Gods, Dams and the Enemy Across: Negotiating the Sacred Environment on the Himalayan Borders

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Abstract: The higher reaches of the Himalayan Mountains is a landscape alive with the sacredness ascribed to it in Hindu mythology and indigenous life worlds. The mountains also function as a boundary defining the identity of the Indian nation, symbolized as a goddess (Bharat Mata) and protected by Indian security forces as a sacred entity. At present the Himalayan region is also the site for intensive economic development, like dam building that represent national pride and sacred patriotism. Such polyvocality of the concept sacred is situated in a power field where local, national and global interests interact, overlap, contradict and contest.

Key words: Himalayas, sacred landscapes, indigenous life-worlds, deified nation, borders, army, dams, and development