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Fourteen Peaks at Eighteen: Nima Rinji Sherpa and the Meaning of Sherpa Power

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When Nima Rinji Sherpa reached the summit of Shishapangma in October 2024, he completed one of mountaineering's most demanding lists before most people his age had finished deciding what they wanted to do with adulthood.

He was 18. In a little over two years, he had climbed all 14 mountains in the world above 8,000 metres, becoming the youngest person to do so.

The record travelled quickly through international media. But Nima's own explanation of the project pointed beyond the number. He called it **#SherpaPower**, a campaign built around a larger

argument: Sherpa climbers should be recognised not merely as guides who help other people reach summits, but as elite athletes in their own right.

A family shaped by expeditions

Nima grew up inside Nepal's mountaineering world. His family was already connected to expedition work, and the logistics, risks and rhythms of high-altitude climbing were part of his environment long before he began setting records.

That background gave him access to experience that few teenagers possess. It also meant he understood something many outsiders learn only after entering the Himalaya: big expeditions are collective enterprises.

The global mythology of mountaineering often celebrates the individual climber standing alone on a summit. In practice, success depends on route fixing, load carrying, weather judgement, camp management, rescue capability and years of mountain knowledge. Sherpa workers have performed much of that labour for generations.

Nima wanted the public conversation to change.

Beginning at sixteen

His 14-peak project began with Manaslu in September 2022, when he was still 16. The pace accelerated rapidly.

He climbed Everest and Lhotse, then moved into Pakistan's Karakoram, where K2, Broad Peak, Gasherbrum I, Gasherbrum II and Nanga Parbat presented a different set of technical and logistical demands.

By 2024 he had moved through more of the Himalayan giants, including Annapurna I, Makalu and Kangchenjunga.

Guinness World Records recognised a series of age records along the way. Nima became the youngest person to summit K2 and Kangchenjunga and later the youngest to complete all 14 of the 8,000-metre peaks.

The achievement was extraordinary even inside a climbing culture that has produced generations of exceptional high-altitude athletes.

What a record does not show

Peak lists make mountaineering easy to count. They do not make it easy to understand.

A successful summit gives a clean line in a record book: mountain, date, altitude. Missing are the days of acclimatisation, retreat

decisions, unstable snow, fatigue, fear and the constant calculation of whether the body can continue safely.

Nima has spoken about surviving dangerous situations, including avalanches and falls. These experiences complicate the glamorous version of record-breaking.

High-altitude climbing rewards confidence but punishes overconfidence. A young climber moving quickly through records therefore faces an unusual challenge: how to retain ambition without allowing success to create the illusion of invulnerability.

Sherpa is not a job title

One of Nima's most important messages is also one of the simplest.

Sherpa is an ethnic identity, not a synonym for porter or mountain guide.

International climbing culture has often blurred that distinction. Because Sherpa climbers became central to Himalayan expeditions, the name of a people was gradually used as shorthand for a category of labour.

The result is a strange kind of visibility. Sherpas are essential to the global image of Everest, yet individual Sherpa athletes have often received less attention than foreign clients whose expeditions they helped make possible.

Nima's #SherpaPower campaign challenges that imbalance directly.

He wants Sherpa climbers to be discussed in the language used for other elite athletes: training, technique, performance, judgement and achievement.

A new generation inherits an old risk

Nima belongs to a generation with opportunities earlier climbers did not have.

Social media allows athletes to speak directly to global audiences. Sponsorship can reach individuals rather than only expedition companies. Records are tracked in real time. Young Sherpa climbers can build public identities under their own names.

Yet the underlying risks remain familiar.

High-altitude work is still dangerous. Families in mountain regions still make economic calculations around expedition labour. Climate change is altering snow, glaciers and routes. The commercialisation of Everest and other peaks has created larger markets but also larger pressures.

The question is therefore not only whether a young Sherpa climber can become internationally famous. It is whether fame can translate into greater power for the communities that have

sustained Himalayan mountaineering.

Beyond the summit photograph

After completing all 14 peaks, Nima spoke about wanting to use his platform for education, healthcare, infrastructure and recognition in Sherpa communities.

That ambition is still much larger than anything one climber can deliver alone. But the direction matters.

The history of Himalayan mountaineering contains many stories in which local expertise produced international glory that accumulated elsewhere. Nima's generation has the opportunity to negotiate that relationship differently.

They can be guides if they choose. They can also be expedition leaders, record-holders, entrepreneurs, advocates and public figures.

What comes after fourteen

Completing the 8,000-metre peaks so young creates an unusual problem: what do you do after finishing a goal that consumes entire careers?

For Nima, the answer appears to be another kind of climbing ambition combined with advocacy. The future may include more technically demanding ascents rather than simply more checklist

records.

That evolution will matter more than adding another statistic.

At 18, Nima Rinji Sherpa had already done something mountaineering history could measure. The more interesting part of his story may be what cannot be measured so neatly.

If #SherpaPower succeeds, the legacy will not simply be that one teenager climbed 14 mountains faster and younger than anyone before him.

It will be that he helped change who the world imagines when it hears the word “climber”.

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