yak steak. At that time if the cook did not prepare alternative food for him, he will be hungry for either the whole day or for the whole night. These are the sort of minor problems a sirdar or a group leader must know and be able to solve. Sometimes the minor problems grow into obstacles to the expedition groups. But during the day time when the sherpas come back to Base Camp they take interest in boiled potatoes. Potatoes are not expensive to purchase in the villages. When the Sherpas carry loads in the early morning, which is very cold in autumn season, as they say the members should provide one small tea thermos to carry two to four cups of tea for the trail.

The role of cook is very important. The cook prepares food for those who stay at Base Camp. One sherpa said that when the high altitude cook neglected to prepare good food for the sherpas on the American Women Everest Expedition they (sherpas) threw all the luggage from Camp. He further added that if the sherpas could not get good food it would be very difficult to carry the loads to high Camps. As a result of this they become

weak and sick. Generally, they do not prefer to take European food but will take it if their own is not available. According to them, they do not need standard European food rather potatoes, rice and other local foods (*thukpa*-noodles, *syam*-boiled flour, *shyakpa*-Sherpa stew, *tsampa*-roasted barley flour) are quite energetic and suitable for their main meal. In fact, it is not a matter of high Camps. They know well it is very difficult to arrange different types of food in high Camps. Anyway, they cannot say anything about their food at Base Camp, they talk with each other and remember their system of *khaponi sawo* which means everyday the menu is changed for the consumption of food. Accordingly, the Sherpas change their menu after every meal and repeat it only after two or three days. In the same way they expect to have their own regular food-potato as often as possible. It is hard for them to get along without boiled potato during their long stay at Base Camp.

Uses of Alcohol

So far as the three corner groups are concerned in the context of alcohol intaking, practice, most of the Sherpas and liaison officers were seen drunk (but not too much) at Everest Base Camp. Many western climbers bring imported drinks but they do not drink during climbing period. If the Sherpas are from Khumbu, often household members send bottles of *chhyang* (local beer) or *rakshi* (local wine) to Base Camp. Those who get drink they feel very happy because they can fulfill their thirst. However, the Sherpa women are not part of this cultural feature.

The Sherpas can consume alcohol just as easily at 5,400 m to 6000 m at high Camp. But, no Sherpa women showed interest in taking liquor at high Camp. In comparison to them,

the male members do not mind to take liquor at any place. In course of talking about liquor, one informant (Sherpa) remembered his previous times at Everest: he and friends took a lot of drinks at Base Camp. By early next morning though they had hangover they reached Camp I and II carrying heavy loads. Though his friends were vomiting but they did not hesitate to come back from Ice Fall. It shows that the Sherpas are well acclimatized to their environment. In fact they seem so well acclimatized that they did not hesitate to sing songs for hours in the evening at high Camp (7,200 m). During stay at Base Camp, they sang a lot of songs every evening from Everest West Shoulder that were heard by the French members through the walki-talki. Besides singing and alcohol intaking, sexual intercourse is also sometimes practised at such altitude (5,400 m) without affecting their climbing.

Everest Base Camp

Everest Base Camp, 30 to 35 km. from Namche or 3 hours walk from Gorakshep to north, is situated on the western side of Ice Fall and Nuptse, and at the bottom of Mt. Khumbutse and Lhola. Lhola, the western side of Mt. Everest Shoulder and northern side of Pumari are particularly liable to frequent avalanches: the mass of snow thundering down with a white puff in its wake in frightening to anyone. The Ice Fall which is often considered the most dangerous part of the Everest climb is also liable to avalanches time and again. The Ice Fall that descended down the western CWM (mountaineering term for a hanging valley) towards the Base Camp is like a frozen lava spilling over a volcanic cone, or to give a more hydrologic imagery a mass of white waves

churning down a cataract and suspended in the act (Gurung, 1980: 321).

The size of Base Camp is about 200 m in length and 100 m in breadth. On its eastern side, there is a small rivulet and many ice seracs (blocks of ice mixed with snow) and on the western side a small track to Mt. Pumari and big crevasses. On its south and in the surrounding area there are huge blocks of stone perched a top blocks of ice about 30 meters above the ground and some thick sections of green ice that have been sculptured into vertical walls.

The northern wall of Everest Base Camp, a sharp ridge between Lingtrentse and Khumbutse, has a particularly dark visage with a series of granite ribs down which rocks roll with frequency. The cameramen for the expedition groups generally go there to take film of the Ice Fall, Camp one and Nuptse. Coming to the down side of Base Camp, the Khumbu glacier from Base Camp extends up to Thugla with its mass of rock, moraine, ice, snow and frozen rivulets. At Base Camp, about every 5 minutes, the moraine breaks down one mm, finally forming a crevasse.

There are often one or two dogs which accompany the groups from lower valley. The dogs survive at Base Camp on the leftover food. Like dogs, some birds are also seen around the Camp which are known as *gorak*, *khongma* and other mini birds. The *gorak* is a Tibetan crow whose scientific name is *Corvus corax*, and the *khongma*, a red billed alpine chough, is known as *Pyrhocorax pyrrhocorax*. They are always flying overhead. They also eat some leftover food. The other birds such as *lammergeier*, *hoopoe*, *rosefinch* and *robin accentor* (Jon Fleming and Ronald Faux, 1977: 238) are also seen near by Camp. They can be found up to 6,200 m.

Base Camp is established above the moraine. At night the ice gives a terrible sound while it breaks underneath the moraine. Due to the movement of glaciers, the shape of Base Camp is always changing. The writer had seen the shape of Base Camp in autumn and that it was completely changed in winter while liaising to the French group. When there is much snow in the winter even the local people walk only by the help of Yaks. Yaks and Naks (Himalayan male and female cattles) are very sensitive and by smelling they know the presence of a crevasse on the track (Livestock Farming-Namche). Laden Yaks generally go upto Base Camp.

Purity and Pollution

Again to the point of purity and pollution of Base Camp: when occupied year round, people eat and throw, use something and throw, everywhere there will be human excrement, dung, plastic, extra-food, half cigarette, empty cigarette cases, papers, bottles, bones, tins, aluminium, pieces of rope, nylon etc. In short from a sanitary point of view Himalaya Base Camp may be said to be built on a rubbish surfacial moraine in the middle of latrines. At first, most People take an interest in keeping Base Camp clean. As the days pass, cleaning is completely forgotten. According to the Sherpas traditional belief, they do not burn rubbish materials, as they believe that the smoke from rubbish gives a bad smell to the mountain gods who are then displeased and may bring harm to the people's lives. In their belief, the serpent deity, *lu*, and the mountain god may be angry with them. If the god is displeased with them, an avalanche, landslide, rainfall or cattle sickness may come. Thus they prefer not to burn rubbish. Instead of that they always want to burn incense to give good smell to the local

spirits or gods for their pleasure. Burning of rubbish is thus considered the worst pollution for the Sherpas, whereas the nonburning of materials in the sense of discarded materials is a bad pollution for the modern thinkers or environmental specialists. This demonstrates the difference in cultures between our and their versions. If their version, in the sense of Sherpas is correct then it would better to give slogan only for "Bury All Rubbish" instead of "Burn and Bury... ..". After completing the expedition, all rubbish either could be burned or buried but at that time everyone wants to hurry to move down from Base Camp. In any case all three groups should be more conscious about discarding materials that pollutes the whole Himalayan environment. The trail and Camp sites are also polluted because of the flow of trekkers and porters. As was seen in post monsoon there were human feces, cigarette cases, papers, spit, plastics, bottles and tin along the trail and and at camp sites. Lukla, a beautiful village, has been spoiled, because of the flow of tourists, porters and local people. Now-adays trekking and mountaineering starts and finishes there. The discarded rubbish are thrown outside of homes or on the street. Very few lodges have built personal toilets most use open toilets just behind the home. Due to the negligence of local people and porters Lukla (2850 m) environment is growing more polluted day by day. Everywhere there seems human excrement and other rubbish which give bad smells. The same characteristics are found in Beding (Rolwaling) and other settlements where there are no personal toilets.

After passing through Lukla, Tyangboche, Feriche and Lobuche seems even dirtier. Perhaps there is no difference between Lobuche and Everest Base camp. So it is not only a problem at certain Camp sites. As Pawson et al write,

"At the present time of more greater current importance than tourist related fuel use in Khumbu is waste disposal. Despite National Park requirements that visitors remove or bury trash, trails and Camp sites are becoming increasingly littered. Some streams have become so polluted that signs are posted warning trekkers not to use the water they contain." (243-244).

Especially in winter, people should collect and gather all rubbish in one place. If it is not burnt, or buried in the meantime the rubbish disappear under heavy snowfall. If not done that will be very difficult to remove from the snow at the time of returning to Kathmandu, so due to that reason, burning of those materials is an urgent task to perform every after three days or week in Himalayan Base Camp. In connection with National Park, it is Khunjo Chumbi, according to Hillary (Ibid: 14), opined that "Hillary first brought sugar to the lips of the Sherpas, but he is now throwing chilli in their eyes." Still there is a tradition of throwing those rubbish and discarded materials under the crevasse. Very few Nepali workers realise that Base Camp as well as the approach to camps are to be protected from waste pollution by falling concepts of native version.

It is not only a matter of Everest Base Camp, all Base Camps of the Himalayas should be cleaned by the groups who use them. It has been nearly 34 years that the mountains has been opened to international climbers. In every Base Camp, people should take a keen interest to keep a clean environment for good sanitation. Actually, the cleaning act should go to the local people and the expedition groups themselves. Environmental education should be provided to the personnel of trekking agencies and motivatoin for the villagers then only it will

to bring awareness or consciousness about purity and pollution.

Nepali Women in the Mountain

Women also climb in the mountain. In the context of Nepali women, Ang Ngimi Sherpa reached the Nuptse summit (7,145 m) in 1984 autumn season with her husband Ang Lhakpa Sherpa, affiliated with the French Nuptse Expedition Group. In the same season, Nepali women police also climbed Labuche peak (6,119 m) and 13 women belonging to different ethnic groups of Nepal reached the summit. This is a land-mark in Nepal's mountaineering history not only among non-Sherpas (Shambu Tamang and Narayan Shrestha) but regarding women's roles in the Himalaya. According to Ang Ngimi Shrepa, she could climb the mountain because she does not have issues. Her other two Sherpa friends (two Sherpani mountain climbers) have also similar type of situation. However, Ang Ngimi wishes to climb Mt. Everest at any time with any groups.

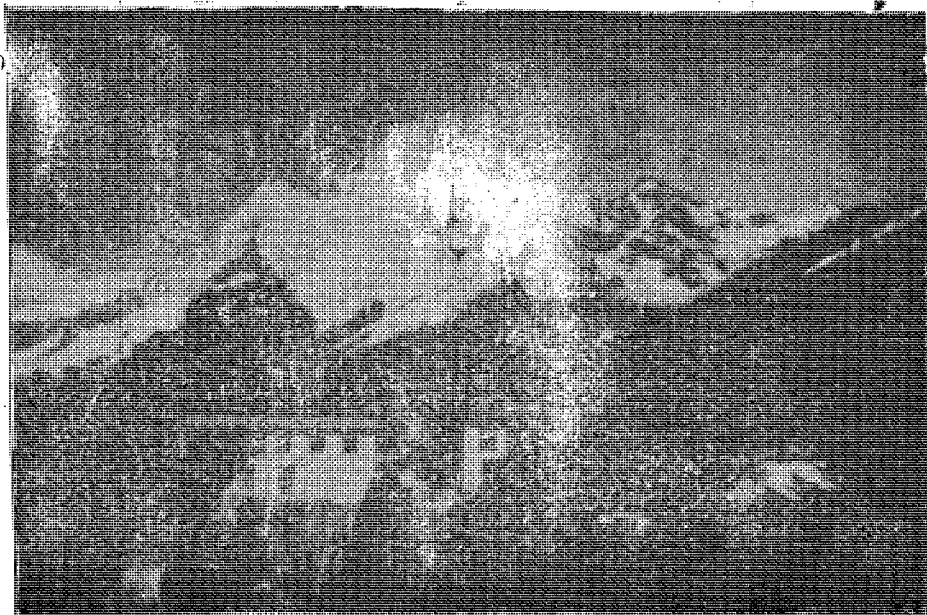
Base Camp Environment

For Hindus, Himalayas remains as their sacred spot or pilgrimage. 'Himalaya' means snow (Him) and home (alaya) is the place that Mahadev and Parvati (husband and wife) settled. For Tibetan Buddhist, Himalaya is regarded as place of the female deity or village god, *hyullha*. It is that region where previously the other people also used to go to collect medicinal herbs and hunting. But now a days due to the flow of modern medicines and establishment of National Park, the act of herb collection is almost left and hunting is completely prohibited to all. However, slaughtering or killing is religiously prohibited among the Tibetan Buddhist groups.

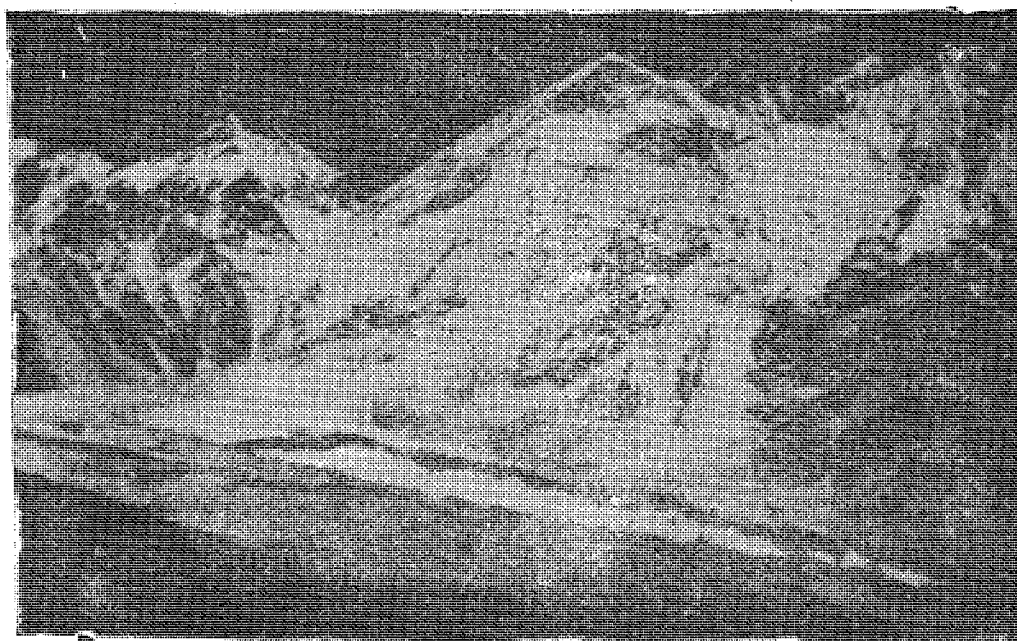
According to Sir Edmund Hillary, "It is people who create a bad environment and a bad environment brings out the worst in people. Man and nature need each other, and by hurting one we wound the other." (1984:15).

For mountain lovers, the Himalaya has become a paradise. This is why everyone should know the value of mountain and equally they must take an active interest to keep the mountains healthy and unpolluted. The expedition teams are increasing year after year, even during winter: there were more than 13 teams in 1984-85 who touched their foot on the Himalayas. With expedition teams throughout the year in the Himalayas, one can not imagine the problem of keeping Base Camp clean. At any time there may be two or three expedition teams on Mt. Everest.

In 1973, six young environment conscious students (4 boys and 2 girls) of the Olympia Evergreen State College, Washington, first coined a slogan in their country that Everest region is going to more polluted and that it has to be cleaned up. For 20 days, they buried 2 tons of garbage which they collected in the Khumbu area. They also placed a couple of signboards reading "Please Do Not Pollute Everest" in English, Japanese and Nepalese at different places in the Everest region. It is further heartening to learn that this year too, 20 foreigners are in the Everest region to work for 20 days to clean the garbage left there by so many expeditions that took place in the preceding year (Shrestha, 1982: 93). Realizing the problem, Ministry of Tourism organized one team in 1984 just to clean up to Everest Base Camp. Their purpose of cleaning the Camp was to bring to local people and expedition group awareness about keeping a clean environment in the Himalayas. Later



Tyangboche Monastery and Mt. Amadablam view



A view of Mt. Everest, West Shoulder, Lhola, Nuptse Ridge, Ice Fall, Everest Base Camp, Seracs, Khumbu glacier and the last northern peak-Chinese Mountain.



*Ang Furba Sherpa of Namche Bazar on the way
(near South-Col) to Mt. Everest top (courtesy: Ang
Dorje Sherpa of Namche Bazar)*



*A view of Mt. Everest top and Ang Furba Sherpa on
the Everest summit (courtesy: Ang Dorje Sherpa of
Namche Bazar)*

on, in autumn season, 1984, Nepal Police also cleaned the Everest Base Camp and the Everest climbing route upto 8,380 m (Inspector Gupta Bahadur Rana-personal communication). They have posted many signs like "Burn and Bury All Rubbish Materials" on the approach routes from Jorsale upto Lobuche. One hopes that their efforts will bear fruits in accelerating further positive steps for cleaning-up tourist area in all of Nepal.

Activities of Base Camp Workers

Among the Base Camp workers, the kitchen boy and cook seem very busy from early morning (3 or 4 o'clock) to late evening (11 o'clock). Their main duty is to wash the dishes, to prepare food, bed tea, breakfast, lunch, tiffin and dinner. The kitchen boy brings the water, washes the dishes, helps the cook for his food preparation and serves the tea and food to all Base Camp settlers. These are the regular duties of the cook and kitchen boy. It indicates that they have to be busy for 24 hours.

The credit for a successful expedition thus must also go to the cook, kitchen boy and other Base Camp staff as well as to the high altitude porters and sirdar. Many Base Camp workers expressed that they were not satisfied with the members because they were not provided full equipment and were ignored in many aspects. Though a mail-runner gets Rs. 30/- per day, excluding his daily allowance for lodging and fooding during his mailing time, he often faces difficult conditions and even may risk his life during winter due to heavy snowfall on the way. These are other minor problems which the group leader must mind to.

While staying in Base Camp some Sherpas do not smoke and the cigarettes which are

provided by the expedition members but sell them to other smokers charging Rs. 15 per packet. They take leftover mountain foods either to their home or sell it to shopkeepers. From this some of them will be certainly benefitted in monetary aspect.

Climbing: A Risk Assessment

High Himalayan climbing (above 7000 m) is risky business. Indeed it is quite possibly the riskiest there is. The Sherpas climb Everest for money whereas the other (alpinists) climb because "it is there." The risk taker's world view corresponds to that of the adventurous Himalaya trader: the Buddhist. The risk avoider's world view corresponds to that of the cautious stay at home cultivation: the Hindu (Thompson, 1983: 301). He further writes "For every proverbs and catchphrases there is, there would seem to be a contradictory counterpart: "Look before you leap" versus "He who hesitates is lost" (Ibid). However, in this article the Hindus are not considered as risk avoiders in comparison with the Sherpas and their role in the mountain. Not only the Hindus, those who have settled in low altitude (including the Sherpas of Solu, Lamobagar, Bigu, Ramechhap and other areas have not succeed to develop mountaineering skill by following the concept "He who hesitates is lost." The reason is that the surrounding ecology has not constrained them to take risk in the mountain. Therefore, the concept risk taker's world view and the proverb "He who hesitates is lost" can be applied only among the Sherpas of Khumbu. Even the Sherpas of Khumbu also know there is risk. Though they take risk but sometimes, according to circumstances, they do not. Their belief towards the nature, god, and the social situation is strong. If they dream something

negative in relation with the mountain they refuse to climb or cancel their programme because of the dreamt risk. For example, on the Nanda Kot Expedition Sherpa sirdar Ang Tshering refused to ascend the summit as he had dreamt that the Goddess Nanda Devi had forbidden him to do so" (Kohli and Verghese, 1962:66). During fieldwork at Everest Base Camp in post monsoon season, 1984, Ang Furba Sherpa of Namche Bazar, one of the Everest summiteers, immediate sirdar of Czechoslovakia Everest Expedition group, explained that he had dreamt that some ladies were laughing before him and compared his dream with Mt. Everest, "Mother Goddess". As he thought that she may not be pleased with him and refused to climb that day.

One Sherpa of Khunde and Sundare Sherpa of Pangboche working with French Winter Everest Expedition 1984-85, said that the day was not good for climbing and committed to climb from next day onward. According to them, the next day was their birthday of the week which is considered as good for starting any type of work. This shows that they are very cautious with good and bad days. Each and every person has his/her own recognized days on which they start their work for success and do not start anything on their socially recognized bad days. According to their belief, Monday, Wednesday and specially birthday of the week on which they prefer to start work, such as climbing the mountain. These days may be good for them for success or to protect against trouble or accident during climbing period.

In regard to this, most of the climbing Sherpas would go to see the famous lama to know their life fortune during expedition about good and bad before joining the group to climb in the Himalaya. For this, the lama

fore-casts something good (no risk) or bad (risk) after consulting Tibetan horoscope, *dattu*, and other concerning texts, considering and consulting his *dja* (day), *karma* (tara), *thewchen* (auspicious occasion), *parka* (birth omen), *merwa* (astronomic traits that gives knowledge about the fortune and misfortune of the life), *lorta* (year) under *kejaa*, (birthday), *soksa*, (longivity), *lajaa* (birth year), and *sejaa* (bad fortune or bad planet). Sometimes the lama may suggest to perform certain *kurim* rites which is a kind of religious remedy, in their belief pattern. The remedy is done by the lama through ritual performance. If the lama suggests him not to climb the mountain because of bad indication for his life he will probably not join the groups. They take risk only after getting positive advice for climbing by the lama. It does not mean that all Sherpas consult with the lama. Even then, they take risk because they have to earn money for survival. There are very few Sherpas whose main intention is to get fame from reaching the summit, rather than earning money. Mostly the non-Sherpas, are not so inspired to climb the Himalayas from private sector.

A sirdar may earn minimum 30 thousand rupees and a Sherpa (high altitude porter) earns more than 15 thousand rupees in one expedition during ninety days. Even so, their wife and parents do not want to send them to climb Everest time and again because of the risks.

They are surviving on the mountain's lap where there is much snow and very cold climate and temperature ranging down to minus 20° c. in their settlement area in Khumbu. They are the true risk takers. On the other hand, the risk avoiders (non-Sherpas) are living in hilly regions where there are no snowy mountains. They naturally hesitate to climb mountains or to go to the Himalayas because of non-involvement with trekking

agencies, unfamiliarity with outsiders, inability to arrange mountain equipment and intolerance to the bitter cold. Besides that there are also many Sherpas who are purely risk avoiders; for example the Sherpas of Lamobagar, Bigu, Labchi, many Sherpas of Solu, Bhojpur, Ramechhap and other areas. It is also because mountaineering is not their main profession. Comparatively most of the educated Sherpas have not pursued a mountaineering occupation because of risk. But they cannot be compared with the Sherpas of Khumbu who are recognized as natural climbers of Nepal. Though they have climbed many times they remember well their friend's tragedies seen on the spot. In this regard, Partemba Sherpa, on his first ascent with Peter Boardman (1975) after experiencing the loss of a friend, food, bad weather and snow blindness, vowed he would never climb again. Years later he was back with the Germans as their camp manager but with no inclination toward climbing. At the Everest Base Camp however, Partemba could not resist, saying "I can not stand there when I see the mountain. He put on his gear, joined the climbers and made it to the top-his second ascent" (Sharma: 1980). It indicates that he takes both the risk-taking world view and the risk-avoiding world view. Sundare Sherpa once said about climbing, "I am not afraid to climb. But when I see friends die before me I get afraid." Talking about safety in the snow once he said that he did not feel safe during winds and stormy conditions on the mountain (Nepal Vision, 1984:32). True, the Sherpas are culturally risk avoiders and economically risk takers. If they are pleased with the groups, if they have good friends, if the weather condition is favourable to them, they do not mind to take a risk. Most of the Sherpas join with the expedition groups in winter and climb the mountain following the principle of 'Look before you leap' and

neglecting the principle of 'He who hesitates is lost'. The expression 'likes and dislikes' also plays a unique role while affiliating with the members to climb the mountain. Most of them are poor in technical climbing but they know almost about mountain, situations, events, accidents, routes, weather, crevasse and the trails because of their long experiences in trekking and mountaineering with many groups. They climb the mountain very carefully in comparison with outsiders. In the context of tragedies that occurs in the mountain, Schaller (1980: 189) writes, "Sherpas generally climb for money not enjoyment and a small tribe can not afford to loose so many of its best young men to the mountains that april, 10 Sherpas died with a South Korean expedition to Mt. Manaslu, the previous 5 had died an another expedition, the year before that on 6 on Mt. Everest, and so on, each year taking frightful toll. Let foreign climbers carry their own loads to the high camps. Why decimate a valuable tribes to satisfy someone's hobby." Even though total accident occuring in the Himalaya is normal phenomena. A total of 63 persons (Nepali and Foreigners) have lost their life on Mt. Everest till 1985. According to Furer-Haimendorf (1984: 74) since 1953, of a total of 116 men from Solu Khumbu who are believed to have perished on mountains, 28 hailed from Khumjung and Kunde, 14 from Namche Bazar, 16 from the Thamichok area, 7 from Phortse and 6 from Pangboche". The given number of fatal accident by Haimendorf is only from Khumbu region. There are many other Sherpas from Solu and other areas who have died in the Himalayas. As it is known that 5 other Sherpas from Solu, 1 from Lukla, 10 from Khumbu died by accident during trekking and mountaineering till 1985.

In 1984-85, winter, the temperature dropped to minus 40° c. and wind was blowing

upto 200 kilometers per hour in and around Everest (altitude at about 7,500 m). During winter everywhere the ground is frozen and there is much snowfall especially in the months of January and February. It is very difficult to arrange *dzopkyos* or *Yaks* to carry loads (about 60 kg.) with the help of herders. At that time goods are very expensive due to the heavy snowfall. The Sherpas are ready to climb Everest even in this time which is really a strange ! They are eager to climb because they hope to get more equipment and bonuses than usual.

A climber should always be careful about many things: with the weather, food, mountain gear, intra-group relation, avalanches, frostbite, verticality and cerebral and pulmonary oedema. If the group does not have good quality of mountain gear they can not climb safely, accidents are a greater possibility as is the suffering from frostbite. Now and then the climbers should try to come down to rest at Base Camp. One day's rest at Base Camp is more beneficial than three day's rest at high camps. Thus they have to acclimatize and then go further in high camp. Intra-group relations are also most important during an expedition. To have more confidence they must have strong bonds among each other. If the relationships break down in camp, there will be great risk between the climbers, and consequently the team must abandon and go home. Mismanagement by the group leader can also dissolve an expedition. In the same way, if the sirdar could not manage well an expedition may be unsuccessful. This type of problem sometimes occurs on Everest. Generally a group has to know about three types of problems: (i) organisational, (ii) technical, and (iii) natural. All of those are equally important from the view point of risk, abandonment, and success.

All group members must keep information about the weather conditions. If one climbs without considering the weather one faces one of the riskiest jobs of the Himalaya. If there are clouds there may be heavy snowfall and the track may not be visible because of snowfall. Under such conditions, accidents occur, as the writer came to know when one of two Japanese died on Mt. Gaurishankar (7,146 m) in 1985-spring season when they ignored the weather conditions. The liaison officer Mr. Shiva Prasad Dhakal and another Japanese member said that "In those days a lot of snow was falling and the track was not visible so they fell while climbing up." A climber has to know from which the wind is blowing up. During my stay at Everest Base Camp in winter 1985, wind started from January onward. The wind was blowing upto 200 kilometers per hour and snow was falling heavily. The average temperature was minus 15° to 17° c. at Everest Base Camp and 30° to 40° c, at 7,500 m. These are all dangerous signals for the climbers. Even though there was no snowfall in the mountainous area between October and November. There are possibilities of avalanches due to the sunshine melting the wet post monsoon snow. In post-monsoon there will be an occasional wind blowing in high camps and tolerable cold at Base Camp in comparison with winter season. But, there seems much avalanches in August-September.

Another dangerous feature of climbing is when the Ice Fall breaks and no one knows of it. Other hazards are suffering from diseases like stomach disorders, diarrhoea, cold, headache, nausea, insomnia, breathlessness frostbite, pulmonary and cerebral oedema to coma and finally death. Artificial oxygen saves some people's lives. One should come down immediately if serious illness is evident while climbing, nearly everyone is affected by

some sort of problem. In this connection most of the people first may get high altitude sickness from Thugla (7,620 m) upward. After Feriche and even after Lobuche or from the same place or Gorakshep (5,150 m) one will feel slightly splitting headache for the new goer. If one gets high altitude sickness he should get down immediately which is the best medicine for high altitude sufferers. Despite all of these hindrances, obstacles, and risks the climbers persist to attack the Camp after Camp. These are the main characteristics of Himalayan sportmanship.

Coming to the point of solution to organisational or practical problem, the role of sirdar, group leader and liaison officer seem to be very important. All of these corner groups have a unique role in a successful climb. A sirdar must pay close attention to the needs and activities of the porters, Sherpas, kitchen staff and the members. He should be able to control the Nepalese workers, all except the liaison officer. If he is not able to keep them disciplined the entire expedition is jeopardized. The liaison officer must also watch over the situation and should inform the group leader if something goes wrong. He should be dedicated not only to his staff and members but to the Ministry of Tourism also. He should always try to keep communication among all groups. If he can keep in touch with both Sherpa groups and the members, naturally a good environment will prevail. There must always remain good relations between all three corner groups unless the expedition group returns back to Kathmandu. Like the sirdar and liaison officer, the group leader should also have practical knowledge about the whole team structure and individual functions. Just aiming at climbing does not give any guarantee for reaching the summit. He has to show a philanthropic idea, rational

thinking and charismatic personality towards the whole structure of the team. If he can run the expedition this way the Sherpas and liaison officer will be pleased with the members and will encourage them to reach the summit.

Climbing Partner

One always seeks to take a good partner while climbing the mountains. Sherpas feel no problem if they are with close partners. As they climb they generally talk, joke, laugh, stop and take a few minutes rest, smoke & again start climbing on and on. This is their style of mountain climbing especially on Everest. As some Sherpas said, it will be only possible to climb a mountain if they are with their true friends.

Climbing Differences

Unlike the Sherpas, most of the members neither drink alcohol nor smoke cigarettes. They talk about weather, equipment, Camps, routes, problems but do not laugh much. But, it does not mean that they do not enjoy with their Sherpas or other Camp staff at all. Most of the members seem very tired and exhausted from the high altitude, even though they do not show their fatigue except while ascending. In the very beginning some of them seem quite fast in climbing but later they walk very slowly because of tiredness. On the other hand the Sherpas move slowly while climbing on the mountain. It seems somewhat difference between the two corner groups. A Sherpa from his rich experience can immediately forecast whether the members can go upto summit or not. This they do not flash but talk with each other.

Problems in Mountaineering

It is said that to form a climbing group the member must be compatible in

temperament, technical ability and experiences. Even fulfilling these necessary qualifications many groups (still) face many problems during their expedition. Generally the problems are started by the local porters. In regards to the porters, Sharma (1982: 8-9) writes "Many of the problems connected with porters have actually emanated as a result of the lack of an organised and registered pool of professional porters who could be drawn upon when required". He further writes, "The problem in this area are mainly related to (i) availability and (ii) rates. Rates, very often, despite government specifications, depend on demand and urgency of the job and the demand/supply equation is at times naturally taken to its extreme. This cause hardship to expeditions". He has not discussed in detail about the local porters which are available in certain places like in Khumbu region and others.

Sometimes some porters, while affiliating with the team, may quarrel with the members because the team member treats them as his servant. Some member's intention is to move with the porter is yet their paces are different because the member carries only a light load. The members behave thus due to the lack of practical knowledge about the culture, environment, temperament, attitude and perception of the local people and the situations. In this regard, they (Westerners) should not compare with anything which they get and see in their countries. Nepalese style of life, temperament, behaviours, attitudes, norms, values, custom and manner is completely different from others. Sometimes porters or other people may steal something and flee, it may create a big problem for the members. Generally the porters are arranged by the *naike*, (leader of the porters) who is directly in touch with the sirdar. Porterage in Nepal is socially less preferred activity and it

is only economic considerations that has led people to fall upon porterage as way of life (Sharma, 1982: 9). In Nepal, especially for trekking and mountaineering, the porters are hired from certain junctions.

The *naike* / sirdar distributes the loads among the porters. If one gets more than 30 kg., the legal limit, a porter may refuse to walk, or if he does carry it, may be sick after several days walking. Expedition staff sometimes become drunk in approached camp in the evening, and occasionally rise to conflict and even violence. Though it does not affect directly to the members but there seems not good environment.

At the time of paying the porters (50 Rupees a day), a *naike* charges 5 Rs. from each the first day as his fee which is professionally accepted by the porters. This is their traditional system. Some porters have said that some authorities do not pay full salary as that was previously agreed upon with group leader. For example, the porters can reach Namche from Jiri in 9 or 10 days but they will be paid for 15 days, as was promised by the authority. If later on, they were paid for 13 days only by which they become angry. They then claimed that their *saheb* promised to pay for 15 days but now they were getting their payment only for 13 days. A group leader must be cautious in this regard and a sirdar should show good sympathy toward the poor porters. This is not the case in every team, however. Those mountaineers who have big experiences in Nepal they will have no problem at all.

When the group establishes Base Camp, for two days most of the people (including Sherpas) seem very busy arranging tents, kitchen hall, store, mess tent, religious altar,

and arrangement for the climbing equipments. The rest of the time is given for ice practice in the seracs. After completing this work, the Sherpas try out their equipment—krampons, carabiners, mountain boots, down jackets, down pants, ice axes, safety belts, jumers, rock pitons, ice pitons, artificial oxygen plus regulator, gaiter, fixed rope, goggles, gloves, main rope and finally the walki-talki. While trying out the gear they compare the quality in their remind with their previous equipment that was provided by previous groups. They talk it about in their own dialect which is not understood by the others. If the gear is of low quality, they hesitate to climb the mountain because of risk. If the members provide good quality equipment the workers will be pleased with them and will not hesitate to climb which is the long run is well worth the extra expense.

Before climbing Everest, the sirdar, Sherpas, and the group leader make an agreement as to the bonus that will be given when they reach each camp. Sometimes if the group does not reach the top, perhaps the leaders do not want to give a bonus to the Sherpas, which causes disputes among them. After every three to five days, the Sherpas get one or two days leave to relax. They often come down to Base Camp and sometimes, without any mention, go to Gorakshap or Lobuche. Such as a trip may be risky if something happens and no one is along to rescue them. Those who are taking rest at Base Camp either play cards or *para syo*, a Tibetan game, or lavish some jokes. Those who do not play and recall their past experiences at the same place and talk to each other.

Sometimes the health condition of the high-altitude Sherpas is not conveyed to the liaison officer. Once two Sherpas from Camp

II wanted to contact through walki-talki at Base Camp but the group denied them contact. In the meantime, a Sherpani came to Base Camp just to see her husband and wanted to talk to him through the walki-talki but permission was not given to either one. She showed her worriedness toward her husband because he is climbing the Everest in such a cold season and that is very risky. Her intention was just to talk to her husband only through walki-talki that was all. Finally, after not having contact with her husband, she started weeping on and on at Base Camp. Then two Sherpas come to know it & quarrelled with the members at Camp II and came down to Base Camp. After finding out more information from the woman they again quarrelled with the members and finally decided to quit their jobs. At that time the liaison officer, who was present at Base Camp, could neither get information, about the events of Sherpas at camp II and III nor he took keen interest about the disputes. According to him, he did not take keen interest because he was not informed anything about the progress of climbing by the Base Camp managers. In the same way the sirdar wanted always to remain neutral between them. This proves that there was a complete lack of communication between groups the three corner groups. In any case, the member should have good affection towards their workers and frequently they must inform the liaison officer about the health conditions, progress report of the whole teams. For various reasons women coming to Base Camp to stay there does not seem good for the high Himalayan climbers. Anyway there should be good understanding among each other.

There are some members who want to climb the mountain without any loads or with minimum weight. They push the Sherpas with heavy loads to high camp. They may become

angry and refuse to climb with such heavy loads. The Sherpas have their own version: that although they are the workers of the members every one should carry equal loads to high camps.

Sometimes, some members, in the absence of a liaison officer, convincing to the other Nepali workers not following the Government rules and regulations climb from different route which indicates that they have not followed their sincerity. As the members express that is simply rock climbing. But, in the context of Nepal Himalaya, they should know that rock (mountain) is considered as valuable as diamond. The writer is fairly sure that many groups follow the Government rules and regulation as well as they show much sympathy towards the Nepali workers who also have not created any problems and the members also have reached the summit and returned back happily.

There are some people who are more interested in getting mountain equipment and money from the groups than in helping the members. Side by side they should be loyal to the groups. Their main duty is to help the members during the climbing. Sometimes if they are not pleased with the members for some reason they threaten to return all the gear and to go back down. Desertion of the group is paramount to abandoning the whole expedition. Once they joined with the team it is not good to leave unless the expedition is completed. Once, when the group reached Khumjung, one Sherpa said that he did not want to climb further because he could not see any close friends. Finally, at the request of the sirdar and the liaison officer, he accompanied the group. If a worker has already agreed to climb Everest with a particular group, and later changes his mind,

it is a great deception to the foreigners. For instance, two people left their jobs two months after their involvement in Everest West ridge. Disobeying the sirdar's order, they came down from high camp. At Base Camp they quarreled with the Base Camp manager and went down without any goods or chattlement. None of the members give any equipment to them. The sirdar and members appointed another two climbers but the problem lingered on and on. Finally, the group had to abandon their expedition because time was passing day by day and no process was being made. In this aspect a sirdar by any means, has to convince the porters and climbing crew to stay on and continue working. Generally, a sirdar recommends taking some of his neighbours or relatives as for Sherpas. For their neighbours they use the term *khimji* or *hyulwa*. They may be more loyal to him because they are appreciative to have the job. A sirdar has to treat all workers equally well even if some of them are not his *khimji hyulwa*. Once for instance, as some Sherpas said, a sirdar was always favouring his neighbours and did not care for the other Sherpa's practical problems. Finally the others left the group. This caused a great problems for the members.

Some people's main intention is to steal the member's goods. When the group was going to Everest Base Camp many things were stolen along the trail. On the return as well many things were lost on the trail and at camping sites. If the group has already reached the summit they do not care so much about losing things but if the expedition was abandoned, and gear missing, there will be big dispute between the Nepali workers and the members. These are the things which the group leader and the sirdar has to think very carefully. Only then there will be no problems.

The liaison officer is deputed from the Ministry of Tourism. Previously, he was deputed without much experience or practical knowledge. The local people said that the liaison officers were ignorant about mountaineering. They did not like to stay at Base Camp the entire time but they are not supposed to go above Base Camp. Some seemed always worried about getting high altitude sickness. Thus they wanted to stay in the lower valleys where food and shelter is available and comfortable. Due not to the presence of a liaison officer at Base Camp the groups had to face many problems during expeditions. The liaison officer does not carry any load or personal luggage while the others do. He may be ill adjusted to the people of different culture not because of being a stranger but because of communication gaps between three corner groups. That is why previously many remained aloof from the rest of the group. Further more he is considered as a Government agent who is coming to check upon them. So he is regarded as an unwanted officer, a spy of Tourism Ministry. No one cares for him even if he is staying at Base Camp. As I came to know there are also conflicts between the sirdar, liaison officer and the members. In fact the duty of liaison officer is to stay at Base Camp during the whole period.

By realising all of these problems which occurred during expeditions from all corners, the Ministry of Tourism since autumn 1984 has arranged a 7 to 10 days programme (orientation class) to train the liaison officers from different experts about expeditions. The writer was one of the trainees of the first programme. From that time, all the liaison officers except a few, have stayed at Base camp as long as they could. And as well, they have succeeded to keep very good relations with the

members and convinced them that they are coming for the purpose of helping not exposing. Often, there is a great misunderstanding among the members about the function of the liaison officer. If the members do not treat him as an unwanted officer, he will be encouraged to stay at Base Camp for the whole time and is ready to solve any sort of problem if possible. Everyone knows that if somebody becomes sick at high altitudes he may be sent down immediately. The sirdars, Sherpa and other staff are very much pleased with the trained liaison officers, seeing their helping nature, positive behaviour and sincerity. Previously, a liaison officer was unknown to the culture and environment of the Himalayan region but now he will be thinking about environmental pollution, soil erosion, climbing activities and the Himalayas etc.

Above all, a liaison officer should try to be a good friend with the local porters, kitchenboy, cook, Sherpas, sirdar and the members. As far as possible, he should be able to give good information to the members. In fact he is the sole representative to the Government and alone is responsible for Government regulations. That is why all the team members should understand his practical problems in regards to the mountaineering rules and regulations. There were a few liaison officers who did not care for their job during expeditions. As writer came to know from local people Mr. 'A' was a liaison officer on the Chooyu Expedition from the northwest side. Apparently, he rarely went to Base Camp, staying mostly in Namche and occasionally visiting Everest Base Camp. Thus, he became polarized from the rest of the group. There was another liaison officer Mr. 'B' who was appointed to the group to Lhotse Shyar. He also never went to his camp and stayed all the

time in Namche. These are the exceptional cases comparatively among the trained liaison officers. If there is a liaison officer with the groups, probably, there will not be any problems during the expedition. If something happens he tries to solve it through the help of the Sirdar or the Sherpas or the group leader. It does not mean that every where and everytime there is a problem. There are many groups who never knew what sort of problem may occur during expeditions. My intention is to give only a matter of precaution.

Unless, the problem is identified, no one can do anything about it. In order to get the summit of Everest, the above mentioned problems should be known especially by the member. That is why it is very important to digest all these issues when some one comes to the mountain for reconnaissance. It is true, most of the successful teams heartily praise the Nepalese people and unsuccessful teams complain that they abandoned not due to their own fault, misunderstanding, inability or other reasons but because working with the Nepalese is not practical.

The Sherpas And Their Spirits

The Sherpas, have strong beliefs toward their gods and spirits (supernatural forces). Though shamanism is gradually declining in their society (Paul, 1976) spiritism is still very much a part of their lives. Though they are Buddhist but they believe in ghosts and spirits too. Therefore, they are animist also. They observe certain rites to protect themselves and their land from the evil spirit. According to their belief, the spirits are everywhere. They may give trouble to a person at any time. That is why the Sherpas, by any means, try to please the local gods through the lamas: by chanting or invoking religious prayers or reciting religious and

liturgical texts which composed by the Tibetan lamas of medieval Tibet. In order to please the gods, to drive away the malignant spirits, they perform some religious rites even all the time of expedition. Their main purpose of worshipping the gods is to ask help for climbing the mountain and not to get any trouble or accident in the Himalayas and also for success.

In this regard firstly they follow the *kurim* (Tib. *sku-rim*) rite with the help of a lama. *Kurim* is a rite in which the lamas are called to the house to drive away malignant spirits, and to recite such books as *gyaldo*, *gyapshi* or *dzendo* for the benefit of the patient (Furer-Haimendorf 1964: 225). Thus Ortner (1978: 92-93) writes "In rituals petitioning the gods for assistance, the chief type of help requested is the gods alliance with humanity against the demons, and in fact rituals of offering and rituals of exorcism would both be classed by the Sherpas as *kurim*". In one kind of *kurim*, one calls all the gods, give them offerings and ask them to join your side in getting rid of the offending spirits. Then when the spirits see the god's power on your side, they realize that they are out done, are frightened and go away. In another ritual one asks the offending spirits what they will need to satisfy them, and give it to them. Actually, *kurim* or *syapten* are rites for remedies before getting sickness or after getting ailment of the patient. If this rite is performed previously, it is known as *kurim gewa*. As such, the lamas read 16 volumes of *hyums* or 108 volumes of *kangyar* or 203 volumes of *Tyengyur* or other type of religious book and makes many ritual offerings. The second type of *kurim* is known as (*kurim*) *dyuwa* in which a lama consults a *damang* book. The word *kurim* is used for big personalities and *rimro* is used for simple personalities but there is actually no difference between *kurim* and *rimro* in the ritualistic context. There

are various types of *kurim* which are performed before and after death. Among these *kurims* the Sherpas order the performance of certain rites to protect their lives and to drive away certain spirits who may give them trouble while they are ascending the mountain. In this type of *kurim* most of the lamas consult the book *farshelamsun*, *sambalhindup*, *chhokchumange tashichekpa*, *mandala*, *hum*, *lungthar* etc. This rite is performed either at home or at the gomba. When the rite is completed, the family members will not be worried about accidents occurring in the Himalaya. By chance, if a fatal accident occurred, the family members would send or offer some amount of money under the name of the deceased person, to many gombas and to many big lamas. This is ritually and religiously known as *ngomdil*. The purpose of performing this ritual is to request to the god to send the deceased soul to the heaven instead of hell. In this case as some Sherpas especially widows after their husbands having a fatal accident, come to Base Camp and show their worriedness; some Sherpas do not care anything about the accident except taking their husband's insurance. After getting insurance she can purchase many ornaments and will get pleasure from this.

According to their beliefs, if a Sherpa dies by accident on the mountain or somewhere else, the deceased soul is captured by the local spirit, *gyaptak*. As Furer-Haimendorf opines that "such a *gyaptak* may be the malignant ghost of an ancestor who had died in anger or pain" (1984: 102) If the soul is captured at the place where death occurred, it is not a good sign as the soul then has to cross over many stages to the next world for rebirth. They believe that the deceased soul can go, if *gyaptak* does not interfere, to any of six realms: to gods, titans, humans, beasts, pretas, or to

hell. "A bad *gyaptak* is considered capable of turning a person into a witch (Furer-Haimendorf, 1984:102). Thus, in order to stay free from the hands of a *gyaptak* a lama follows various rituals in different contexts as it was arranged by the Tibetan Buddhists.

The purpose of performing all these rites and rituals is to get success in their work, to have no accidents, and to prevent bad fortune. They are very much frightened by the spirits, a belief which has strongly influenced their life and culture.

In this aspect, when the climbing groups reach Tyangboche monastery, the lama shows great interest in their adventurous work and may offer the Tibetan tea and biscuits. Then he will say that he will pray for their safe return. It reveals that how Tibetan Buddhism attracts the others. The sirdar, first, goes to see the head lama and asks what the group may encounter on the mountain. To bring good luck for a successful climb one small religious activity is arranged known as *wang* which means power or ordination or initiation. In this process the lama distributes this sacred water and *chhilap* (sacred pills) to the attendants by touching the vajra (diamond) and *drilbu* (bell). This is a process of taking blessing from a reincarnate lama. Though it is a practice of the Sherpas but the members and the liaison officers also follow it because of religious matter. After that the sirdar may collect money (or may not) from every team member and hands it over to the gombas for performance of *syapten* under the name of the team. Some Sherpa sirdars do not hesitate to offer their own personal money to the gomba to gain religious merit. Thus was followed by the sirdar of French Winter Everest Expedition. Pasang Nurbu Sherpa of Namche, a sirdar of Japanese Gaurishankar Expedition

1985 (Spring Season) offered 2100 Rs. to Beding and Na gombas of Rolwaling valley.

When the group settles at Base Camp having not previously performed a religious rite, they do not immediately start climbing the mountain. First the Sherpas prepare an altar and arrange to perform a ceremony which is known as *lhapso*. (Tibetan: *Lha-gsol*). Foreigners use the term 'Base Camp Ceremony' for this performance. The term *lhapso* means invocation and offerings to the local gods. On the ceremonial day, particularly in the morning all Sherpas wear new mountain dresses and stand near the altar where a ritual master, *chhone* will perform the *lhapso* rite through the *dekeserkim* book. This is a short method of worshipping the local gods. The Sherpa pattern of changing dress in such an occasion or gathering is known as *sabtanamsa* and *galhachhok* respectively. Within an hour, the ritual master completes the rituals and all members of the three corner groups, (though the liaison officer and the members are completely unfamiliar with the meaning of this ritual) go to the front of the altar. Finally, all the Sherpas cry together with loud voice *ki-ki so-so lha gelho* which means "victory cry" (Stein: 1972) and glory be to the gods, there by thanking and sending off the gods. The lama then distributes *chimmar* (flour) to every one to gain material-fortune, *temdil*. Continuing with the ceremony one

of the Sherpas erects some *tharsing*, a flown from the *lhasu*, alter. A *lhasu* is built above the *denthi* which is built for the purpose of erecting the *tharshing*. *Tharshing* is generally offered to the mountain gods or which is a symbol of offering to the *hyullha*. *Denthi* is considered a place where the gods reside or sleep. But in this ceremony, it is used to display all ritual offerings and objects to perform the *lhapso* rite. Besides this a painted and printed clothes having some hymns for certain deities evolving long sacred symbolic pieces of five different colours, *tharchok*, are hung from one corner to another corner. The printed hymns are known as *gyalzen chumu*. The purpose of hanging this *tharchok* is to avoid trouble, accident and to ask for victory or success in any kind of work as well. Specially, from the view point of religious concept, the qualified monks do not care for the *gyaptak*. As they say the *gyaptak* is nothing just a *mana* (soul). It depends on his own *mana* where it drives the *gyaptak* goes. Therefore, the *gyaptak* does not affect to the sacred people.

This concludes a description of all things which must be done for a successful. With the blessings of the gods and hard work and good will from the groups, the climbers will get the top.

ki-ki-so-so lha-gyal-lo.

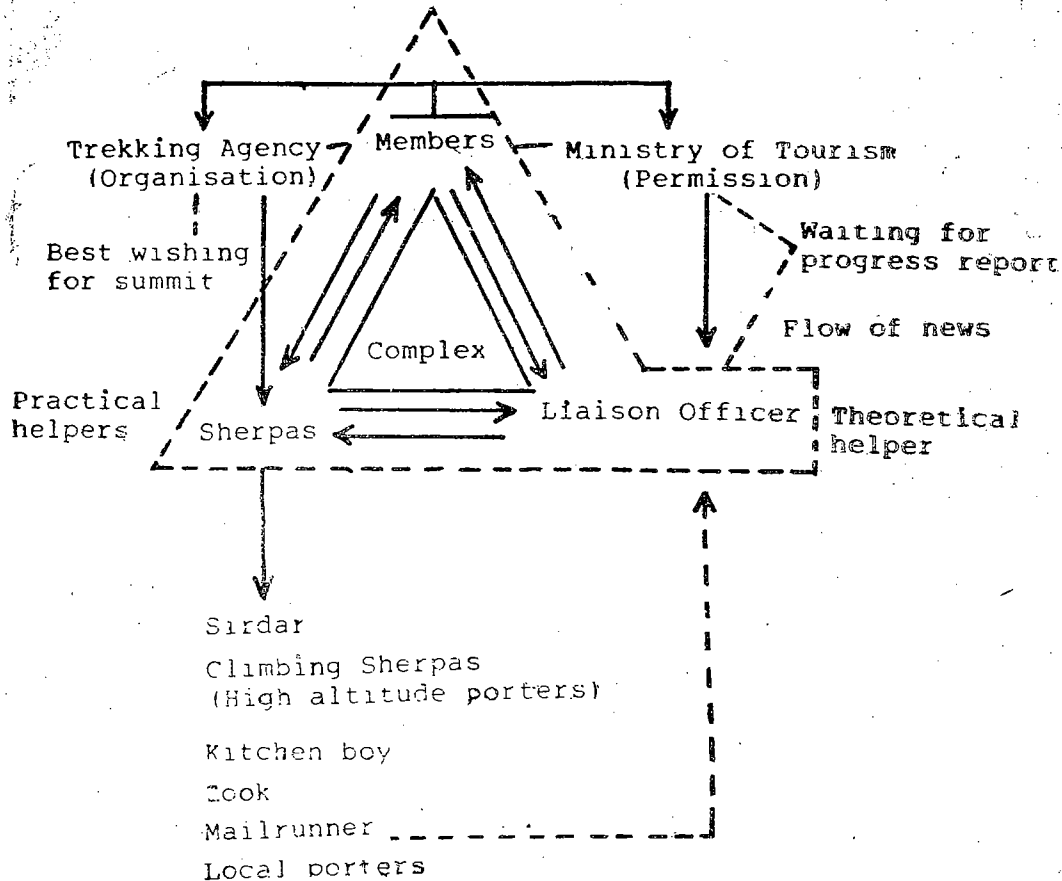
APPENDIX NO. 1

Chart. MSL: Three Corner Complex and Composition of Expedition Team in Nepal.

Notes

It was Ang Karma Sherpa of Solu, a trained mountaineer and Mari (wife of Eric Dossin, the group leader of French Winter Everest Expedition Team-1984-85) who always encouraged me to learn ice climbing or to practice in the seracs and finally, they took me upto Lhola point (about 6,100 m) on the

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