

# State Highway 31: A Road Trip Through the Heart of Modern India

Dr. Edward Simpson

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This talk will follow the route of State Highway 31 through western Madhya Pradesh, central India. The research is part of a larger project looking at the ideas behind the production of infrastructure in South Asia. This journey takes us through landscapes of sex work and opium, some of the oldest nationalist networks in the country, and along the fault-lines of long-running tensions between local communities. The road was one of a series built as a public private partnership and, as such, speaks of the reconfiguration of state relations with private capital and business.



Toll booths become places of company ethos, for education, and for the creation of new kinds of citizens. The nexus of government and private enterprise takes us on a dizzying journey through the world's tax havens and onto the decks of luxury yachts. Exploring the broader political economy of the road and the organization of institutions and travelers that sustains it encourages questions about the nature of governance and power in the country.



Edward Simpson is Professor of Social Anthropology and Director of the South Asia Institute at SOAS University of London. He is currently interested in the relationship between infrastructure, automobility, and the global-sustainability agenda in South Asia. He is the Principal Investigator on a five-year project funded by the European Research Council looking at infrastructure across South Asia. This work is being undertaken in partnership with the Mumbai-based artists CAMP. His publications include *The Political Biography of an Earthquake: Aftermath and Amnesia in Gujarat, India* and *Muslim Society and the Indian Ocean: The Seafarers of Kachchh*.

Light Lunch will be provided!

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