

## Book Reviews

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**Adams, Vincanne. *Tigers of the Snow and Other Virtual Sherpas; an ethnography of Himalayan encounters*. 1996, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey. Pp. 304, \$17.95; ISBN 0-691-00111-1.**

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Vincanne Adams has been studying a group of Sherpas that are somewhat geographically isolated from their fellow Sherpas due to their location high in the Himalayas, near Everest. Due to this location, however, they do have contact with numerous Westerners who come to climb Everest and use the Sherpas as guides, for their track up the mountain. Because of this isolation from other Nepalian people and more than casual contact with certain types of Westerners, the Sherpas have developed a bond with the Westerners. This bond is actually an important aspect of Adams' research for he has never seen or read about a bond being this strong and extensive anywhere else. This particular group of Sherpas seem to have a high sponsor rate from Westerners. It is so high that it has raised some of the individuals yearly income through direct cash gifts, as well as paid-in-full trips to the sponsors home, and the paying for medical operations.

Adams' starts his ethnography with an example of his own bonds with some Sherpas. It is from this bond he writes this book. He starts by explaining about the tragic passing of a Sherpa friend named Pasang Lhamu. Since his last visit, she became very famous throughout the entire nation of Nepal, because she became the first Nepalese woman to climb Everest to the summit. Consequently, it would be this very action that is the cause for her sudden and tragic passing as well. On April 22, 1993, Pasang Lhamu and her climbing team of five younger men reached the summit. This was her fourth attempt to trek to the summit. The group started down, two climbers descending faster than Pasang Lhamu and the other three, taking them an entire day to reach the camp below the summit. Sonam Tshiring, one of the three young men who descended slowly, was coughing up blood and had been for the entire day. Pasang Lhamu sent the other two climbers down the mountain for oxygen, while she waited with Sonam Tshiring for help to arrive. During their wait, bad weather set in and climbers from below could not find Pasang Lhamu or Sonam Tshiring in time.

Pasang Lhamu was thirty-two years old, a wife and a mother of three. Her husband made enough money that they lived a comfortable life. Meaning that economics was not the reason why she would start a high-risk job of climbing mountains. Adams asked her husband, why she started climbing and he replied simply, "She wanted too." Adams did not expect this answer, nor could he accept it at face value. What would make a woman who in 1986 had no desire at all in climbing make four attempts to track up one of the most dangerous mountains in the world. Thus risking everything, her life, her children and her husband, everything that was important to her.

It is this tragic loss of a close friend that causes Adams to search for a deep understanding and purpose of the Sherpas desire to be more like Westerners. He states the purpose of the book is to explore the Sherpa "identity in the Western imagination and the persistent anthropological and Western desire to find a site of authenticity beyond the Western gaze,

what led Pasang Lhamu to get involved in the high-risk, high-profit, image-making, and body-breaking business of mountaineering because 'she wanted to.'" Adams approach to this question starts by examining the role Westerners have had in "creating" the Sherpas he knew.

Adams believes, "that becoming what Westerners desire is built into the way in which Sherpas are expected to be similar to Westerners, who have brought them modernity," (i.e., climbing for sport). The Sherpa prior to Western influence did not climb the mountains because they were considered sacred. He states his argument for this as: "the logic of mimesis governs this interaction, in which surface appearances in such things as representations of difference. . . become the location of authenticity." Adams shows this interaction by demonstrating the impact the Sherpa have on Westerners. At the same time "to show that by accommodating Western interests for a particular sort of Sherpa is part of who Sherpas are."

Adams depicts a complex culture that has developed within this particular group of Sherpas. According to Adams, they have achieved a balance of traditional culture that actually seeks out and invites in Western culture, and in doing so they achieve a cultural exchange. Adams suggest that this type of activity came from a cultural exchange from the West, the fascination of exotic and different cultures. By inviting in and accommodating people from around the world they are able to see and experience the different and exotic cultures of the West, without ever leaving the comfort of their living rooms. He further suggests that one of the reasons they are able to achieve this level of cultural exchange is attributed to their Buddhist belief. He has dedicated chapter three entitled Buddhist Sherpas as Others to this development. In this chapter he does not make all the Sherpas out to be monks, on the contrary he points out that the actual education level is low and the monks educate via example, rather than formal training or education. With so much cultural exchange and interaction between the Sherpas and the West, the Sherpas might lose their cultural heritage and meaning. This has been addressed not only by the Sherpas, but the entire international community. There are schools and foundations that have been established by Westerners to preserve the traditional Sherpa way of life. At the same time these foundations are bringing in modern conveyances in the medical world and through computers for educational use. There are other various foundations all working with the Nepalese government and the Sherpas directly. Adams does suggest that part of the reason why a connection is made between the Sherpas and the Westerners has to do with their Buddhist belief of inner peace. It is this inner peace that Westerners are seeking to find themselves and in doing so they are finding and connecting with the Sherpas culture. The Sherpas, at the same time, are able to achieve their inner peace by finding themselves by interacting with Westerners.

Overall, this is a good read. Adams research is extensive including the translation of old Buddhist transcripts and other documents, which was provided by one of the foundations who purpose it is to translate this information. Other sources come from his personal fieldwork as well as other books and articles written on the Sherpas. His writing style and stories keep your attention. His writing method is quite clear and to the point. I really enjoyed his book and I only wish it could have been written under happier circumstance.

In this book, Vincanne Adams explores how attempts to characterize an "authentic" Sherpa are complicated by Western fascination with Sherpas and by the Sherpas' desires to live up to Western portrayals of them. Throughout Adams illustrates how one might undertake an ethnography of transnationally produced subjects by using the notion of "virtual" identities. In a manner informed by both Buddhism and shamanism, virtual Sherpas are always both real and distilled reflections of the desires that produce them. show more. Product details. Format Paperback | 296 pages. Dimensions 197 x 254 x 22.1mm | 454g. Publication date 19 Nov 1995. Publisher Princeton University Press. 3Buddhist Sherpas as Others121Ch. 4The Intimacy of Shamanic Sherpas171Ch. In this book, Vincanne Adams explores how attempts to characterize an "authentic" Sherpa are complicated by Western fascination with Sherpas and by the Sherpas' desires to live up to Western portrayals of them. Sherpas are portrayed by Westerners as heroic mountain guides, or "tigers of the snow," as Buddhist adepts, and as a people in touch with intimate ways of life that seem no longer available in the Western world. In this book, Vincanne Adams explores how attempts to characterize an "authentic" Sherpa are complicated by Western fascination with Sherpas and by the Sherpas' desires to live up to Western portrayals of them.