

Book Review**Exploring the Mystical Himalaya: Cultures, Economies, and Environment. Cham: Springer Nature. 185 pp. ISBN: 978-3-032-14275-7.**

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The Himalaya has always been the focal point of mountain research. It attracts scholars from multiple disciplines, including geography, geology, and environmental science. The Himalayan regions are ecologically fragile, geologically sensitive, culturally diverse, and have complex socio-ecological systems (Sati, 2019). These complex socio-ecological systems in the Himalaya demand a scientific approach that examines interrelationships among environment, culture, and society. Within this context, V. P. Sati's book "*Exploring the Mystical Himalaya: Cultures, Economies, and Environment*" offers a rich overview of the entire Himalayan arc. It covers the whole Himalayan region from Uttarakhand and Ladakh in India to Nepal, Bhutan, and the Tibet Autonomous Region in China. The book presents the Himalaya not merely as a physical entity but as a spiritual and dynamic socio-ecological system shaped by centuries of interaction between nature and human societies.

The book's strength lies in its broad geographical coverage. It integrates the Himalaya's environmental and economic aspects with cultural narratives and the author's empirical observations. The detailed description of the Uttarakhand Himalaya, particularly the regions such as Jaunsar-Bawar, Kedarkhand, and Manaskhand, demonstrates the author's vast empirical knowledge of the Indian Central Himalaya. The Uttarakhand sections of the book provide rich insights into its geography, culture, society, customs, and rituals of Garhwali, Kumaoni, and the people of Jaunsar-Bawar. Similarly, the discussions on "*Ladakh: The Land of Lamas*" effectively highlight the life of high-altitude people. It illustrates Ladakhi culture, livelihoods, customs, and rituals.

Moving beyond India, the book includes chapters on Nepal, Bhutan, and China. In the Nepal section, the author discusses Nepal's mountainous landscape and its rich religious and cultural heritage. The author describes Pashupatinath and Muktinath in detail, emphasising their deep spiritual significance in the region. The chapter also discusses Nepal's economy and the country's various challenges. In the Bhutan chapter, the author describes its unique development philosophy of Gross National Happiness. Bhutan is described as a Buddhist kingdom where environmental conservation and cultural preservation are central to national policy. The author also briefly discusses Tibet (China), highlighting its geographical position within the Trans-Himalayan region. The Tibetan Plateau is described as a cold, largely arid environment where pastoralism and livestock rearing remain important livelihoods. The author also discusses its cultural and religious traditions. Finally, the author discusses the Himalaya's ecological fragility and emphasises the importance of sustainable development in the region.

The book's valuable contribution lies in its spiritual descriptions of mountains, rivers, and forests. Moreover, the book's travelogue approach makes it interesting and distinctive, as it is the first of its kind in Himalayan scholarship. The book's strengths lie in its attempt to present the entire Himalayan region as a connected and diverse socio-ecological system. By examining multiple countries of the Himalayan region and cultural landscapes, the author demonstrates how the Himalaya functions as a shared system that transcends political boundaries. Integrating social, cultural, environmental, and economic perspectives gives readers a deep understanding of Himalayan societies. Another notable aspect of the book is its

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portrayal of the Himalaya as a sacred, spiritual, and mystical landscape, where natural elements such as mountains, rivers, and forests are deeply embedded in local belief systems. At the same time, the book also acknowledges several challenges people in this region face. These include increasing natural hazards, economic marginalisation, environmental degradation, and pressure from over-tourism. The author suggests that sustainable development strategies must account for the ecological fragility and sensitivity of mountain environments.

Despite this valuable contribution, the book's analytical depth remains limited. The book is mainly descriptive and relies largely on the author's personal observations and travel experiences. In addition, the book does not follow a scientific methodological framework. The lack of scientific methodology raises several questions. Although this book successfully describes the socio-cultural life of different Himalayan communities, their economic conditions, socio-economic marginalisation, livelihood constraints, and environmental vulnerability, it does not critically examine the underlying drivers of these problems. As a result, the several analyses in the book remain superficial. The book draws various conclusions without sufficient data and scientific explanation. Further, compared with other scholarly works on the Himalaya, the book remains largely narrative and makes little substantial contribution to the region's theoretical understanding. Another important limitation is its uneven regional coverage. The book discusses the Indian Central Himalaya in more detail than other regions. Countries like Bhutan, Nepal, and Tibet (Autonomous Region of China) receive comparatively little attention. This regional imbalance raises questions about how representative the book's coverage of other regions is. Moreover, the book does not examine important contemporary issues such as climate change, migration dynamics, and the expansion of infrastructure and over-tourism in sufficient depth. Given their growing role in transforming mountain societies and environments, a more detailed analysis of these issues would have significantly enhanced the book's scientific relevance. Despite several limitations, this work succeeds in presenting the Himalaya as a spiritual entity in which human societies and natural systems are deeply interconnected. Its simple and descriptive writing style makes it particularly useful as an introductory text for students and general readers interested in Himalayan society and culture.

Reference

Sati, V. P. 2019. *Himalaya on the Threshold of Change*. Springer International Publishers, Switzerland, ISBN 978-3-030-14179-0, P. 250, Advances in Global Change Research series, Scopus-indexed.

