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Gagné, K. *Caring for Glaciers: Land, Animals, and Humanity in the Himalayas*. University of Washington Press, Seattle. 2019. (pp. 258). Paperback (ISBN 9780295744001). ₹ 3078

Caring for Glaciers: Land, Animals, and Humanity in the Himalayas

The book *Caring for Glaciers: Land, Animals, and Humanity in the Himalayas* highlights the theme through its title—care and affective relationship set in Sham, Ladakh, where glaciers are synonymous with the region. This book argues that the ethics of care for non-humans, glaciers here, are not only driven by religion but also through folk rituals and beliefs plus practical engagement with the environment, such as farming and herding. Hence, the foundation of Sham society aims for a “morally correct life” (xv). The book traces the undergoing transformation of the ethics of care and the interconnections between humans and non-humans owing to the changing geopolitics of the region.

The book presents a constant dialogue alternating between the author’s active time in the field site and her analysis. She lays out her original goal, which was to examine environmental changes such as loss in glacier sizes, water sources, and vegetation, and the communities’ perceptions of these environmental changes over time. However, the frequent recollection of wars—the Sino-Indian War (1961–62) and Indo-Pakistan War (1948, 1965, 1971, and 1999) led to the inevitable inclusion of the impact of wars in her assessments. During these post-independence wars, the process of state-making by the centre and the provinces led to killings, creating collective memories of despair. Political or infrastructural interventions and disruptions during the state-making process act as markers in history, especially in the context of how communities see their continuum of time. The author reiterates the prevalence and visibility of the state-making processes throughout the book via the notion of *khral* or mandatory work and “state-sponsored festivals”, for example, the Golden Jubilee of the Ladakh Scouts (75). Border-making vis-à-vis geopolitical changes brings further trials and tribulations to marginalised geographies such as Ladakh. Gagné suggests that every activity colours one’s perspective of the environment.

The book begins with the framework of the study built on ethics of care, affect, embodiment, the everyday, and the description of Sham. Affect, ethics of care, and morality are illustrated to depict environmental consciousness that emerges out of knowing the science, the experiences, and the interwovenness of nature and culture. Affect is defined as “an intensely felt, interactive bodily experience that is neither presocial nor fully social” which emerges from everyday life (11). This helps in understanding the non-human interactions and feelings that arise from such “embodied experience” (12).

Affect in the case of Ladakh, Sham in particular, takes two forms, between the human and the non-human, and via the production of the state and the making of Ladakh as a border area. The author illustrates these linkages through the experiences of her interlocutors who were ageing farmers and herders.

Chapter 1 provides an insight into the social lives of Ladakhis and the ongoing transformations and their effects on the environment. The remoteness of the highlands manifests as the loneliness of elders and lack of income sources other than tourism. Being present and participating in the community is seen as a way of life but the lack of employment and education forces many to leave. Migration for better opportunities, seasonal migration during the harsh winters, the building of roads, and the breaking up of joint families are believed to have led to disconnections with the community and dissolution of community duties. Kinship relations, especially polyandry, were seen as the unit of cohesion and a system of cooperation. Nowadays, families who are away hire caretakers for their community roles to express their presence, highlighting how monetary compensation for carrying out community roles has begun.

Chapters 2 and 3 present the history via military conquests, wars, production of the state, and creation of sentinel citizens. Chapter 2 presents accounts of the first Indo-Pakistani war of 1948 and the aftermath with a focus on the military, local resistance, and creation of religious rifts. “Everything has become split” (41) is used as an explanation for environmental changes in Ladakh. Split implies the separation of families, division of the people, and undoing of the cooperative nature of households. Dilemma is recorded across generations—the elders felt like a burden and the younger felt guilty for leaving the older ones behind by themselves. In spite of familial differences and the changing agro-pastoralist economy, the Ladakhis still juggle between care for the family land and animals and their off-farm work. Ladakhis have become sentinel citizens owing to the border-making of the region and their mobilisation for military labour in exchange for an assurance of geopolitical stability by the state and the military (Chapter 3). The affective labour and sentinel relationship, as morality and loyalty towards the land, is reinforced through employment in the army.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 examine the veneration of the glacier, everyday lives, and production of intimate glacier. ‘Intimate glacier’ is produced through sociality, beliefs, and the embodied experience of the mountains manifesting as an attachment to and caring for the glaciers. ‘Intimate’ here is

the process as well as the outcome by which one gets to know a glacier by sustained caring, seeing, and knowing, and not simply familiarity. Through Chapter 4, the author examines “the interconnection between spirits, human and environment” via rituals in reverence of the glaciers and everyday practices such as agriculture. Ritualistic practices such as the onset of the farming season (*sa kha phye*), worship of the glacier deity, and *skyin jug* illustrate the interconnections between nature and society. Chapter 5 evokes interspecies kinship and places herders and livestock at the centre to carry out landscape ethnography. Using landscape ethnography as a method pushes beyond the static framing conception of the landscape by providing an understanding of the relationships between humans and non-humans. In Chapter 6, the author sets out to see the Shali Kangri, Sham’s local glacier. Her experience underlines the objective of the book as she writes, “The experience of high mountains amalgamates physical strain, bodily sensation and emotions”. Gagné points out that care is needed to understand the causal relationship between religious doctrine to understand “moral attitudes and ethical disposition”. For the elders not climate change but the younger generation are the cause for changes as they are uninterested and have no knowledge about the local environment. These sentiments echo the despair of the elders in seeing the straining interconnections with the surroundings, especially the glaciers.

Melancholically, the last chapter hints at vanishing glaciers and the vanishing relationships of the locals with them. Morality and mundaneness and aspiration and dilemmas leave the readers with multiple ways in which the environmental change pertaining to glaciers can be understood. Recognising the army’s “ineluctable presence” (89), the author’s work to accommodate and write about it in a book which began with understanding care in the human and natural realm is praiseworthy. This book shows the interrelation of familial bonds, political economy, and biophysical factors and their effects on each other.

The author specifies the lack of examination of an ethical disposition towards the environment and its development among the subjects (Chapter 6). Towards this, the concepts of moral ecological rationality (Cleaver 2000) and meta-capability and ecological capabilities (Holland 2008) in terms of individual and collective actions for environmental well-being can be engaged with. Engagement with the biophysical aspect of environmental change could have helped the reader gauge the changes occurring to the glaciers themselves.

The book focuses on glaciers drawing from interlocutors and placing their narratives within the larger political continuum of the region, reinforcing the need to look at environmental problems as something not existing in silos but couched within the politics, history, and culture of the region. The book provides an insight into anthropological conceptualisation, methods, analysis, and writing on the environment for students and researchers studying environment, conservation, and

sustainability. This is essential as biophysical changes are often seen as taking place in a lab-like situation by environmental science students. Furthermore, perception studies, such as those on climate change, are seen as a check box to make one’s study interdisciplinary. This book provides a framework to create an enriched account of environmental changes, providing space for all interlocutors.

Non-western forms of personifying nature which have been in existence (Lepcha and Lepcha 2021) are reiterated in this book. These highlight how ways of knowing Nature and Culture as separated in the Western forms of knowing are moving towards considering them as one influencing the other (Hulme 2015), making this book essential reading.

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