

Sacred mountains

- 1. Review: What is a mtn?**
- 2. Components of Sacred Mtns**
- 3. Mountain worship**
- 4. Threats to sacred mountains**
 - Climate change**
 - Tourism**

Review: What is a mountain?

Objective Criteria

1. Scientific definition:

- objective set of criteria
 - elevation
 - local relief
 - Climate
 - Steepness
 - geology

Review: What is a mountain?

Subjective Criteria

2. Subjective definition:

“To a large extent, a mountain is a mountain because of the part it plays in popular imagination.”

(Roderich Peattie)

Sacred mountain

“There are mountains which are just mountains and there are mountains with **personality**. The **personality of a mountain** is more than merely a strange shape that makes it different from others—just as a strangely shaped face or strange actions do not make an individual into a personality. Personality consists in the power to influence others, and this power is due to **consistency, harmony, and one-pointedness** of character. If these qualities are present in a mountain, we recognize him as a vessel of cosmic power, and we call it a **sacred mountain** [...].”

Components of Sacred Mtns: Mircea Eliade, comparative religion

1. The mountain as sacred center
2. Mountain as places of revelation
3. Mountain as Gods
4. Mountains as life and death places
5. Persistence of mountains

1. The mountain as sacred center

- “Axis mundi” = center of the world
- Cosmic mountain- image of stability and permanence
- Example: Mt.Meru, center of the world for Hindus, Buddhists and Jains
 - Mythical mountain
 - Heaven is actually part of the mountain
 - Central component of the regions
 - Based on real mountains



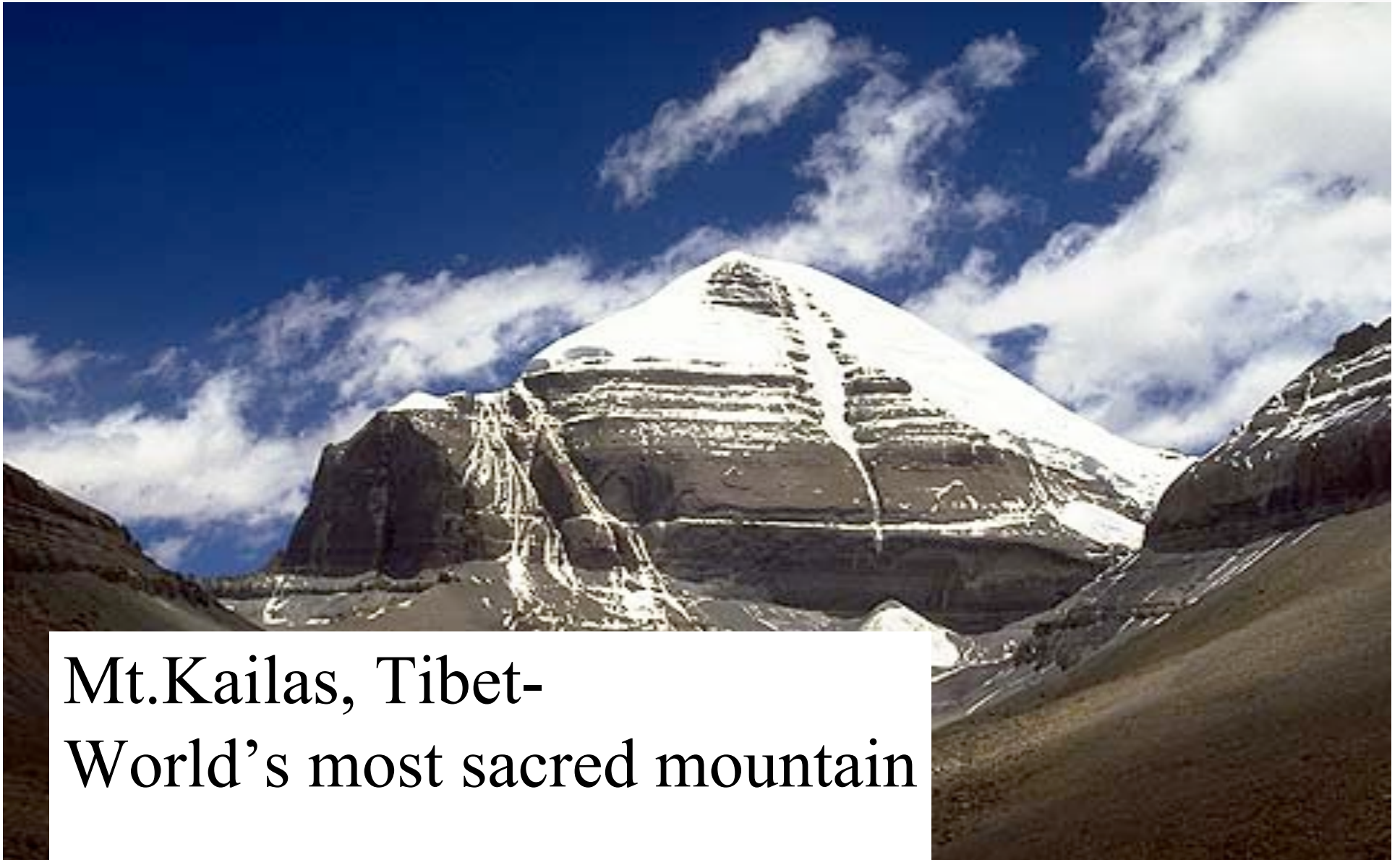
Bhutanese thanka of Mt. Meru and the Buddhist Universe, 19th century, Trongsa Dzong, Trongsa, Bhutan

Many Hindu temples, including Angkor Wat, the principal temple of Angkor in Cambodia, have been built as symbolic representations of the mountain.

1. The mountain as sacred center

- **Morphology of the mountain plays an important role in defining the mountain as sacred**
 - **Shape**
 - **Color of the rock**
 - **Elevation**
 - **Local relief**
 - **Snow**

1. The mountain as sacred center



Mt.Kailas, Tibet-
World's most sacred mountain

Morphology features that make Kailas a sacred mountain

- Shape: perfect dome
- Color: white (snow)
- Source of 4 rivers in 4 cardinal directions
- Local relief: contrasting with the vast plateau surrounding it
- Remoteness (W Tibet very sparsely populated)



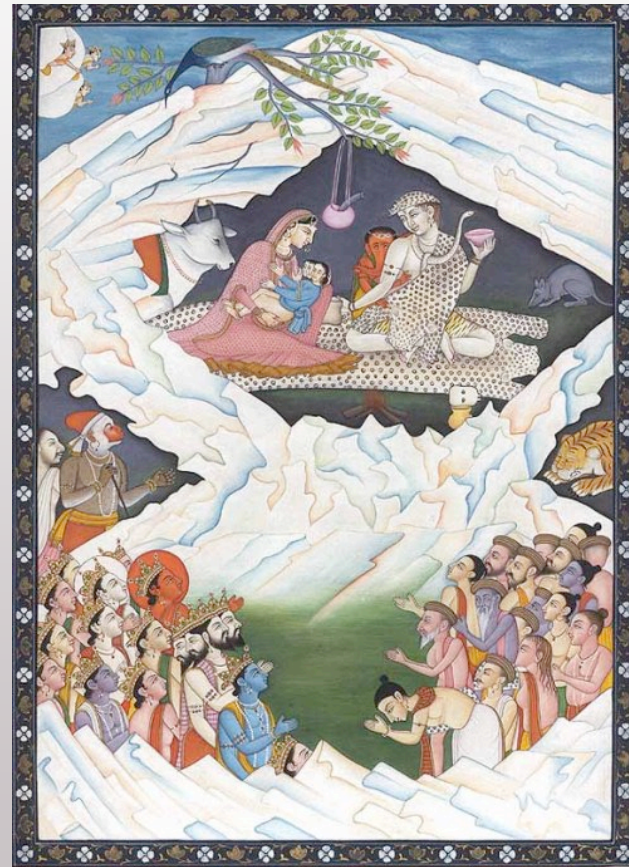


Mt Kailis rivers

- Tsangpo/Bramaputra
- Indus
- Ganges
- Sutlej River (a major tributary of the Indus River)

Hindu religion

- According to Hinduism, Shiva, the destroyer of evil and sorrow, resides at the summit of a legendary mountain named Kailāśā, where he sits in a state of perpetual meditation along with his wife Pārvatī, the daughter of Himalaya.

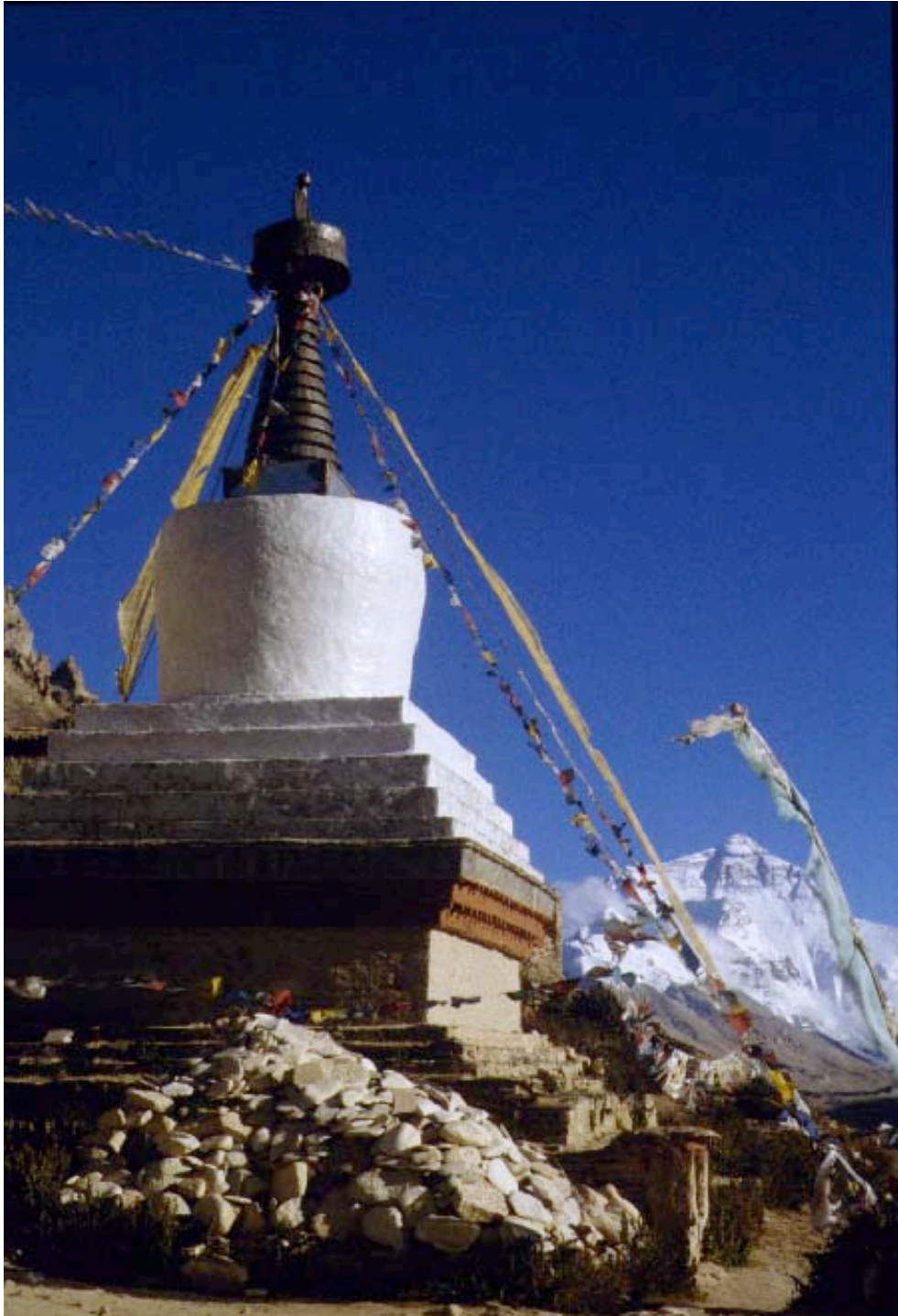


Important to many cultures, religions

- The word Kailāśā means "crystal" in Sanskrit. The Tibetan name is Gangs Rin-po-che, meaning “precious jewel of snows”. Jains refer to the mtn as Ashtapada



Kailash, north side



Cosmic mountain represented in temple architecture:

“Stupa” (Buddhist temple)
shaped in form of a dome
with gateways to the four
directions

Stairs symbolize way to
heaven (the ascent)

*Rongbuk Monastery
Everest Base Camp,
North (Tibetan) side*

Hindu temple in Durbar Square, Kathmandu (Nepal)



- **Another example of mountains represented in temple architecture**
- Steps represent spiritual ascent
- Link between heaven and earth

1. The mountain as sacred center

Summary

- Axis mundi: center of world
 - Connects heaven to earth
- Characteristics: morphology, color
- Represents cardinal directions
- Temple architecture
- Mount Kailish
 - Ganges, Indus, Tsangpo/Bramaputra

2. Mountains as Places of Revelation

- Mountaintop- revelatory place
- Height of the mountain is important
- Mountain ascent – spiritual, transforming experience

Mount Hira





Mount Sinai

Moses encounters Yahveh
with fire and lightning

And the Lord came down
upon Mount Sinai, on the
top of the mount: and the
Lord called Moses up to
the top of the mount; and
Moses went up.

Exodus 19:20

Ten commandments

Native Americans Vision Quests



Yamabushi

- Yamabushi (山伏) (Literally: "One who lies in the mountains") are Japanese mountain ascetics and warriors, mostly of the Shingon sect of Buddhism.
- Mountain ascents associated with spiritual transformation, particularly spiritual insights.

Swayambunath Temple, Kathmandu (Nepal)



2. Mountains as Places of Revelation

Summary

- Transcends cultures and religions
- Places of spiritual transformations
- Places of revelation where “god” communicates to special people
- Revelation generally a function of ascending the mountains
- Ex: Mt Hira, Mt Sinai, vision quest

3. Mountains with Divine Powers/Gods themselves

- Snow capped mountains are important
- Verticality / local relief
- Remoteness
- Abode of the Divine
- Guardian Gods for local people



Shiva

Resides on Mt Kailas, which
Is personification of Shiva

Parvat, Siva's wife, is the
daughter of the Himalayas

4. Mountains as Givers of Life and Death

- Sources of rivers
- Thus, sources of fertility
- Abode of the dead; path of the dead

Andes: Mountain as source of Water and Fertility

- Verticality is important
- Source of water
- Gods of meteorological phenomena, controlling crops and cattle
- Places of astronomical observations

Mt. Mismi, Peruvian Andes



Mt. Coropuna, sacred mountain



5. Persistence of Mountains

- Many-layered traditions of myth and pilgrimage



Mount Moriah

Early Caanite high
place of worship

Abraham came to
sacrifice Isaac

Solomon built the great
temple

Nehemiah rebuilt after
Babylonian exile

Muhammad begin ascent
from earth to heaven

Mountain Worship Examples

Buddhist mountain worship

CIRCUMAMBULATION (Korra)

is the way to worship:

“to see the greatness of a mountain, one must keep one’s distance; to understand its form, one must move around it”

- Prostration
- Prayer wheels
- Mani stones
- Offerings: juniper incense
- “Sky burial” ceremony





Sky burial

Body placed on top
Vultures consume

About 18,000' here

Pilgrimage

- Pilgrimage in outer space= mirrored reflection of an inner movement or development (Tibetan Buddhism)
- the journey to sacred places for spiritual benefit and paying homage to deities (Himalayas)
- Asking for good crops as well as good health (Andes)
- a purifying journey (ex. Dudh Kunda in Nepal)

Pilgrimage as a means for conservation

- Encourage local beliefs about sanctity of the mountains
- Sacred space needs to be clean and not polluted
- Local people's concern not to upset the mountain Gods helps maintain the pilgrimage practice

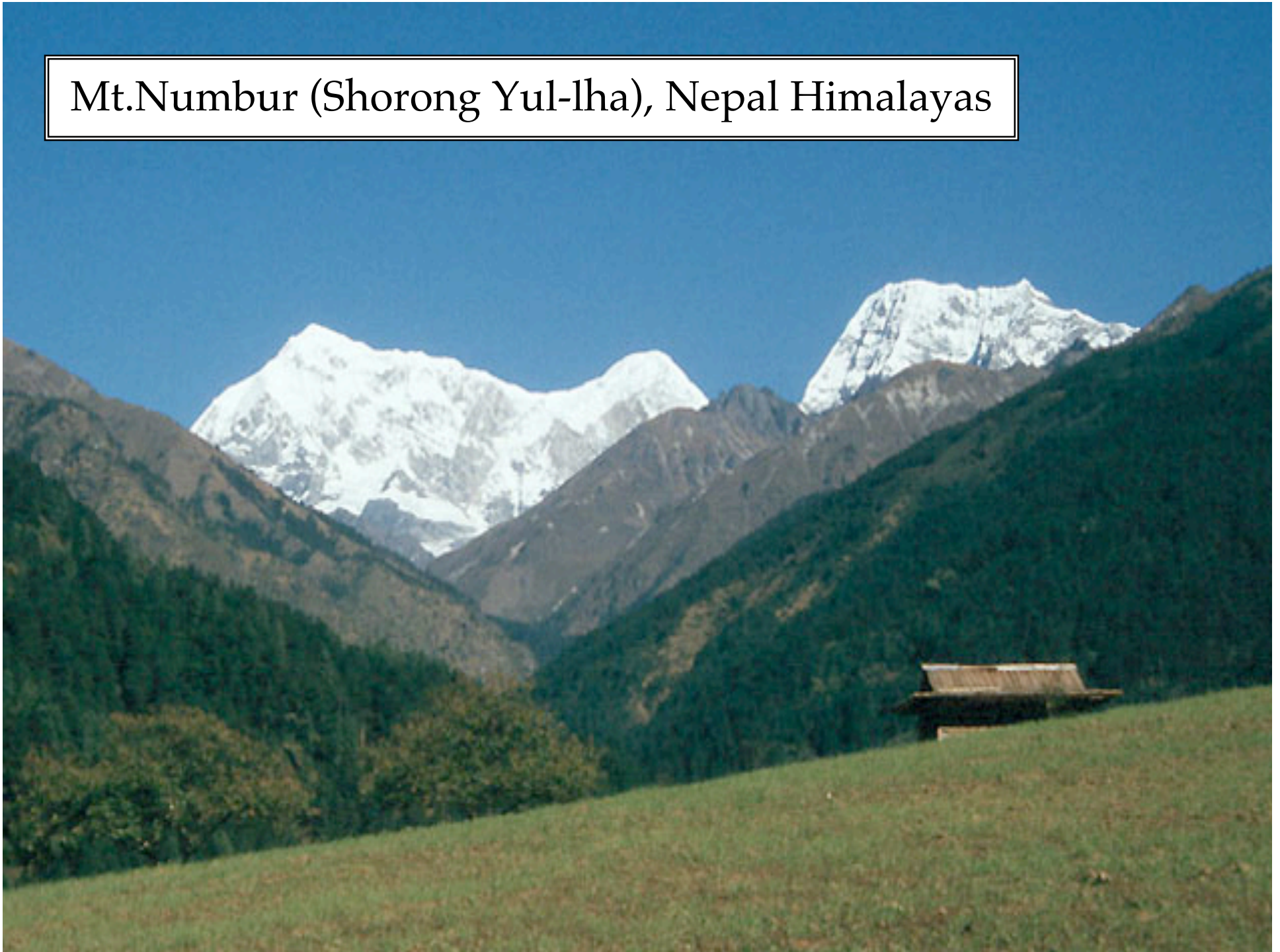
What can happen when you hitch-hike
on trucks in Tibet...?



Mountain rituals: the Himalayas

- *Mountain top=off-limits*
- Hindu mountain worship:
- pilgrimage to the base of the mountain
- bathing in the lake
- Incense burning

Mt.Numbur (Shorong Yul-lha), Nepal Himalayas





Dudh Kunda (“Milk Lake”) at the base of Numbur Mt.



Mountain worship in the Andes



(The Mountain Institute, West Virginia)

The Ice Maiden

- Archaeological sites and mummies have been found in the Andes at altitudes up to 20,000ft
- Incas constructed the sites in the 15th century to appease the mountain gods
- Human sacrifice: Capac Cocha ritual

Volcano Llullaillaco, Argentina, highest archeological site (~21,000ft)



Peaks in the Andes are still worshipped to this day, eg. Mt. Ausangate



Present day pilgrimage to Qoyllur Rit'I, Peru



Sinaqara Glacier, pilgrimage site







Qoyllur Rit'I, Sinaqara Glacier, S. Peru

Taking “medicinal”
ice from the glacier
as a symbol of water
sources and fertility



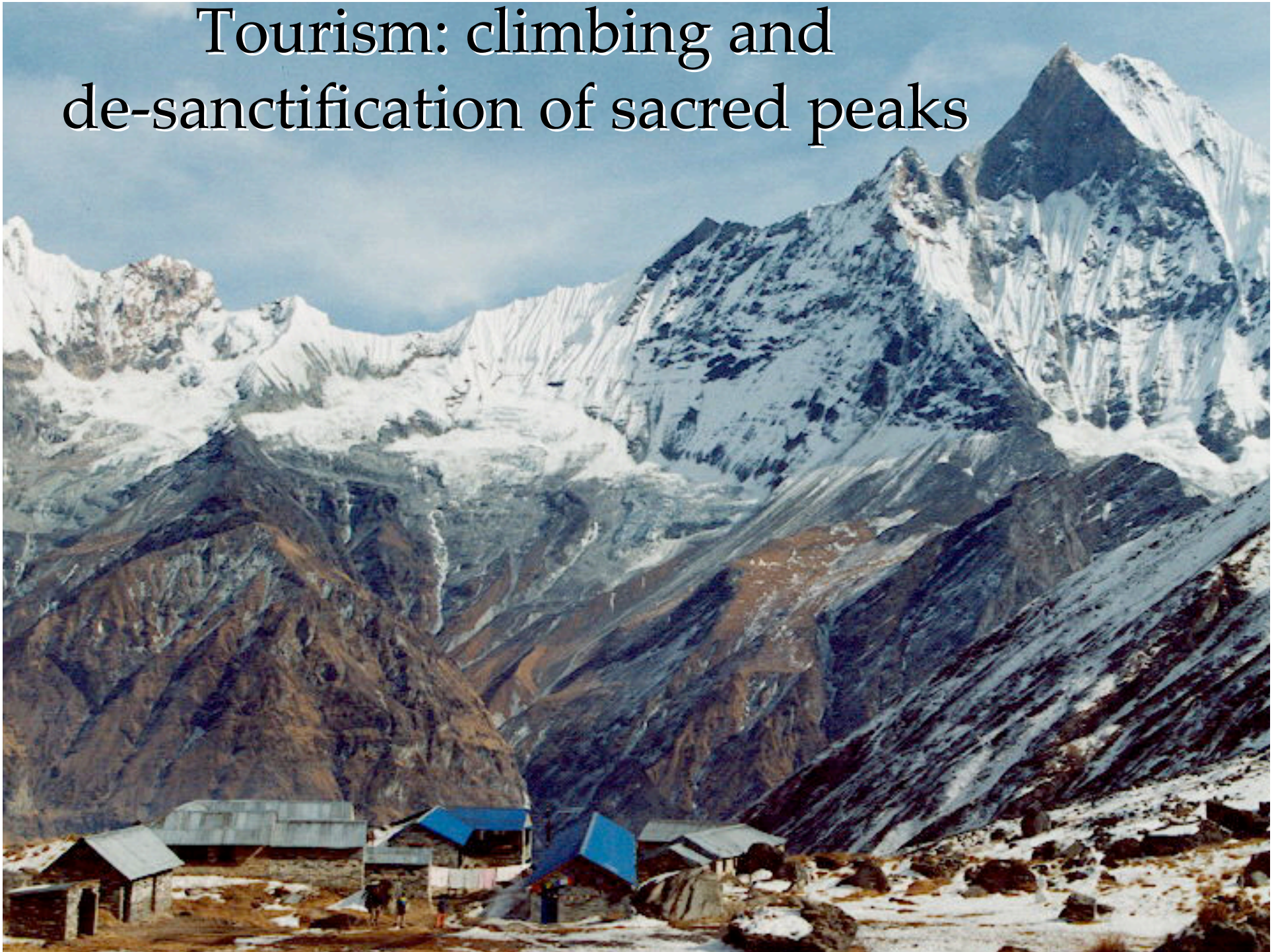
Threats to sacred mountains

- **Tourism:**
 - Climbing permits
 - Pollution of sacred space

**Nepal, 2001: 103 more peaks opened for mountaineering
in the area of Everest and Kangchenjunga**

- **Climate change:**
 - glacial melt
 - Changes in vegetation
 - Water resources

Tourism: climbing and de-sanctification of sacred peaks



Mt. Macchapuchare



World Tibet Network News



Thursday, May 17, 2001

Mount Kailash Desecrated

Some press agencies and specialized magazines have recently spread the news that a Spanish mountaineering expedition led by Mr. Jesus Martinez Noves had applied for and was granted permission by the Chinese authorities to attempt the climb of Mount Kailash in Tibet.

Wednesday, May 30, 2001

Climber calls off ascent of sacred peak amid protests (ST)

INTERNATIONAL protests by mountaineers have halted what would have been the first ascent of Mount Kailash, a Tibetan mountain held sacred by Hindus and Buddhists.

Climate change

Glacier ablation
at Shorong Yul-Iha
(Numbur),
Nepal Himalayas

Glacier AX010
estimated to
disappear by year
2060.

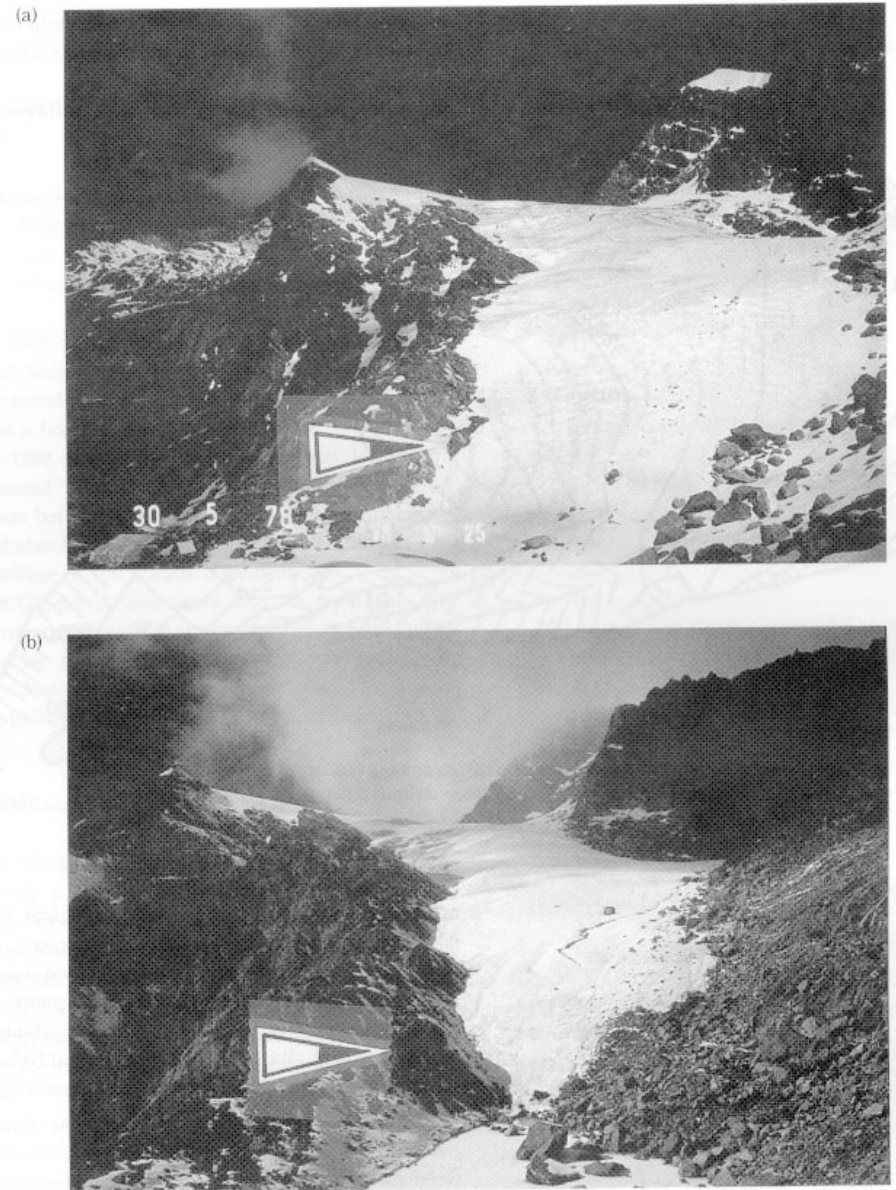


Fig. 4. Photographs of the lower part of Glacier AX010 taken in June 1978 (a), and in November 1989 (b). Shrinkage of the glacier is evident as shown by arrows in (a) and (b) at the same point.



Everest Melting?

High Signs of Climate Change

*Stentor Danielson
National Geographic News
June 5, 2002*

A team sponsored by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has found signs that the landscape of Mount Everest has changed significantly since Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay first conquered the peak in 1953. A primary cause is the warming **global climate**. But the growing impact of **tourism** is also taxing the world's highest mountain.

The team found that the glacier that once came close to Hillary and Norgay's first camp has retreated **three miles (five kilometers)**. A series of ponds that used to be near Island Peak—so-called because it was then an island in a sea of ice—had merged into a long lake.

Indian Himalayas:

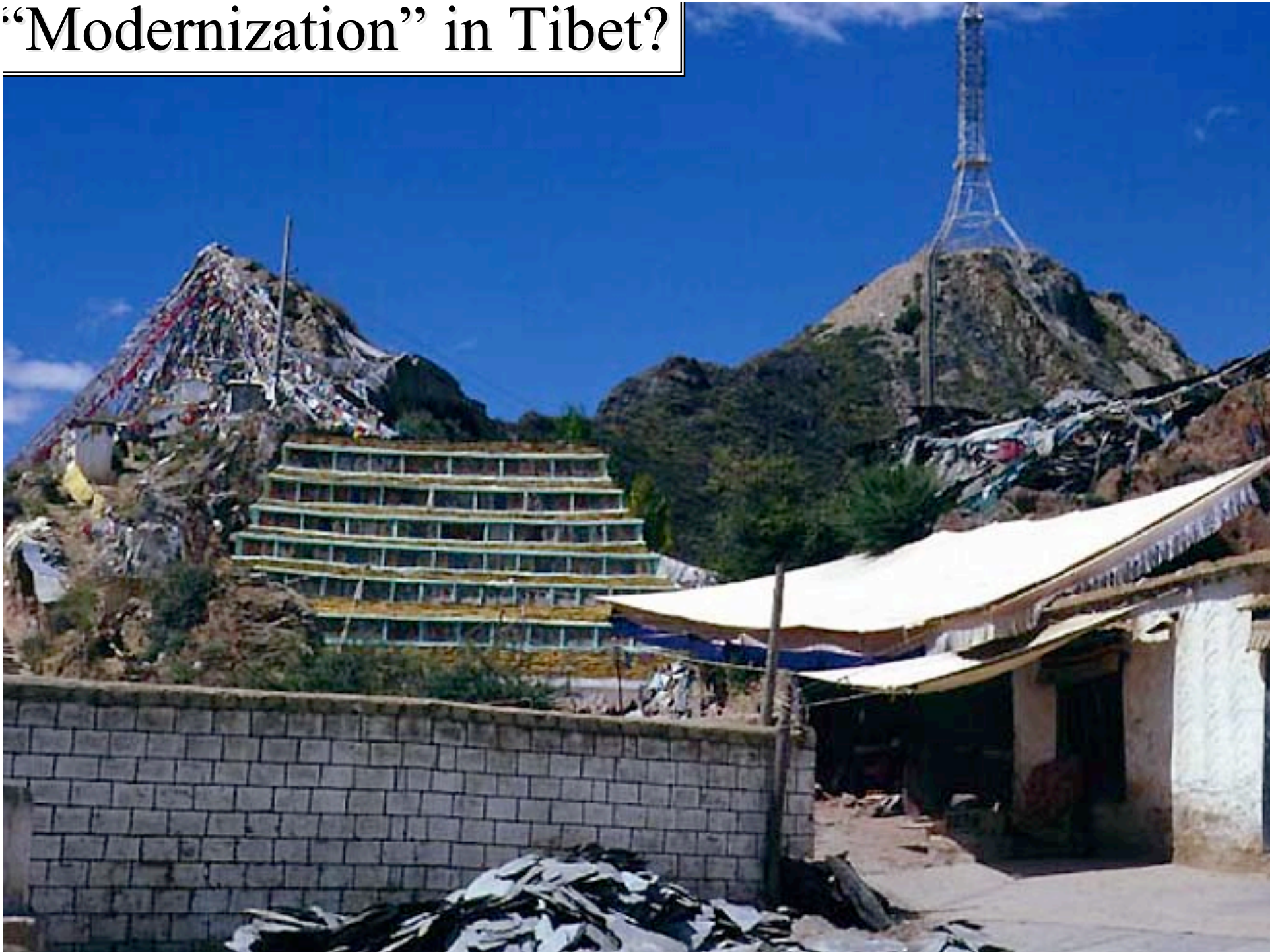
Glacier ablation at Gangotri, source of the holy Ganges

- 1% of Ganges water comes from Gangotri glacier
- millions of people dependent on water from runoff
- glacier terminus retreated by 3km

ASTER Image courtesy of: NASA EROS
Data Center, Sept. 9, 2001



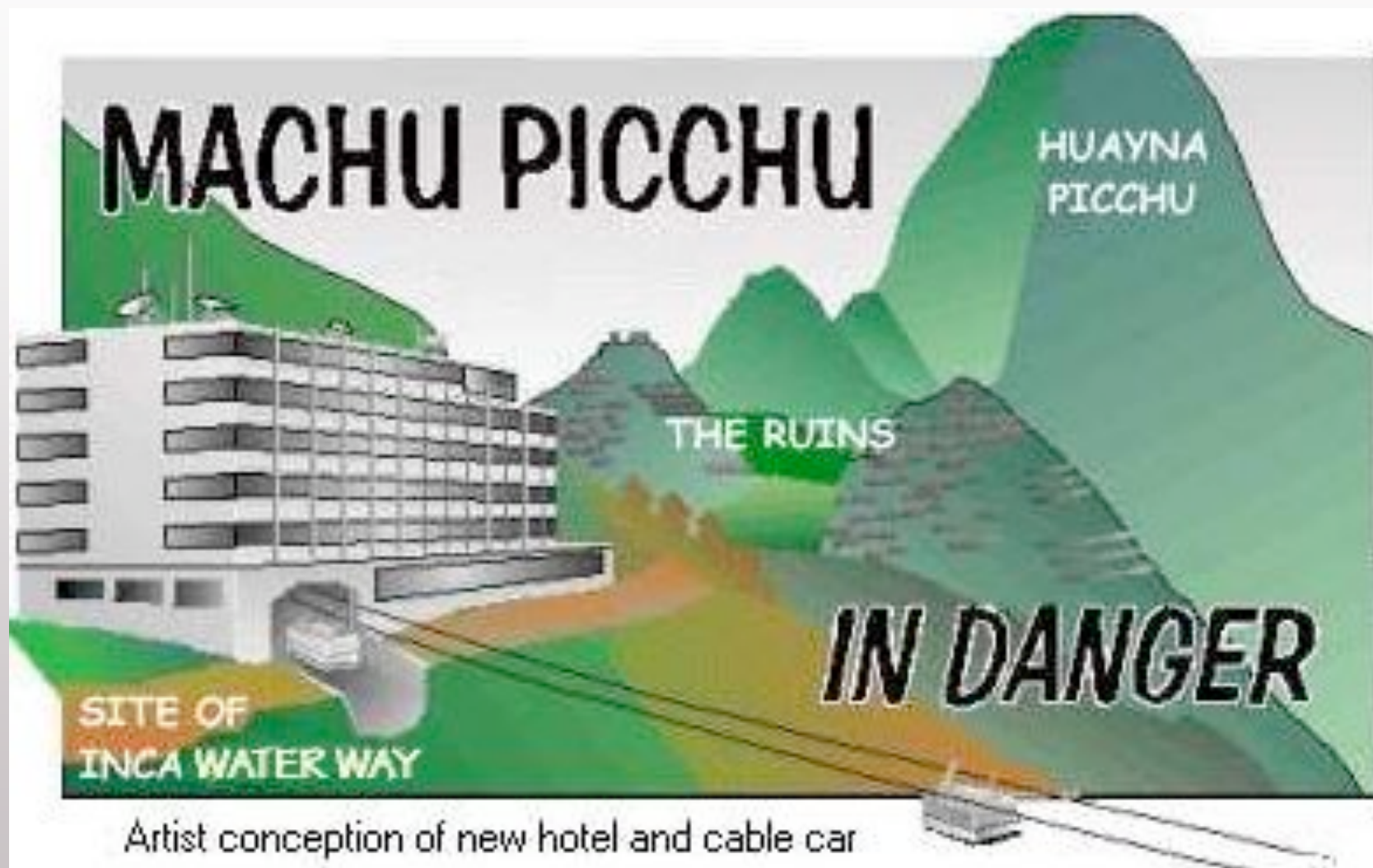
“Modernization” in Tibet?



An aerial photograph of the ancient Inca city of Machu Picchu, showing its stone ruins and terraced fields on a mountain ridge. In the background, a massive, jagged mountain peak rises against a blue sky. The text 'THE END OF A LEGEND?' is overlaid in the upper left corner.

THE END OF A LEGEND?

Aug 2000: Another cable car project is being proposed for Macchu Picchu



MACHU PICCHU

HUAYNA
PICCHU

THE RUINS

SITE OF
INCA WATER WAY

IN DANGER

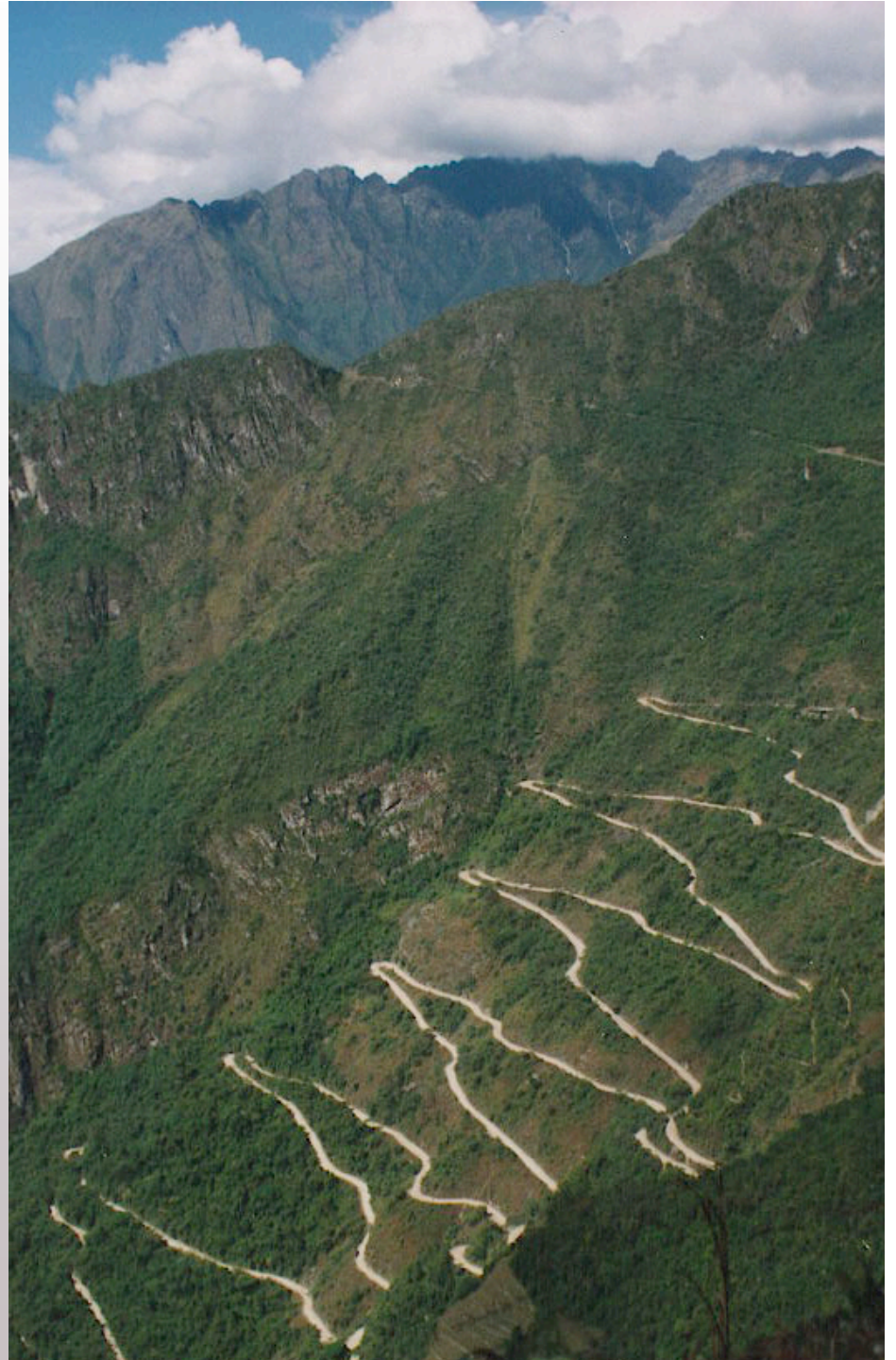
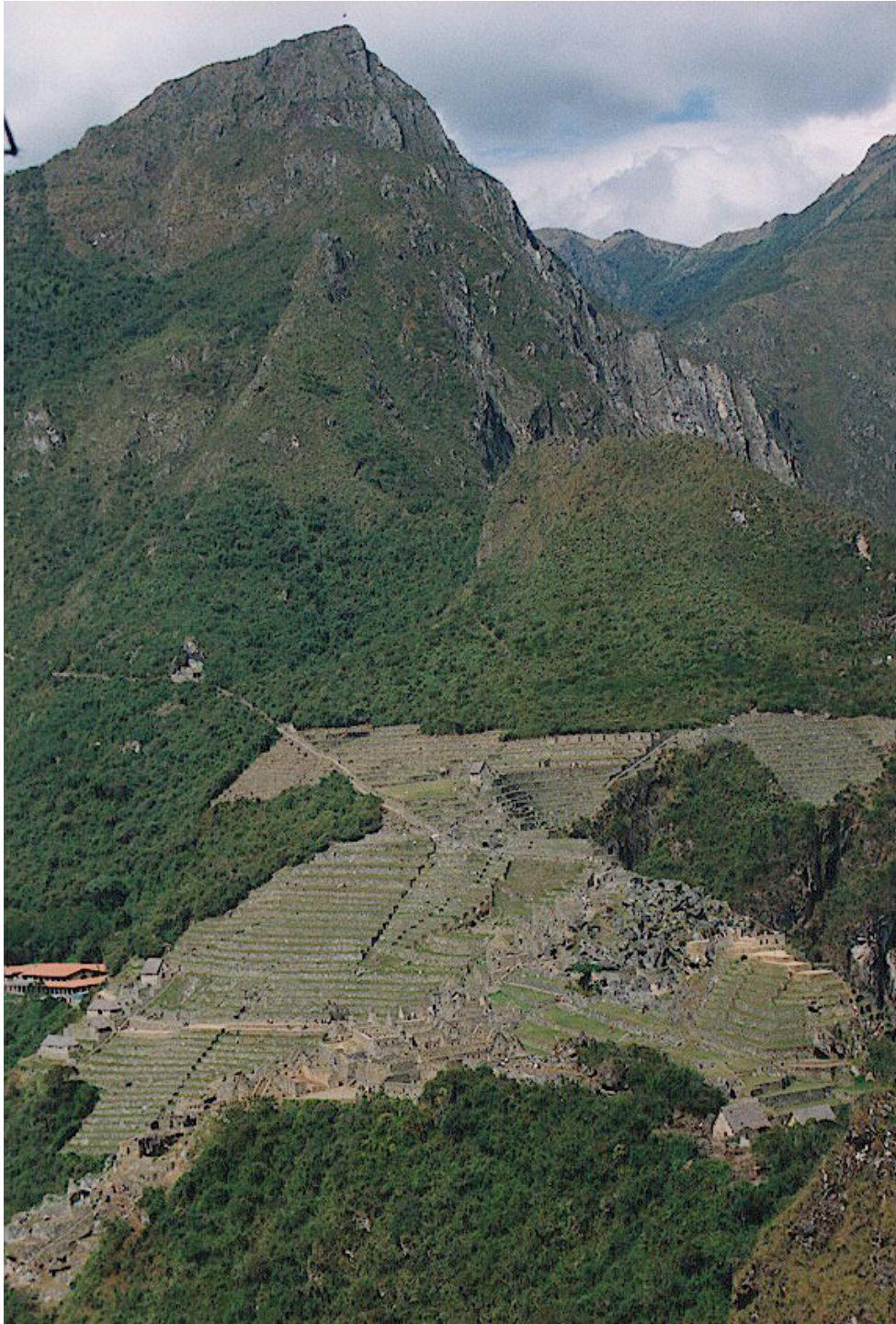
Artist conception of new hotel and cable car

MACHU PICCHU TODAY



AFTER THE PROJECT





Beer vs. Sacred Mountains?



Sept 11, 2000:
“The Intihuatana, considered by archaeologists to be the most sacred object in Machu Picchu has been damaged in the filming of a beer commercial.”

Summary: Mountain cultures at risk

- Mountain rituals: a way for local cultures to maintain global and local awareness
- Balancing sanctity of the mountains with resource use and conservation in the mountains
- Global action:
 - address issue of climate change in the mountains
 - help maintain traditional worship practices
- Scientific research: need to respect local traditions
- “Mountain to mountain” exchange and collaboration

Summary: Why is a mountain sacred?

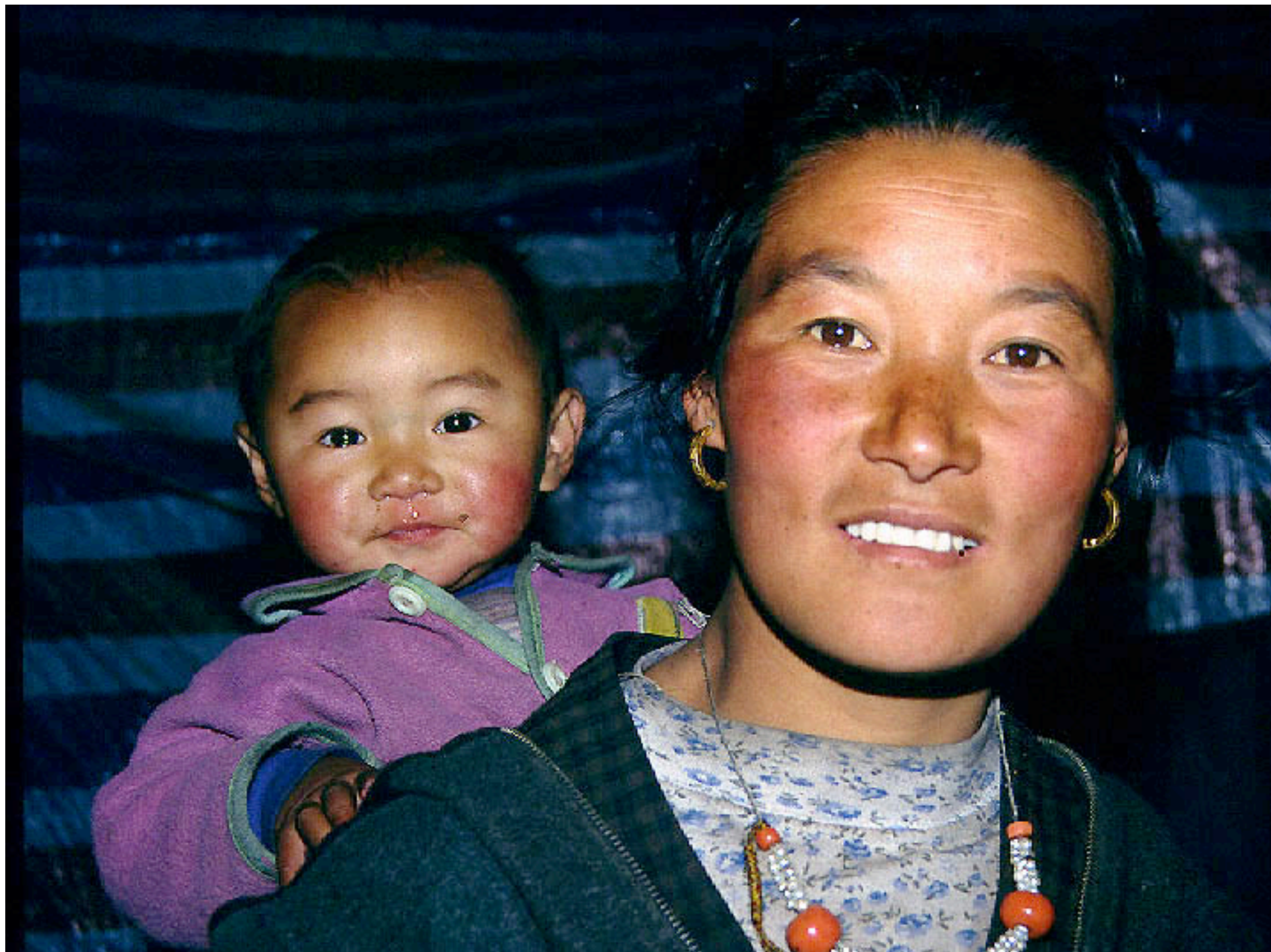
- Glacier-topped peaks=venerated as abode of heavenly enlightened (Devi and Deva, Gods of weather and crops)
- Highest prominent feature in a village landscape
- Extreme beauty (Macchapuchre, Ama Dablam)
- Clouds: creative power of mind (Tibetan Buddhism)
- Source of water (Andes)
- Healing power and energy (Huaringas- Peru, Kalincok, Nepal)
- Color of the rock: white=purity

Example: Garhwal Himalayas (India)

- Most important pilgrimage site in Indian Himalayas
- Shrines at the source of the Ganges
- Seedling ceremony to plant trees to preserve the sacred forests
- Priests blessed the seeds
- Pilgrims helped in planting the seeds













Ama Dablam, Nepal Himalayas







Summary: Three ways to worship sacred mountains

- **Buddhism:** circumambulation (circling) of sacred mountains
- **Hinduism:** pilgrimage to the base of the mountain
- **Andean culture:** human sacrifice on top of the peaks to appease the mountain Gods (Inca Empire)

Sacred mountains...



...A Way for Conservation