

Abstract

This thesis investigates the complex interplay of infrastructure, affect, religion, and state power in Kargil, a strategically vital borderland within Ladakh, India. Focusing on the Shia Muslim community, the study examines how religious practices engage with and transform state-controlled infrastructure, primarily roads, producing affective counter-geographies. Kargil's location along the contested India-Pakistan border has profoundly shaped its infrastructural development and socio-political dynamics of the region. The 1947 partition and subsequent closure of traditional trade routes converted Kargil from a transnationally connected hub into a remote, landlocked territory, rendering it critically dependent on modern infrastructure for connectivity and socio-economic progress. Moreover, the development infrastructures like roads also act as a mechanism of surveillance of the lives of people in this borderland. This imposed remoteness is exacerbated by a pervasive military presence, which restricts civilian access to space and influences infrastructural priorities. This thesis, therefore, reflects on the various forms of affect that infrastructures tend to garner in the lives of the inhabitants of this borderland.

This study contributes to infrastructure studies by foregrounding the role of infrastructure when it comes in conjunction with the realm of religion, or ecology, creating intense affective experiences for people. The state's strategic development of roads to promote pilgrimage sites highlights the uneven distribution of infrastructural resources and their instrumentalization for nationalistic purposes. Furthermore, the thesis examines the affective experiences generated by dilapidated road conditions in civilian areas, contrasting them with the well-maintained military infrastructure. This infrastructural disparity fuels feelings of discrimination, marginalization, and a sense of infrastructural backwardness. The research concludes that in Kargil, infrastructure, particularly roads, is not a neutral instrument of connectivity, but a contested terrain where religion, state

power, and affective experiences converge, profoundly shaping the lives and identities of this borderland community.