

Tandal:

A Feminist Archive of an Infrastructure in the Making

Kesang Thakur and Krishna Tashi Palmo

Infrastructures are concrete expressions of desires and aspirations: of what to be and how to be. In the context of the recently inaugurated Atal Rohtang Tunnel in the tribal trans-Himalayan district of Lahul and Spiti, India, infrastructural aspirations have been visibly gendered. This mega-infrastructure deeply embodies a hierarchical and masculine vision – the top composed by engineering and geological expertise and the bottom by the able-bodied male migrant workers corporeally engaged with the infrastructure's making (Sabhlok 2017).

Rohtang, a mountain pass on the Pir Panjal Range at almost 4000 meters, is a defining feature of Lahul's remoteness. This natural infrastructure that demarcates Lahul has been central in imagining the tunnel as a social and geopolitical necessity. Colonial tropes of backwardness and isolation define the tunnel as the driver of development in this trans-Himalayan region. Existing national, regional and vernacular knowledge on this infrastructure are dominated by masculine understandings of geology, technology and geopolitics.

This is the space we are inhabiting and navigating as Lahuli women. Where do the social and political imaginaries of Lahuli women fit in the grand schemes of progress and geopolitical security? We explore some of these feminine imaginations and interpretations of the tunnel in this illustrated essay.

 To access the illustrated essay please click here.



References:

Sabhlok, Anu. 2017. "Main Bhi to Hindostaan Hoon': Gender and Nation State in India's Border Roads Organisation." *Gender, Place and Culture* 24 (12): 1711–28.

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Krishna Tashi Palmo is an artist from Lahul, India. Trained and certified in traditional Buddhist Thangka art from the Tibetan Children's Village Art School in Kullu, she is equally drawn to contemporary forms and mediums of expression. Her experimental work builds radically on the notions of the feminine, spirituality and the self. She has exhibited her paintings in local, national and international artistic platforms, most recently at the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi and Asia Society Center, Hong Kong.

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