

Concrete development: destruction and distraction in the eastern Himalaya

In the Himalayan border state of Sikkim, Indian tourism is a key development strategy that is built around mountain landscapes, organic agriculture and concrete structures. Religious theme parks, Hindu temple complexes, gigantic statues of Guru Padmasambhava, Lord Buddha and other religious figures are crucial components of this concrete landscape. The success of these statues and religious parks in attracting tourists and pilgrims has led to public demands for more concrete which is now imbued with hopes of transforming villages and towns into popular and economically prosperous tourist destinations. On the other hand, large-scale hydropower projects are being built across the rivers of Sikkim, which also promise economic development for the state and its citizens. Concrete, therefore has become the focal point of the state's development initiatives; the tangible representation of hope and prosperity for citizens whilst at the same time being used for resource extraction by private hydropower companies. Based on ethnographic research in Sikkim, the paper focuses *firstly* on the development narrative and visions of modernity which is based on the construction of concrete structures; *secondly* on the environmental destruction and cultural distractions which, though contradictory, are central to this development narrative; and *thirdly* on how concrete heralds the collusion of the state and private finance leading to the social and spatial transformation of a Himalayan frontier.

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