



# G.B. Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment

## Special Lecture Series Lecture-8

10<sup>th</sup> May 2024 (Friday)  
2:30 pm (Hybrid mode)



### **Understanding Himalaya through yatras: Experiences of Askot-Arakot abhiyans 1974-2024** Prof. Shekhar Pathak



**Chair**  
Prof. K.S. Rao  
Former Dean, Faculty  
of Technology,  
University of Delhi



**Welcome**  
Prof. Sunil Nautiyal  
Director, NIHE

Prof. Pathak is a historian, editor, publisher, activist, and traveller from Uttarakhand. He is known for his extensive knowledge of the history of colonial and postcolonial social movements and contemporary environmental and social issues in Uttarakhand. He was a professor of History at Kumaun University, Nainital till 2007. He has initiated the Askot-Arakot padayatra from Askot in eastern Uttarakhand to Arakot in western Uttarakhand which commences once every decade since 1974. After the last five yatra in 1974, 1984, 1994, 2004, 2014 the next yatra is scheduled in May 2024. In these yatras, Prof. Pathak along with a group of interested people walks from village to village studying emerging trends in society, culture, economy, and environment across the length of Uttarakhand. He founded the non-profit NGO PAHAR 'People's Association for Himalaya Area Research' in 1983.



**About Speakers**  
Dr. I.D. Bhatt



**Vote of thanks**  
Dr. Arun Jugran



**Moderator**  
Dr. Suresh Rana

**Webex link:** <https://gbpnihehq.my.webex.com/gbpnihehq.my/j.php?MTID=ma1c88fd699fc4985dd0463e49ae54e4c>  
**Meeting ID:** 2641 837 4330  
**Password:** Himalaya@2024

# Understanding Himalaya through yatras: Experiences of Askot-Arakot abhiyans 1974-2024

**Prof. Shekhar Pathak**

PAHAR Foundations, Nainital, Uttarakhand

## **Abstract**

Life of people living in the Himalaya is not easy due to the lack of basic facilities like schools, colleges, electricity, communication and markets. For any government, it is necessary to know whether their programmes and initiatives are reaching to masses or not. To study the lives of people in the mountains and to know them better, four students of newly founded Garhwal and Kumaon Universities inspired by social worker Sunderlal Bahuguna decided to set out along foot journey on May 25, 1974, from the hamlet of Askot (Pithoragarh) falling on the Nepal border and concluding in the village of Arakot (Uttarkashi), which touches Himachal Pradesh. In the 45-day journey of Shekhar Pathak, Shamsheer Singh Bisht, Kunwar Prasun and Pratap Shikhar, who were in their early 20s then, they slept and ate with villagers, walked for eight hours every day and used to discuss and try to understand their daily struggle. Since then, Prof Shekhar Pathak has carried out such foot journey every decade on May 25. During the trek participants are allowed to join or left anytime, and they are not allowed to carry any money. They have to live with locals and talk to them to understand the conditions they are living in. May 25 was intentionally chosen as the beginning date of the expedition as it was the birth anniversary of the patriot Sridev Suman, who protested against the autocratic rule of the Maharaja of Tehri Garhwal and died in jail after a fast of 84 days in 1944.

Prof Pathak is the founder of the PAHAR foundation which is a Non-profit organization working to create awareness among common people, scientists and researchers about the fragile Himalayas and unite them to save the Himalayas. For this purpose, they organize treks in remote areas of Uttarakhand. Other than that they organize seminars, events, and expeditions and publish books and journals. Their journal, PAHAR covers the issue of Uttarakhand related to geography, history, politics, ecology, and culture. The ideals and values of the foundation are rooted in social movements, especially Chipko movement. Some of the major programmes of PAHAR were the Askot-Arakot Abhiyan, Nandi Kund March 1985, Study Trek along Kali, Kuti, Dhauri reverse in 1986, and along the Gori Ganga river in 1987, CHIPKO Indus Expedition and CHIPKO Arunachal Brahmaputra Expedition with D.G.S.M respectively in 1988 and 1992.

The sixth Askot-Arakot abhiyan will commence on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2024 at Askot in Uttarakhand. During the special lecture, Prof Pathak will share his experiences from the past yatras and plans for the 2024 yatra from Askot to Arakot.