

NICHOLAS FILMS AND TIBET HOUSE US PRESENT

# T H E T H I R D P O L E

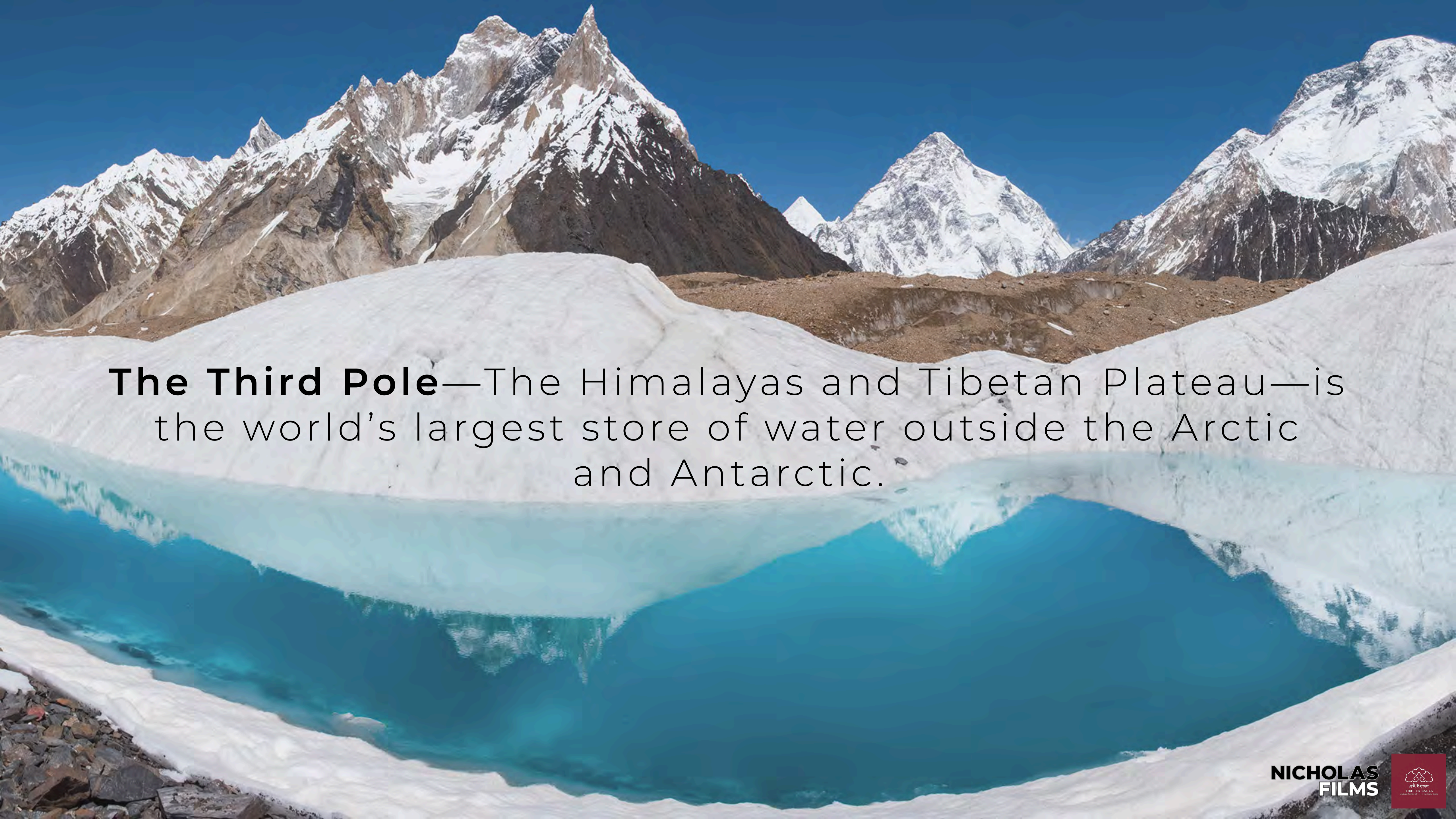
THE HEART OF EARTH'S UNTOLD CLIMATE CRISIS

**A NEW DOCUMENTARY SERIES**

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A wide-angle landscape photograph of a high-altitude mountain region. In the background, several jagged, snow-covered mountain peaks rise against a clear blue sky. The middle ground features a large, white, snow-covered slope that appears to be a glacier or a high-altitude plateau. In the foreground, a vibrant turquoise lake is nestled within a valley, its surface reflecting the surrounding snow and mountains. The water has a milky, blue-green hue, characteristic of glacial meltwater.

**The Third Pole**—The Himalayas and Tibetan Plateau—is the world's largest store of water outside the Arctic and Antarctic.



An aerial photograph showing a large glacier on the left side of the frame, melting into a vast, turquoise-colored lake. The glacier's edge is jagged and uneven, with chunks of ice and rock visible. The lake's surface is textured with numerous small, white icebergs and chunks of ice that have calved from the glacier. The water has a deep blue-green hue, suggesting depth and cold temperatures. The overall scene conveys a sense of immense scale and the rapid pace of glacial retreat.

But these glaciers are melting faster  
than anywhere else on Earth.





Threatening 2.5 billion people who live downstream,  
***and unleashing a global climate catastrophe.***





As the Third Pole transforms, the world must pay attention.

***What's happening here affects us all.***





Shot across five countries and a full year of seasonal change, this revealing series portrays the breathtaking beauty—and looming danger—of the Third Pole. Our goal is to celebrate these rich cultures and breathtaking landscapes while confronting the crisis and exploring the steps we must take to protect it.



# T H E T H I R D P O L E







***“The glaciers of the Himalayas are melting very fast, in a few decades our sacred rivers like Ganga, Brahmaputra, and Indus might become seasonal rivers.”***

-Sonam Wangchuk, Engineer & Inventor of the Ice Stupa

***“2025 has been designated the Year of the Glaciers by the United Nations — This must be a wake-up call to the world.”***

-Celeste Saulo, Secretary-General U.N. World Meteorological Organisation

***“Human beings are the only creatures with the power to destroy the Earth, but we are also the species with the greatest capacity to protect it.”***

-H.H. 14th Dalai Lama

***“We are not separate from nature; we are nature. When we embrace this reality, we sustain the world.”***

-Vandana Shiva, Environmentalist & Seed Sovereignty Advocate

***“We deserve a safe future. And we demand a safe future. Is that really too much to ask?”***

-Greta Thunberg, Activist



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CLIMATE ACTION

There is a third pole on earth, and it's melting quickly

A Himalayan lake fed by melting ice just released a devastating flood in northern India. Thousands of other unstable lakes are getting bigger every year.



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Glacier meltdown risks food and water supply of 2 billion people, says UN

Unesco report highlights 'unprecedented' glacier loss driven by climate crisis, threatening ecosystems, agriculture and water sources

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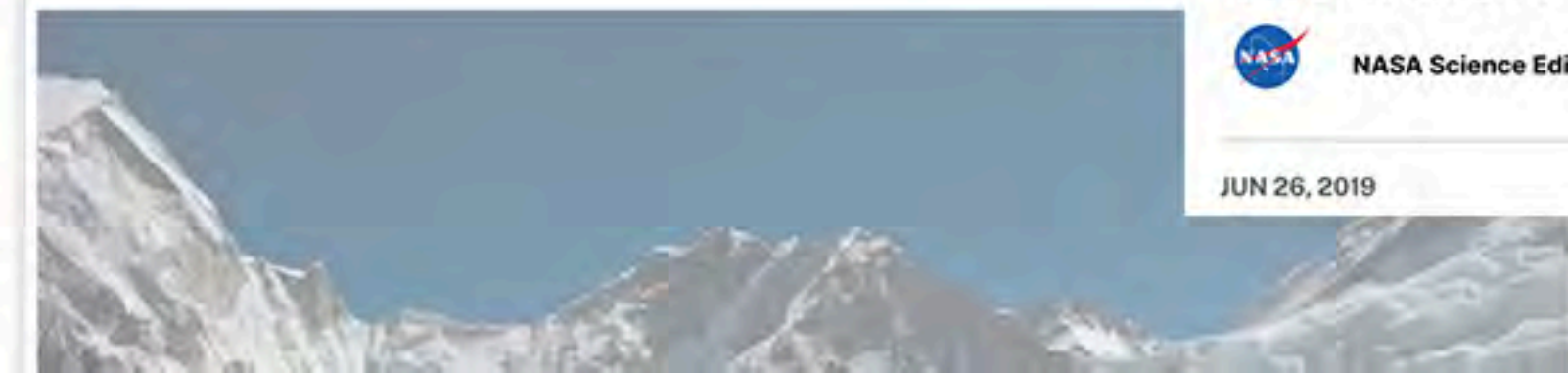
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News

Climate Crisis

Himalayan glaciers may lose 75 percent of ice by 2100, report says

Melting of glaciers will cause dangerous flooding and water shortages for 2 billion people who live downstream of rivers that originate in the Himalayas, report says.



Green | Climate Politics

As the Third Pole Melts, Climate Diplomacy Is Hard to Come By

NASA

The Water Future of Earth's 'Third Pole'

NASA Science Editorial Team

JUN 26, 2019

abc NEWS

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Climate change is making the world more challenging, experts say

Mountaineers will have to contend with much more unpredictable weather conditions

By Julia Jacoby

September 26, 2023 5:05 AM

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OCT 24, 2023 2:00 AM

Glacial Lakes Threaten Millions in a Warming World

A Himalayan lake fed by melting ice just released a devastating flood in northern India. Thousands of other unstable lakes are getting bigger every year.

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DECEMBER 15, 2023

Researchers study the risk of glacial lake outbursts in the Third Pole

by Cactus Communications

A map of the Third Pole region, showing the Himalayas and surrounding areas. The map is color-coded to indicate the risk of glacial lake outbursts, with red and orange areas indicating high risk. There are also several circular icons on the map, likely representing specific glacial lakes or study sites.

A bar chart showing the number of glacial lakes in different regions. The x-axis lists various regions, and the y-axis shows the number of lakes. The bars are colored in shades of green and yellow.

Shrinking Himalayan glaciers spell trouble downstream

Researchers strive to better understand melting glaciers on Asian mountain peaks, the Earth's 'Third Pole' in light of devastating floods and water supply problems.

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Himalayan glaciers are melting faster than ever before, scientists warn

Two billion people – most of whom have not contributed to the worsening environment – are now vulnerable

Stuti Mishra • Tuesday 20 June 2023 13:43 BST • Comments





# *Our Plan*

This series goes beyond the headlines to bring this global crisis to life—through unforgettable stories grounded in place, people, and purpose. We will:

- Track climate impacts across a year of seasonal change, from Winter, to Spring, Summer and Autumn.
- Showcase key upstream and downstream locations, from the melting glaciers of Nepal, Bhutan and Pakistan, to the floodplains of India, Cambodia, and Vietnam.
- Document intimate, character-driven stories that reveal how climate change is reshaping daily life, ancient traditions, and spiritual practices.
- Learn from scientists, activists, and local communities who are fighting to understand, adapt to, and slow the impacts of glacial retreat.







# *Winter*

FROZEN RIVERS



# *Spring*

LANDSLIDES & FLOODS



# *Summer*

THE MONSOON



# *Autumn*

A HARD HARVEST



# *Narrative Approach*

In one of the most breathtaking and fragile regions on Earth, **vérité scenes** of everyday life—from ice stupas blooming in the high desert to elders lighting butter lamps in ancient monasteries—draw viewers into a world where tradition and survival are inseparable.

- This quiet intimacy is guided by a singular voice—our **narrator**. More than a storyteller, the narrator is the emotional spine of the series: carrying us across borders and seasons, helping audiences fall in love with a place most will never see firsthand.
- The spiritual core of the series is the wisdom of **His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama** whose teachings reframe the climate crisis as a sacred responsibility—a call to protect life in all its forms.

The ultimate aim of The Third Pole series is to stir both heart and mind: to spark wonder, to educate audiences on the scientific realities on the ground, and to inspire positive action—not only for the Himalayas, but for our shared future.



# *Interviews with Experts*

**Interviews with leading experts** in climate science illustrate what the world is doing to prepare for this possible climate catastrophe, and invite a broader understanding of what is at stake—not just for the Himalayan peoples, but for the entire planet.

***“We all need water. We’re 90 percent water, we require fresh water... We have big demands on the water from these water towers, and we have to understand better how they’re changing.”***

-Michele Koppes, Climate and Glacier Scientist at the University of British Columbia

***“To tackle this regional snow crisis and the challenges it creates for long-term food, water and energy resilience, we urgently need to embrace a paradigm shift toward science-based, forward-looking policies and foster renewed regional cooperation for transboundary water management and emissions mitigation.”***

-Pema Gyamtsho, ICIMOD Director General





# *Series Score & Audio*

To bring the spirit of the Third Pole to life, we will record immersive soundscapes on location—glaciers cracking, yak bells echoing across mountain passes, monks chanting inside ancient temples. These elements will form the backbone of an evocative audio design, grounding each episode in the visceral experience of the Himalayas.

We plan to seek out and collaborate with musicians whose work resonates deeply with the region's spiritual and environmental themes—either through original scoring that integrates field recordings, or by licensing existing compositions that align with the emotional arc of the series.





# Artistic Approach

By working with a local crew, *The Third Pole* remains true to the spirit of the region and the communities whose stories we are telling. Our cinematography will embrace a cinéma-vérité approach—respectfully embedding within the rhythms of daily life while capturing the breathtaking landscapes of the Third Pole with natural light, long takes, and a contemplative style.

Series DP, Jigme Tenzing is one of Bhutan's most celebrated cinematographers. Jigme is best known for his work on the Academy Award-nominated *Lunana: A Yak in the Classroom* and has collaborated closely with filmmaker and Buddhist monk Khyentse Norbu Rinpoche. Jigme has a proven ability to merge the poetic grandeur of the Himalayas with intimate, human-driven storytelling.

**Jigme Tenzing**  
*Director of Photography*







## ***Production Timeline***

The Third Pole is slated as a four-part series encompassing 42 weeks of production, with a further eight month post production period. We anticipate completion by mid 2027 and, following promotion, publicity and scheduling, broadcast in late 2027.

## ***Distribution & Impact***

The Third Pole series is intended for broadcast on television and streaming services. This would represent the first window of distribution.

Following this broadcast window, the series would move to the educational market, available with full episodes and clips integrated into lesson plans and teaching resources.

Finally, we would move to international distribution, if not already covered in our initial broadcast window.

## ***Budget***

The total production budget for all four 60-minute programs stands at ~\$1,700,000 (~\$425,000/hour). With \$200,000.00 (\$50,000/episode) needed to begin production on all four episodes in this series.



NICHOLAS FILMS AND TIBET HOUSE US PRESENT

# T H E T H I R D P O L E

A CO-PRODUCTION OF


**NICHOLAS**  
**FILMS**



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TIBET HOUSE US  
Cultural Center of H. H. the Dalai Lama

PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY DAN NICHOLAS



An aerial photograph of a mountain range. The mountains are rugged and covered in snow or light-colored rock. A central valley is visible, filled with a lighter, possibly snow-covered or sandy terrain. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds. The overall tone is cool and serene.

# *Episode Synopses*



EPISODE 1:

# WINTER

*“Guardians of the Third Pole”*





# *Varanasi, India*

## *Sacred River At Risk*

At dawn the Ganges is golden. Morning mist clings to its surface as oars slice through the water near the cremation ghats. This is Varanasi—eternal city of India—where millions live, work, and worship in rhythm with the sacred river that has sustained life for millennia.

We meet Ramesh, an aging boatman who has ferried families across the Ganges for nearly fifty years. His wooden skiff carries the living and the dead—pilgrims, mourners, and wandering sadhus—through the shifting sandbars that now appear earlier each winter as the river recedes. In his youth, the river never ran this low. Now, glancing at the burning funeral pyres, he wonders “Where will the souls go if the river runs dry?”

Just a few streets away, in a dim government office thick with the whirl of ceiling fans and rustle of paperwork, Anjali, a determined young municipal engineer, is racing against time. The Ganges is Varanasi’s lifeblood and its drinking water. With water levels growing erratic, Anjali and her team rush to stabilize intake systems before Dev Deepawali—the annual festival of light that draws millions to the riverbanks. As the festival approaches, two stories unfold: one ancient and devotional, one bureaucratic and fragile. At the heart of both stands the river Ganges—sacred and imperiled.





# Varanasi, India

## *Lights of Dev Deepawali*

Interviews with leading climate scientists warn that what happens in the Himalayas impacts billions of people downstream who depend on the glacier-fed rivers of the Third Pole for drinking water, sanitation, and agriculture. If the Third Pole watershed fails, the ripple effects on global supply chains would be immense.

In Varanasi, on the eve of Dev Deepawali, pilgrims line the ghats with thousands of lamps. From a quiet jetty, Ramesh and his family gather to watch the glow on the water. Nearby, Anjali breathes a sigh of relief—she has shepherded the city's water system into the festival season without a major breakdown. But her relief is temporary, as she knows the real crisis lies upstream in the glaciers of the Third Pole.

Later that night, among bustling crowds, passing musicians, and wandering sadhus, families with children gather in a small square to watch a puppet show. The story is ancient: “Once long ago a king prayed for rain, and Lord Shiva answered by releasing the goddess Ganga from the heavens.” Parents smile at the familiar tale, but in recent years a new warning has been added to this ancient story: “If the Goddess retreats to the mountains for good,” the puppets ask the children, “what will happen to all the people who depend on her?”





# Everest, Nepal

## *Mother of the World*

High in the Himalayas, beneath the icy peaks of Everest—known to Tibetans as Chomolungma, Mother Goddess of the World—the Ngozumpa Glacier winds through the Gokyo Valley. This is the beating heart of the Third Pole, home to the largest body of freshwater outside the polar regions, and source of the sacred Ganges.

A hub of cutting edge international climate science for decades. An international team of researchers make their way across the forbidding landscape. Among them is Pema, the team's glaciologist, who was born in a nearby village. From the highest peaks, Pema can see her childhood home—a cluster of stone houses beside the sacred Gokyo Lakes. This is the homeland of the Sherpa people, where towering peaks meet sacred lakes, and the rhythm of life moves at the will of the mountains.

Pema and the team hike between century-old photo points, documenting the glacier's retreat. The images don't lie—year after year, the ice is vanishing, *“Two meters a year,”* she notes, *“at this rate some of our largest rivers might become seasonal, the smaller ones may stop altogether. Where will 2 billion people drink when the water shuts off up here?”*





# Gokyo Lakes, Nepal

## *Science & Sacred Water*

When the expedition breaks for winter, her fellow team-members fly back to their homes while Pema returns to her village to celebrate the Tibetan New Year—Losar. This season of celebration marks the beginning of the Tibetan calendar and a chance to cleanse any negativity from the past year and usher in an auspicious new year.

For Pema, this homecoming offers both a chance to reunite with family, and to share her findings. Pema is a Nawa—a traditional leader in the Sherpa mutual aid network, she helps neighboring villages prepare for climate emergencies. On the eve of Losar, Pema joins her community on the banks of their sacred lake. Directing everyone's view to the high peaks above, she points out which are melting, which might be prone to avalanches, and which are stable for now. As the sun lingers in the sky above Chomolungma, golden light is cast across the water, children toss flour into the air to drive away bad spirits, and monks chant beneath strings of fluttering prayer flags. Any worry about future winters is forgotten in the joyous atmosphere of Losar. Spring is coming.

In commentary that frames this episode and all episodes in this series, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama reminds us that facing suffering—whether personal or planetary—is the first step toward compassion and action.





EPISODE 2:

# SPRING

*“Renewal and Risk”*





# *Jomolhari, Bhutan*

## *If the Goddess Weeps*

Spring is green in the Third Pole. Hills bloom with wild rhododendrons, rivers swell, and ice begins to crack beneath the warming sun. In Bhutan, the season begins with a journey.

We meet Lama Tenzin, a soft-spoken Buddhist monk preparing to leave his winter monastery for his seasonal retreat. Each year, he walks a pilgrimage route toward Jomolhari, one of the highest unclimbed peaks in the Himalayas. Sacred to Bhutanese Buddhists, Jomolhari is believed to be the home of a mountain goddess. No climber dares touch her summit.

As Lama Tenzin hikes deeper into the alpine forest, he passes yak herders moving their animals to greener pastures. They speak of strange sounds in the night—cracking ice, tumbling rocks, water where water should not be. “Is the goddess angry?” they ask. Tenzin offers no answer, only a nod, and continues upward. At last, he reaches his hermitage: a small stone retreat perched above a glacial melt pond. But something is wrong. The water, once a tranquil mirror, has risen noticeably. The mountain, it seems, is weeping.





# *Jomolhari, Bhutan*

## *Living with Change*

Concerned, Lama Tenzin makes the trek to a nearby village equipped with a satellite phone. He contacts local authorities, describing the changes he has observed. Days later, a team of scientists and officials arrive to assess the situation. Under the monk's watchful presence, they develop a plan to mitigate the risk. They will create controlled channels to release excess water gradually. The work is meticulous, requiring time and careful coordination.

To highlight the global importance of Climate Change in the Himalaya, interviews with leading climate scientists describe the Himalayan Third Pole. Researchers stress that losing these glaciers would be like draining the cisterns of Earth's most vital water towers. Throughout the episode, maps and graphics show how experts now monitor more than 200 high-risk lakes in the region, any one of which could unleash catastrophe downstream.

With the immediate threat addressed, the team departs, leaving Lama Tenzin to his retreat. He lights a butter lamp, offers a final prayer, and closes the wooden door. He will spend the season in meditation, knowing that in this new era of climate change, vigilance is its own kind of devotion.





# *Kanchenjunga, Sikkim*

## *Silent Spring*

In the eastern reaches of the Third Pole, where dense forests rise into the clouds beneath the shadow of Kanchenjunga, spring carries a strange silence. Birds are late. Blossoms bloom too soon. The mountain's rhythms, once steady, are shifting. The biodiversity that has endured for millennia is under imminent threat of collapse.

We meet Tashi, a young Lepcha woman, walking alone beneath the canopy. She pauses often—jotting notes in a worn notebook. Her eyes scan for early flowers, her ears for the absences in the forest's song. Tashi is an amateur ecologist, self-taught and dedicated, for Tashi and her community the mountain is alive, a venerable member of the family.

Returning to her village, Tashi greets her great-uncle, Dorje, a respected Bongthing—a traditional Lepcha spiritual leader. Dorje has gathered the village to record an archive: prayers, endangered medicinal plants, animal migrations, and sacred laws. Children gather with pressed flowers, elders speak into hand-held recorders. Tashi, moving between generations, transcribes and translates.

These are not just stories of what was—they are instructions for what may still be—and they are needed now more than ever, as climate change threatens to wash away the life the Lepcha have always known.





# *Kanchenjunga, Sikkim*

## *Life After Landslide*

Tashi's cousins, Pema and Deki, live further downriver. Last year, their village was struck by a massive landslide—triggered by a glacial outburst flood higher in the mountains. Homes and livestock were lost, the temple buried. Some families left and never returned.

Pema and Deki stayed. Now, with spring returning to the valley, they are rebuilding. Guided by Uncle Dorje's memories and informed by satellite images and geological surveys, they choose a new location—one above the flood line. They work slowly by hand, sifting usable stones from the rubble, replanting herbs, and repainting salvaged statues. As the couple work alongside their neighbors, the village begins to breathe again.

Under a bright full moon the community comes together to celebrate Saga Dawa—the festival remembering the life, enlightenment, and passing of the Buddha himself. Surrounded by a changing landscape, and the new homes and temples still under construction, the community reflects on the cyclical nature of existence, gaining solace from the Dharma.

As the season shifts and life rebuilds, wisdom from the Dalai Lama reminds the audience that impermanence and loss are also opportunities to grow, adapt, and begin again.





EPISODE 3:

# SUMMER

*“Abundance and Pressure”*





# *Lumbini, Nepal*

## *Calling Down the Monsoon*

Summer arrives in the southern lowlands of the Third Pole like a hot breath. In Lumbini—the sacred birthplace of the Buddha—the air hangs heavy with dust and anticipation. Everyone is waiting for the monsoon to arrive. The hills of Lumbini are the traditional homelands of the Kham Magar, a people who trace their lineage to ancient, pre-Buddhist Tibet. To the Kham Magar, the Earth is alive—sacred, intelligent, and in need of ceremony to maintain the cosmic balance.

In a quiet courtyard outside the village, Sita, a teenage girl, helps her older sisters prepare for Bhume Puja, the annual ritual that calls the rains down from heaven. Their family has been entrusted with leading the sacred dance—a role passed down through their maternal line for generations. Behind them, fields lie cracked and waiting. Seeds cannot be planted until the rains arrive.

Sita's grandmother, now too frail to dance, watches from a shaded doorway, murmuring prayers and corrections. "The hands must tell the story," she says. "Even the rain must understand." Bhume Puja is both a celebration and a prayer. Honoring the Earth as mother and protector, and aligning the start of planting season with the rhythms of the sky. The young Buddha once attended a similar planting festival—experiencing his first moment of nirvana while sitting beneath a rose-apple tree.





# *Lumbini, Nepal*

## *A Tradition of Dance*

As drums echo across the hills and dancers move barefoot across the dust, the sky begins to shift. Thunder murmurs in the distance. Sita raises her face to the wind. A single drop hits the earth, then another, soon it is a downpour. Onlookers, especially farmers, hug and laugh as the water soaks their clothes. The monsoon has arrived!

The rains have come. The Bhume Puja is complete. Seeds are in the soil. But, in Lumbini, rain is not always a blessing. Across the village fields, rice shoots bend under growing pools of water. The monsoon is unpredictable now—too much, too fast. What once nourished can now destroy.

Interviews with experts explain the threat to this vital food source and its global implications — from extreme monsoon flooding and deadly landslides in Nepal's hills, to soil erosion and crop losses across India's breadbasket, to how climate change is making the rains more unpredictable, jeopardizing food security for hundreds of millions downstream.





# *Lumbini, Nepal*

## *A Bread-basket in Peril*

In interviews, experts explain that South Asia produces a fifth of the world's rice, much of it reliant on predictable monsoon rains. As the monsoon grows more erratic, global food security hangs in the balance.

We meet Arjun, Sita's older cousin and leader of the local farming co-op. A former schoolteacher turned organizer, Arjun has helped his neighbors adapt—blending ancestral knowledge with new tools. In his hand is a satellite-linked phone; around his fields run centuries-old ghuri—earthen irrigation channels that the Kham Magar have maintained for generations.

When dark clouds gather, Arjun sends alerts across the co-op. Farmers rush to open the ghuri, diverting excess water into catchment basins. It's a delicate dance between precision and instinct—guided by both mobile weather data and their own ability to “read the wind.”





# *Lumbini, Nepal*

## *A Co-Op Saves The Day*

On the worst days, Arjun and his team ride motorbikes from village to village, checking flood levels and clearing blockages by hand. “The monsoon doesn’t wait,” he says. “And neither can we.”

Under Arjun’s guidance, the co-op has saved crops, preserved seed stores, and created new planting calendars that adjust to the changing climate. What they’re building is more than food security—it’s a blueprint for survival.

For Arjun this is all part of honoring his Kham Magar heritage. “The Earth has always been our mother,” Arjun tells his family, “And we, her children, must look after her.”

As the sun breaks through and farmers return to their fields, we glimpse Sita in the distance, helping to plant a second round of seedlings. Her feet press into the wet soil her ancestors once danced upon. The rains were called and the monsoon answered.





# *Mustang, Nepal*

## *The River Keeper*

In stark contrast to the flooding in Lumbini, the Upper Mustang valley is bone dry. In the rain shadow of the Himalayas, monsoon clouds are blocked by jagged mountain peaks. In the high desert of the Mustang Valley—12,500 feet above sea level—whitewashed homes cling to terraced slopes. The earth shines red with copper and rust, here water is a scarce and precious resource.

We meet Tenzing, a young man on horseback, riding alone along the edge of a dry riverbed. Dust curls beneath his horses' hooves. Slung across his saddle is a rusted spade and a packet of barley flour for offerings. Tenzing is a Riverkeeper, one of a growing network of volunteers tasked with maintaining the sacred water system of Mustang.

He follows a khul, a narrow irrigation canal cut into the rock. These channels—some centuries old—guide snowmelt from the mountains to the villages below. Without them, the land cracks, crops fail, and life becomes impossible.

In interviews, experts explain how high-altitude irrigation systems like the khuls of Mustang are ancient technologies that may hold answers for water-scarce futures far beyond the Himalayas.





# *Mustang, Nepal*

## *The River Keeper*

As Tenzing rides, he passes chortens at different elevations—small shrines marking the sacred thresholds of the mountain. Each corresponds to a realm of the Buddhist cosmos: the earth spirits below, the protector deities of the middle realm, the sky deities above. Tenzing dismounts at each, offering flour into the wind, whispering mantras. Being a Riverkeeper also means keeping the spirit and material world in balance.

At last, Tenzing reaches one of Mustang's sacred springs, hidden beneath a stone ledge flecked with lichen and prayer flags. The flow of this spring has slowed to a trickle. Tenzing kneels and begins clearing debris—twigs, silt, small stones—his hands moving with reverence. A simple mantra is carved on a rock beside the spring: Om Mani Padme Hum.

Now restored, the flow of water begins its descent—first into the khuls, then to the fields, then into the wells of Tenzing and his neighbors. As Tenzing rides back toward the village, chasing the water as it races down the canal at his side. The valley opens before him—a patchwork of terraced fields, whitewashed homes, and blood-red cliffs glowing in the late sun.





# Mustang, Nepal

## *The River Keeper*

Prayer flags ripple from rooftop to rooftop as the wind carries the sound of distant bells and hoofbeats. In a few days, this remote valley will echo with galloping horses and festival drums. The Yartung Horse Festival is coming—and Tenzing the riverkeeper is also a rider.

In Mustang, summer ends with thunder—not from the sky but from the hooves of horses. The Yartung Horse Festival has arrived, and the village is alive with sound and movement. Riders from across the region stream into town, their horses adorned with tassels, feathers, and bells. Drums echo through the red valley. Children chase one another through clouds of dust. Women lay out bright cloth for picnics on flat rooftops. The festival honors the legendary Wind Horse, a symbol of inner strength and spiritual vitality in Tibetan Buddhism. Here, that spirit takes form in speed, precision, and balance.

We follow Tenzing, no longer in his work-worn Riverkeeper clothes but dressed in ceremonial silks and a hand-stitched sash from his mother. His horse, sleek and restless beneath him, knows what's coming.





# *Mustang, Nepal*

## *A Wind Horse Races*

The races begins with long sprints across the valley floor, trick riding with swords and targets, and trials of agility passed down from warrior ancestors. Elders cheer from stone walls. Monks bless each rider with a flick of incense and a whispered chant.

When Tenzing's turn comes, the village quiets. He lowers his body over the horse's neck, eyes set on the painted marker far ahead. Then—he's off. Hooves pound the earth. Dust spirals. Tenzing feels he has become the Wind Horse itself. Dusk falls and the winners are named, but it hardly matters who takes home the prize. The community has gathered, tradition has been honored, and the summer is ending in joy.

As night settles over the valley, families gather around small bonfires. Children leap through the firelight, their shadows dancing against the red cliffs. Above it all, the stars shine large and bright. The air is clear at 13,000 feet above sea level.

As communities adapt to a changing monsoon, His Holiness reminds us that not all solutions are technical, some are cultural, spiritual, even ancestral. Wise words from the Dalai Lama help us see that, when facing the extremes of drought and flood, compassion and connection provide our best chance to save life on the Third Pole.





EPISODE 4:

# AUTUMN

*“Harvest and Reflection”*





# *Ladakh, India*

## *Farming the Roof of the World*

At 11,500 feet above sea level, sunlight in Ladakh feels surreal—this rocky frozen desert has been called a “moonscape” and, as Autumn arrives, it’s easy to see why. The air is thin and the sun dominates the cold blue sky throwing long shadows across the valley. Rows of golden buckwheat dot the landscape—harvest has come to the roof of the world.

Just outside Leh, Ladakh’s capital city, Dolma—a grandfather in his seventies—tends to his farm with his son and grandson working beside him. Together, three generations work to prepare the chickpeas and buckwheat for reaping. The annual Harvest Festival is days away, and this has been a particularly good crop. Dolma is eager to show it off to his fellow farmers, but first they will follow tradition. In the evening, the family carries the first sheaf to the monastery. The monks place it on the altar beside flickering butter lamps and fresh juniper smoke.

Farming in this high desert has always been an act of faith, but now, the glaciers are retreating faster than ever before, and ancient water sources are becoming unreliable.





# Ladakh, India

## *Making Glaciers*

In the rocky hills above Dolma's village, the monks of Phyang Monastery are responding—not just with prayer, but with engineering. With the help of local engineers and farmers, they are building a towering Ice Stupa—soaring, conical towers of frozen water that act as artificial glaciers, freezing and growing with ice throughout the winter, then melting and releasing that water in spring, just in time for planting. Each stupa can extend the growing season by weeks, providing desperately needed water just as crops begin to sprout.

Expert Interviews explain that, with glaciers retreating worldwide, artificial ice reservoirs like these could become critical tools for farming communities from the Andes to the Alps.

Down below, Dolma and his family work quickly. They know the window to harvest is short. Grain is bundled and stacked. Chickpeas are threshed by hand. The smell of earth and smoke fills the valley. Children and dogs chase each other between the fields, scattering grain and laughing into the wind. With the harvest gathered, the city of Leh begins to transform.





# Ladakh, India

## *The Harvest Festival Arrives*

Colorful banners are strung between buildings. Monks paint new mantras on stones along the roadside. Dancers rehearse beneath fluttering prayer flags. The Ladakh Harvest Festival has begun—a 15-day celebration of food, faith, and everything it takes to survive in this extreme place.

We find Dolma's wife, Karma, dressed in the flowing robes of her finest chuba, with her daughter and granddaughter beside her. They join a long procession weaving through the narrow streets of Leh. Farmers, monks, engineers, and elders—all walking together—carry offerings of grain, water, and butter lamps to the town monastery. Among them are the men and women who built the Ice Stupa, who are to receive special honors at this year's ceremony.

Traditional Cham dancers whirl through the crowd in a rainbow of colored robes, each wearing an elaborately carved and ferociously painted wooden mask. Home brewed spiced tea and barley beer amplify the joy of the revelers. As night falls, Dolma lights a lamp with her granddaughter. They place it by the edge of a stream that flows from the hills above.





# K2, Pakistan

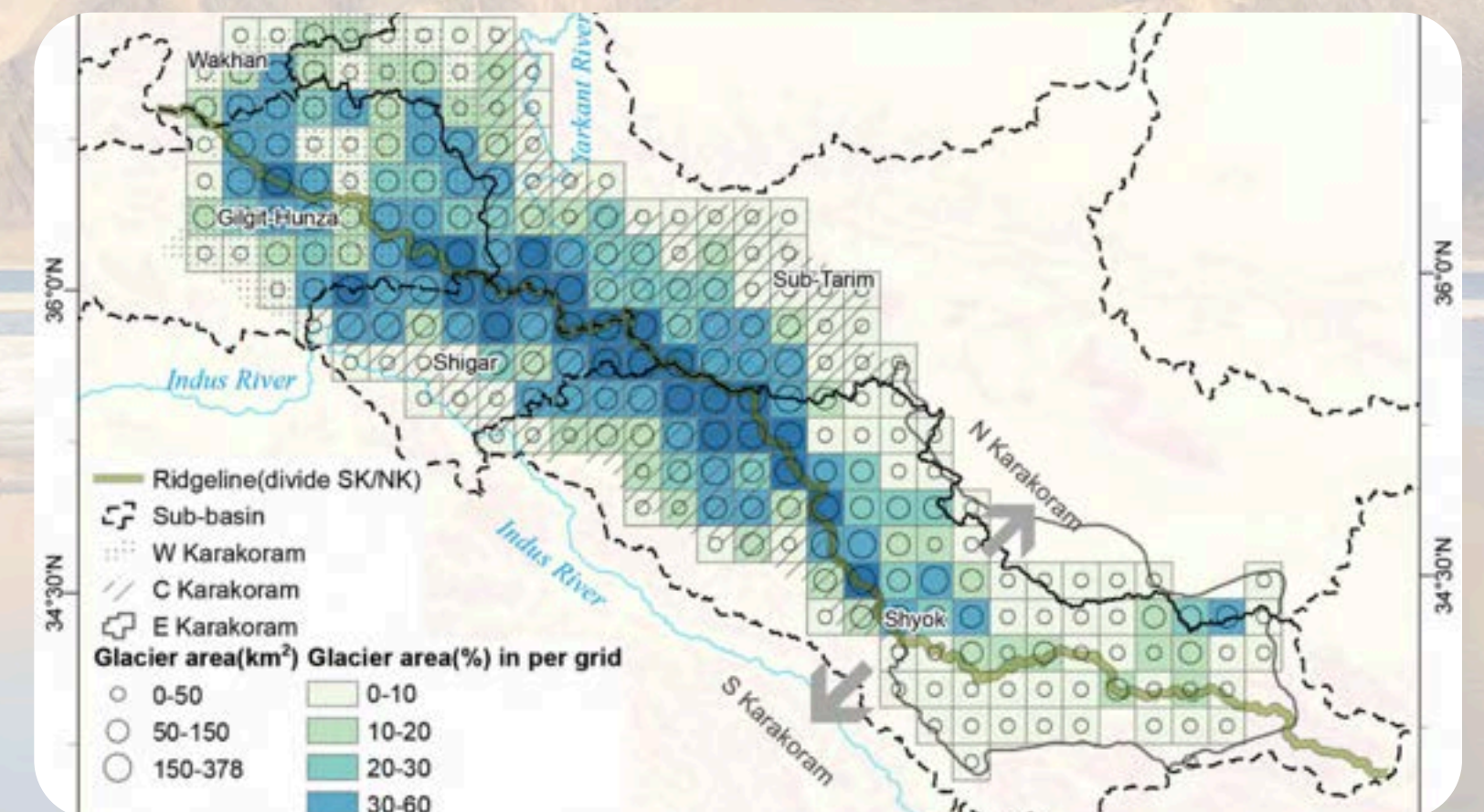
## *How To Harvest an Avalanche*

Across the western edge of the Third Pole, the landscape changes again. The wind sharpens. The valleys narrow. Above the skyline is dominated by the immense peaks of the second-highest mountain on Earth—K2. Here, among the stone villages of Baltistan, the glaciers are doing something strange.

While ice retreats across much of the Himalaya, some glaciers near K2 are advancing—growing larger year after year. Scientists call it the Karakoram Anomaly, and no one fully understands why it is happening.

The Balti people who have lived in these valleys for centuries aren't waiting for answers, they're adapting to this new reality. The people here share common heritage with the Ladakhis to their east, however, while Tibetan Buddhism defines much of the culture of the Third Pole, here Sufi Islam predominates. Proud of their heritage, the Balti community views adapting to the changing environment as an act of cultural preservation.

In expert interviews, glaciologists discuss the Karakoram Anomaly—explaining the profound influence of the Tibetan plateau and the Third Pole on global weather systems. Illuminating local solutions making a global impact.





# K2, Pakistan

## *How To Harvest an Avalanche*

We meet Zahid, a young Balti guide assisting a team of researchers from the University of Islamabad. He leads them along high ridge lines and over deep blue frozen cracks in the ice *“this is where glaciers have shifted in recent seasons”* he tells the researchers, but Zahid also shows them how his people have learned to live with changing ice. *“These walls we build save the village, without them the snow takes everything, with them the snow gives life.”*

Near his village, Zahid leads the team into a steep gorge where local families are finishing work on a new snow barrier—a curved wall made of stacked stone, timber braces, and packed clay. Men pass buckets of earth, teenagers haul tools across the slope. A line of women spreads straw along the base to insulate the structure from early melt. The village Imam blesses the enterprise.

This is avalanche harvesting—a rare technique used only here. The barrier is designed to catch avalanches when they fall, compacting the snow into dense mounds that will melt slowly in the months ahead. That melt feeds irrigation channels, fills underground cisterns, and keeps the fields alive long after the last snow storm has passed.





# *K2, Pakistan*

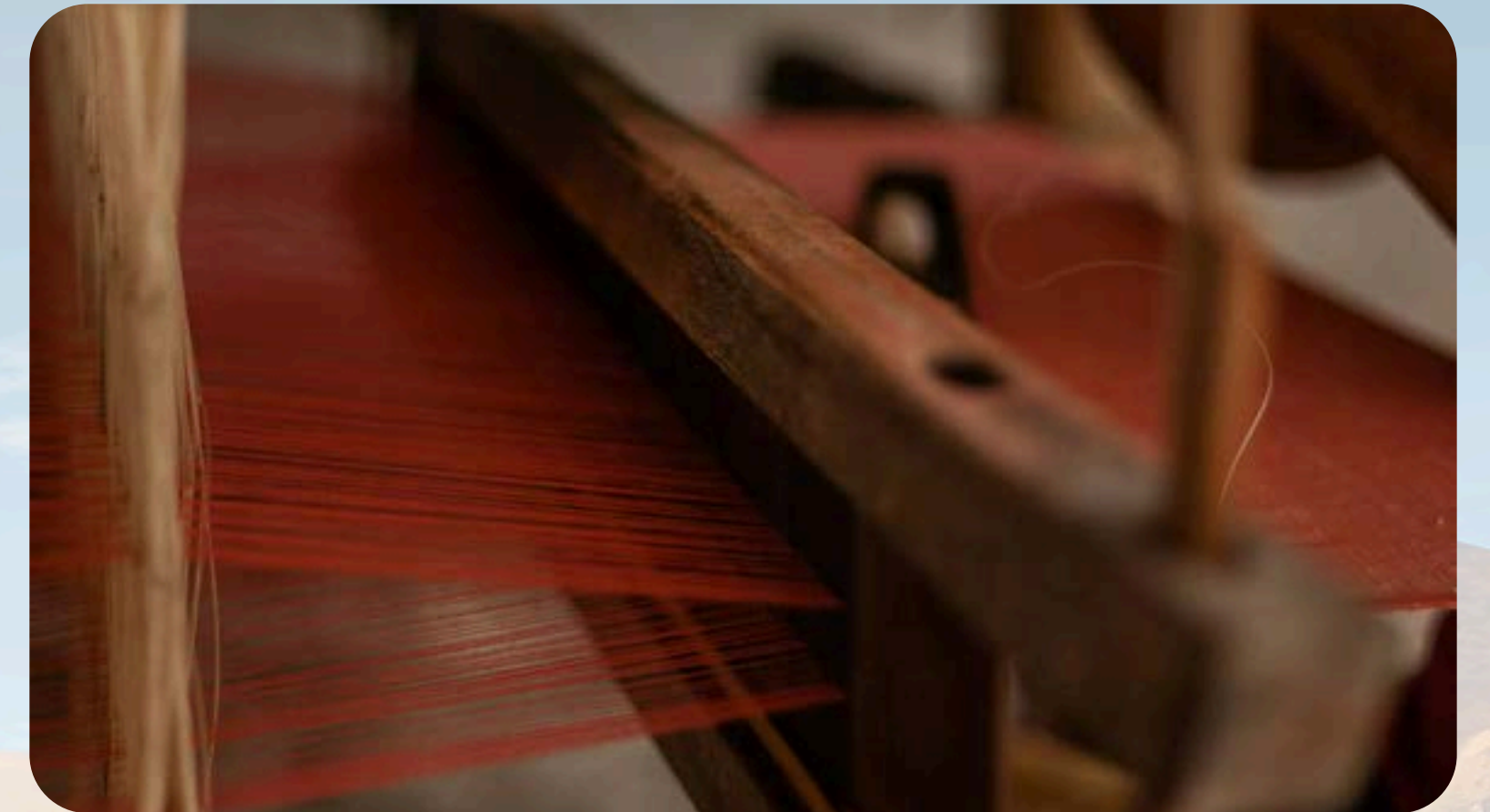
## *Weaving The Third Pole*

Back in the village, Zahid's mother, grandmother, and young niece, are preparing for the harvest festival, weaving a tapestry to mark the end of the difficult growing season.

We follow the women through the market as they gather the plants and minerals used to make dye: walnut husk, rhubarb, indigo, madder root—many are becoming scarce in the changing climate. Each plant provides a chance for the older generation to teach the younger about the importance of preserving their landscape.

The elaborate weaving takes shape on the loom, becoming a tapestry of the surrounding landscape—like the Third Pole itself, a precious treasure that must be honored and protected. Images of the people and places visited across the Third Pole series appear and dissolve into each other .

As the cycle of the seasons completes, the Dalai Lama reminds us that all things arise in relationship with each other, bringing together science and ancient wisdom. To protect this world is to recognise that we are not separate from it. To care for the Earth is not just a necessity—it is a sacred responsibility.



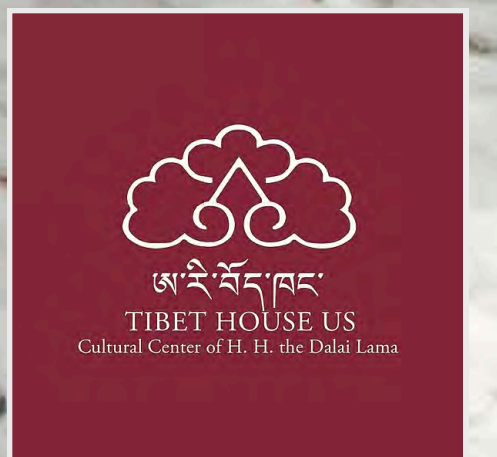


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