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"The Politics of India-Myanmar Border Fencing"

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This is to certify that the aforementioned students from Sri Venkateswara College have participated in the summer project SVP-2457 titled **"The Politics of India-Myanmar Border Fencing"**. The participants have carried out the research project work under my guidance and supervision from 15th June 2024 to 30th September 2024. The work carried out is original and carried out in an online mode.

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Abbreviations

AEP:	Act East Policy
AFSPA:	Armed Forces Special Powers Act
AI:	Artificial Intelligence
ASEAN:	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BADP:	Border Area Development Programme
BCIM:	Bangladesh China India Myanmar
BFSR:	Battlefield Surveillance Radar
BRI:	Belt and Road Initiative
CIBMS:	Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System
CM:	Chief Minister
DONER:	Ministry of Development of Northeastern Region
FATA:	Federally Administered Tribal Area
FCA:	Forest Conservation Act
FMR:	Free Movement Regime
GIS:	Geographic Information System
HHTI:	Hand Held Thermal Imager
ICP:	Integrated Check Post
ICWA:	Indian Council for World Affairs
IDSA:	Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses
IDW:	Internally Displaced Women
IPCS:	Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies
IR:	Indian Rupee
KPK:	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
LAC:	Line of Actual Control
LCS:	Land Customs Stations
LGP:	Liberalisation, Privatisation & Globalisation
LORROS:	Long Range Reconnaissance and Observance System
MHA:	Ministry of Home Affairs
ML:	Machine Learning
NADRA:	National Database & Registration Authority

NAP:	National Awami Party
NE:	Northeast
NEC:	Northeastern Council
NER:	Northeastern Region
NGOCC:	NGO Coordination Committee
NIC:	National Identity Cards
NSCN (IM):	National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah)
NVD:	National Vulnerability Database
ORF:	Observer Research Foundation
RCEP:	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
SAU:	South Asian University
TTP:	Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan
UAV:	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UT:	Union Territory
VVP:	Vibrant Villages Programme

CONTENTS

Abstract of the Chapters

Chapter 1 - Rethinking Borders: Conceptualising India-Myanmar Borders: Borders were originally used to delimit the territorial possessions of sovereign states, and hence borders became a central to the nationalist agenda and the development of nation states. However, borders and the idea of borders is not fixed but is rather dynamic and keeps evolving overtime. Demarcation of boundaries is also such that some fences are being destroyed while others are being erected. Territorial, political, juridical, and economic borders of all kinds quite literally define every aspect of social life in the twenty- first century. Despite the celebration of globalization and the increasing necessity of global mobility, there are more types of borders today than ever before in history. There exists an alternative border discourse that focuses on the process of bordering, through which territories and peoples are respectively included or excluded within a hierarchical network of groups, affiliations and identities. boundaries result from international agreements that are established by mutual understandings between states. These create complex, intermeshed networks of government policies and functions that interact to form international boundaries delineating sovereign spaces.

There are various theories that conceptualise borders and look at different aspects stemming from them. These conceptualisations of borders bring us to the question whether it is theories that shape our understanding of borders, or whether it is the people's perspective that shape these theories, or either way they are independent of one another which may then necessitate us to delve deeper into formulation of new concepts depending on the variances observed. Moving beyond the traditional interpretation of events, our faculty lies in imagining borders as not only a product of social and physical construction but also the interplay of intangible aspects such as our conscience. Therefore, in this paper we aim to analyse various theories on borders and discover the themes that can be seen in the ongoing issue of India-Myanmar border fencing, and its various features as highlighted by these very theories.

Chapter 2 - Historical and Contemporary Dynamics of India-Myanmar Border Relations: India-Myanmar border which is of 1643 km is shared by the Northeast states of India, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland and by Myanmar's Chin, Kachin and Sagaing state. Myanmar is regarded as the gateway to Southeast Asia. The proximity has helped the relationship to thrive. Also, it led the minimal and user-friendly contact of two states people to make a friendly understanding. The India-Myanmar borderlands are home to a wide array of racial groups. The tales of insurgencies in the region is long due and it has impacted

badly on development while governance over India-Myanmar border remains a tough challenge for both the states. Border fencing has been an issue that underscores the complexities in the borderlands of Northeast India. Matters of fencing are very serious and under any cost local communities in the borderlands do not accept anything as barriers to their regions. Meanwhile, particularly on extreme ends like some North-eastern states, including Manipur or Nagaland as they do not want any kind of barriers between their ethnic groups living on both sides of the border. Unlike China and Pakistan, Myanmar has never been a threat to the Indian nation state. It is one of the friendly neighbours to India after Bhutan and Nepal. The borderlands along India-Myanmar consisting of the many tribal communities who though divided by borderlines continue to have transborder interactions from either side of the border.

Chapter 3 - Fencing the India-Myanmar Frontier: A case of balancing Interests: This chapter aims to analyse the dynamics of fencing on the India-Myanmar border by exploring the various challenges mapping the border area, India's fencing policy, case studies of various international borders and solutions to strategize the India-Myanmar frontier. The focus is on comprehending the unique characteristics of the border and delve into the border management policy which will entail novel strategies to effectively deal with decades long problems of economic marginalisation, insurgency, smuggling etc. as barriers and equipment have little value without the development of plans, operational doctrine, and exercises that address how the border capabilities are to be employed.

Research will be done in phases, wherein in the initial phase we will go on to explain the concept of security with respect to the Indo-Myanmar border, many degrees of challenges in the region and how the notion has undergone various changes with the advent of globalisation and phenomenon of complex interdependence to include within its purview the concepts of human security, economic security etc. In the subsequent phases, India's fencing policy will be scrutinised with emphasis on mapping northeast and fencing policy with Myanmar in particular. We will also take references from the border management experiences of various international borders to develop a region-specific strategy.

Chapter 4 - The political economy of Border fencing: Interests, actors and outcomes: The India-Myanmar borderland can be viewed as the starting point or the vantage point, a space where interaction between the two communities has occurred (Hasting and Thomas, 1999). Instead of seeing it as a point of demarcation, it must be seen as a sociocultural space where inhabitants on both sides of the borders meet and interact. The border also stands as a site of

negotiation in which negotiation takes place at different levels, such as between the people and the state. investment, and economic cooperation like with the ASEAN countries. Myanmar, as often argued, is the 'gateway of India to Southeast Asia' as India shares both land and maritime borders with Myanmar. The recent decision to roll back the Free Movement Regime (FMR) and to fence the 1,643 kilometres border shared by both the countries echoes various implications especially for the people living along the border consisting of various ethnic tribes from the states of Northeast region of India (NER) including social, cultural, economic and environmental implications.

The chapter delves into a brief description of the tribal community living along the border and their day-to-day experiences amidst the ongoing occurrence at the borderland including how the community views the state and its stakeholders by exploring more as it's believed that people are the Soul of the study of border studies. The India-Myanmar fencing is also cited as a measure to curb various illegal activities occurring along the border including illegal smuggling, poaching and illegal trade activities and presence of various insurgent groups. Through this chapter we try to analyse as cited before, various implications the India-Myanmar border fencing will bring forth, it also tries to understand how the political economies of both the nations will undergo a major change citing the same and the after effects in the coming days, the chapter also explores the role of Women through the lens of Gender when coming to borderland studies with special focus on the India-Myanmar border.

Chapter 5- The Way Forward: Conclusion

The Politics of India-Myanmar Border Fencing

Introduction

The politics surrounding the India-Myanmar border fencing initiative is a complex interplay of security, ethnic ties, and regional dynamics. Announced in early 2024 by India's Home Minister Amit Shah, the decision to construct a fence along the 1,643-kilometer border aims to curb illegal activities such as drug trafficking and arms smuggling, while also addressing concerns about unregulated cross-border movement that has been linked to ethnic violence in India's northeastern states, particularly Manipur.

Statement of the Problem

The decision by the Indian government to construct a fence along the entire 1,643-kilometer border with Myanmar, announced by Home Minister Amit Shah, aims to address significant issues such as illegal immigration, drug trafficking, and cross-border insurgency. However, this initiative raises critical challenges. The border has historically been porous, allowing for familial and cultural ties between communities on both sides. The fencing initiative threatens to disrupt these relationships and could exacerbate tensions.

Key political figures and organizations in northeastern India, including the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM) and various Kuki groups in Manipur, oppose the fencing. They argue that it infringes on their rights and disrupts traditional cross-border interactions that have been integral to their social fabric. This opposition could lead to increased unrest and complicate peace negotiations already underway in the region.

The complex topography of the India-Myanmar border, characterized by dense forests and hills, poses significant logistical hurdles for effective fencing and surveillance. Past attempts at border fencing have faced delays and inefficiencies, raising concerns about the feasibility of completing such an extensive project within a reasonable timeframe.

The cessation of the Free Movement Regime (FMR), which allowed for easier cross-border travel for local populations, could strain diplomatic relations between India and Myanmar. This change may hinder cooperative efforts in trade and cultural exchange that have been beneficial for both nations.

In summary, while the fencing initiative is positioned as a necessary measure for enhancing national security, it simultaneously risks aggravating ethnic tensions, complicating regional dynamics, and challenging the feasibility of implementation amidst logistical constraints.

Objectives

- To evaluate the effectiveness of the India-Myanmar border fencing initiative in enhancing national security by reducing illegal activities such as drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and cross-border insurgency.

- To investigate the implications of the border fencing on local ethnic communities and familial ties, particularly focusing on how the cessation of the Free Movement Regime (FMR) affects social dynamics and regional stability.

- To explore the political reactions from local leaders, insurgent groups, and community organizations regarding the fencing initiative, assessing how these responses influence governance and peace negotiations in the northeastern states of India.

Data and Methodology

The methodology adopted for the study is descriptive and analytical based on data collected from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include documents and reports of: Annual Reports, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, New Delhi; Annual Reports, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi; Publications and Reports, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DONER); Year End Reviews, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi; Publications and Reports of Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, (IDSA), New Delhi; Indian Council for World Affairs, (ICWA), New Delhi, Observer Research Foundation (ORF), New Delhi, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), New Delhi and Speeches, Interviews, Commentaries, Keynote Address, of The Presidents, Prime Ministers, External Affairs Ministers and other Cabinet Ministers, Ambassadors, Foreign Secretaries etc.

The Secondary sources include Books, Articles from Journals, Seminar Papers, Occasional Papers, Working Papers, Discussion Papers, Magazines, Weeklies and Newspapers.

<center>**Borders: Conceptualising India-Myanmar Borders**</center>

<center>- Ayushi Marques and Douminlun Singsit</center>

Introduction: What is the Meaning of a Border?

Border construct 'the space of agency, the mode of participation in which we act as citizens in the multilayered polities to which we belong. Hence borders are not merely lines. They are zones that situate the grey areas where the jurisdiction of one state ends and the other begins. They are the common ground of two or more states that share them and interpret its meanings 'in very different ways to its citizens in their national narratives, history writing and collective spatialized memories' (Banerjee 2010, 138). Not only are there different kinds of borders that individual belonging to different social groups experience in different ways but borders also simultaneously perform ''several functions of demarcation and territorialization-between distinct social exchanges or flows, between distinct rights, and so forth''. Moreover, borders are always overdetermined, meaning that ''no political border is ever the mere boundary between two states'' but is always ''sanctioned, reduplicated and relativized by other geopolitical divisions''. (E Balibar, 2002)

Borders become the site where contest over inclusion and exclusion is played out. They demarcate the inside from the outside, sovereignty from anarchy and the singular from pluralistic space. In the case of South Asia, these borders are also peopled by groups that have linkages to both sides of the borders. Yet in their efforts to emphasise the national identity, state sovereignty demands a severance of those linkages that 'encourages difference' leading to a conscious exclusion of the recalcitrant from privileges. This results in conflicts. Hence, borders of democratic states, as the kind found in South Asia, often emerge as conflict zones (Banerjee 2010, 138).

The contemporary notion of the border as a securitized space strips the border of the multiplicity of meanings that it embodies. Historicizing the borderlands can help contextualize and locate each border region within its own political, economic, social, and cultural specificities. (Kurian 2001, 68). India and its borders, when located in their historical context, help us understand a broader perspective of what these borders signify for the people living in the borderlands. The now highly securitised borders were sites of rich cultural, social and economic exchange. Both during the six-hundred-year reign (1228-1826) of the Ahoms and prior to it, Northeast India had close trade ties with Bhutan, Tibet, and Myanmar (Misra 2005, 49).

Recalling these capillaric flows and their networks usefully alerts us to the limits of sovereign control, especially over frontiers (Kurian 2014) The problem with a state-led subregional imaginary is that the idea could end up being little more than a series of intergovernmental bargains. Such a model continues to implicitly presume that the national level will drive subregional integration processes with little to suggest any devolution of decision-making authority to the subnational level. These constraints also present cross-border governance dilemmas that arise as Susan Clarke (2002, 2) notes, when "interdependent, complex, loosely linked actors and institutions with shared purposes but no shared authority" are required to coordinate their efforts. (Kurian 2021,67).

An erroneous conclusion is to consider borders as mere dividing lines of two states or more. Several scholars, in their analysis of borders have attempted to understand borders beyond their physical demarcations because it is not only the natural geographic elements that shape, transform, and affect the construction of borders. While a quick insight into borders features the dividing space between different entities that can be seen without distortion, the concept of borders transcends the realities, bringing forward issues such as identities, power relations, eco-relations, etc. Reading the works of Georg Simmel's sociology of space, he defined space (border) as conceivable, precipitable, producible, designable, and not a fixed, a priori constant (Ellebrecht 2013). Since borders cannot be understood in terms of space alone, it has become imperative to analyse through a multidisciplinary lens although each subfield claims of multidisciplinary narrowed it to a single case specialization because of the high dispersion of their geographical distribution (Payan 2014). A Companion to Border Studies by Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan contended that borders have become a master narrative and hegemonic symbol in popular, commercial, youth and liberation cultures (Wilson & Donnan 2012). They gave a suggestion that when theorizing borders, the first step is to approach it from an anthropological perspective, emphasizing that nations and states are composed of people. These cultural constructs of daily life provide significance to the divisions between communities and nations, which was frequently overlooked in the viewpoints of other social sciences during that time (Wilson & Donnan 2012). The anthropological study of borders by Wilson and Donnan preceded the interpretations for geographers, historians, sociologists, and political scientists. Scholars who have attempted to theorize on borders have been overwhelmed with several complex perspectives, incomprehensible variables, too many values attached to those variables, and individualizing and unique circumstances that make it problematic to engage in the kind of theorizing that can advance knowledge beyond mostly descriptive work (Newman 2003; Kolossov 2005; Payan 2014). Hence, the problem with

border theory is as much as it is territorial, political, juridical or economic phenomenon, it is equally an aterritorial, apolitical, nonlegal, and noneconomic phenomenon at the same time (Nail 2016). Border is also experienced as a continuity by some and as a discontinuity by others highlighting a process of circulation as the border is always in between and in motion, it is a continually changing process. As "a delimited social field" the border is both constitutive of and constituted by society. Society is first and foremost a product of the borders that define it and the material conditions under which it is dividable. (Nail 2016.)

To understand contemporary situations around borderlands involving the nexus of politics, economics, and ecologies, the assay to study borders from a theoretical perspective rather produces scanty results. One of the limitations is the failure to emphasize on method instead of focusing on the nature of the phenomenon of borders and borderlands as Payan argues. Careful attention to methods will help render sets of variables amenable to theory building. The production of border theories that can explain and predict, however, is far behind the production of empirical knowledge in border studies (Payan 2014, 2).

India-Myanmar border makes it even increasingly challenging due to its relative neglect studies as compared to extensively studied borders like India-Pakistan or India-Bangladesh, or US-Mexico. This area falls under a broader region known as Zomia, that includes groups of people spreading across Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar who remained stateless and evaded the oppressive structures of organized states, such as taxation and conscription for over two millennia. Resistance is deep rooted in these people characterized by their geographical isolation, agricultural practices that promote mobility, and flexible ethnic identities, which collectively enable them to avoid state imposition and maintain autonomy, as described by James C. Scott in his famous book The Art of Not Being Governed (Scott 2009). The qualification and quantification of data continues to be difficult if considered the spheres at which typical research begins. While it has comparatively become simple to study borders as they are - terrains, social relations, trades, overall, the loop of interactions that may define inquiry frameworks, this study then engenders a process of where individuals or groups are categorized as belonging or not, indicating that border constitutes division. While this may not always be overtly discriminatory, the politics of border fencing at a deeper examination reveals the accompanies of trauma and hurt. Although borders are ideologically constructed and celebrated as if their real purpose were simply "exclusion" - functioning as a barrier that "protects" what is inside by shutting out what is outside - they operate in fact in ways that are much more equivocal, as amorphous zones that can be permeated and transgressed, and thus, as sites of encounter and exchange (De Genova 2016, 11). Like in most cases a border is

simplified to a mechanism of division and exclusion, or a site of encounter and connection, but rarely both simultaneously, as their intrinsic ambivalence or equivocality would imply (Agnew 2008). This paper seeks to move beyond a simplistic, theoretical understanding of borders by avoiding the randomness of theories' assertion and methodological confinement particularly in the context of borderlands like the India-Myanmar region.

Border and Liberal Theory

Presumably lies the desire for liberation of borders until that liberality threatens the very existence of a society revealing to what extent the degree of liberalism is acceptable. Borders are not easily explained in liberal theory. At its core, liberalism promotes free trade, market integration, and universal human rights (Simmons, 2021). It is this liberal perspective that widens yet narrows global interactions, the result of which comes in forms such as conflict between human rights and group rights. Borders which were then constricted are now strengthened as it demands the everyday interactions with nature and people to sustain these border areas. After the LPG reforms and developing the Act East Policy, along with the FMR being implemented although by now it has been scrapped, the position of India was in fact a liberal one when it comes to India-Myanmar border relations. While threats persist and national security outweighs the discourse of the masses, the relational balance between cultures, trades, and connections foster under several forms. Liberalising borders as the term suggests is a concept that garners and appeals to civic cerebrations. But how far is this substantial in what can be called areas of resistance (self-determination). In communities that must balance between universal principles and maintaining identities, the latter seems prominent, yet the thoughts of liberalism do leave imprints on how border practices are functioned. Benhabib views the dilemma between universal principles and sovereign self-determination as resting at the heart of democratic theory itself (Behabib 2005, 673). While the liberal order is highly acclaimed, there lies a mediation on how far liberal theory praxis is theorised in terms of its degree. As borders are sensitive zones of the country, the state constantly attempts to assert its sovereignty over the area, and it is logical to solidify its grip witnessing the instability of our neighbours. While we try to understand the paradoxical nature of liberalist border conception, this brings us to analysis of John Ruggie's idea of *embedded liberalism* that domestic social purposes shape and constrain international cooperation and globalization signifying a compromise between liberalism and territorial states to defend state's actions (Ruggie 1982). Other liberals such as Simmons and Kenwick developed a concept of *border orientation*, defined as the extent to which the state is committed to the public, authoritative, and spatial display of control over territorial entry and exit at its national borders. This definition captures

the idea that (often symbolic) physical border structures are responses to challenges to state territorial authority (Brown 2010). Similar work is Andrew Moravscik's analysis of *ideational liberalism* stating a liberal account of politics which explains state preferences as shaped by social identities and values (Moravcsik 1997). These accounts show the pragmatic nature of liberal politics which has been played along by many nation states. To take in the complexities of analysing a liberal stance on India-Myanmar borders, it is pertinent to remind ourselves that this region remains one of the most neglected terrains. Surprisingly it remained unaffected by the climax of partition violence. However, recent phenomena have shown a realist approach and interest on the pretext of national security tightened the surveillance around borders that becomes justifiable considering the ethnic factors tied with illegal migration, drug trafficking, arms trade and so on. It would be misleading on our end to appropriate the mentioned liberalism of state interference by appertaining it to libertarianism because a move towards such a concept is bound to face resistance, and a slight provocation has the potential to ignite a fire which could further deteriorate international relations. Although ideologies at this point seem to be crucial, the practicality of such supersedes the former in shaping the nation's interests.

Conservatism: The Obscured Liberalism

The rise of conservative libertarian thoughts seems to bring a clearer picture of what is practised. As borders are the creation of identities involving the dynamics of exclusion and inclusion, understanding comes with people's perception and stance when the process of othering or alienation is being felt by the constituents of borders. In light conservatism and liberalism combo-divide, the whole notion of who is a liberal and what is liberal rather takes a stance of conservatism as it is confined to the sphere where utmost benefits should be reaped from aligning with and the praxis of such ideologies. The dominance of liberalism also perpetuates homogenisation of groups and thinkings as it appears to be a simplistic way of addressing border challenges, and in due course it leads to formation of certain identities either exclusive or inclusive of others. Actualization of this attitude is supported by conservative libertarians like Ron Paul and Rand Paul who are of the view that freedom needs tradition, and such endorsement of liberty and tradition seems to imply a policy of border restrictions, firmly gripping on the notion that a nation without secure borders is not a nation at all, and it makes no sense to fight terrorists abroad when your own front door is left unlocked (Paul 2007; Camacho 2015, 230). The point here takes a turn as mentioned, actualization on the ground of realities where identities have associated themselves with certain denominators to assess the context and extent of their freedom, and in doing so perpetuates the cycle of exclusionary-

inclusionary process even within themselves and neighbours. This whole idea of conservatism and the practice of liberalism brings us to India Myanmar context whereby there lies a desirability of closed borders in terms of interactions with outsiders who may intrude into the socio-political life of border communities yet arises a staunch advocacy of open borders considering the ethnic ties established for centuries, making it inconclusive. To further understand this, we delve to deduce on the reasons why Enrique Camacho objected to Christopher Wellman's idea restricting his arguments to sovereignty, self-determination, and state's freedom of association as justification for closed borders is purely based on the concept of political community which for now is incompatible with the ideas of liberal democracies (Camacho 2015). While understanding Camacho's objection to conservative libertarians' viewpoint, our faculties with its whole rationality begin to question on the validity of a political community's aspirations, reflecting if closed border perchance the appropriate decision owing to the fact is that borders created due to differences and borders created to make a difference sparks contrasting results and concerns.

Views from Marxism

Marxist concepts are all connected by the common goal to contribute to what they perceive as the greater good of humankind and its environment (Pal 2018, 1). Adrienne Rich said, "theory is the seeing of patterns, showing the forest as well as the trees – theory can be a dew that rises from the earth and collects in the rain cloud and returns to earth over and over. But if it doesn't smell of the earth, it isn't good for the earth." (Rich 1984, 213-214). Marx specifically do not talk about borders, but from scholars aligning with his ideas, what can be derived is that Marxists are critical of fixed borders as it creates forms of dependency and reinforce the capitalist structure of exploiting labourers and looting resources at the borders (McGlinchey, Walters and Scheinp 2023). Class consciousness and unity are preconditions to combat this whole vicious capitalist paradigm, hence the need for global citizenship emerges advocating for freer borders. To them, borders are not inert, fixed or coherent things. Rather, as in Marx's analysis of capital, borders are better seen as socio-political relations. What is at stake in these relations, which are indeed relations of struggle, is the rendering of borders into seemingly fixed and stable thing-like realities with a semblance of objectivity, durability and intrinsic power (De Genova 2016). Marxism centrals on the idea of the oppression of the working class and calling for a revolution to break free from this mode of oppression. Inadequacy arises if we are to replicate Marxism in the environs of India-Myanmar borderlands, we must be well enough to understand the unequal relations of exchanges occurring in this area. Strong in its

roots of practising intrinsic cultural norms, the justification would be questionable to the point that norms could be imposed without considering rationalities. Marxist ideology seems to capture resistances and strongly highlight the oppression people are in, and it could become a tool to salvate from oppressive regimes if comprehended properly. The human social relations could be analysed in terms of proletariat-bourgeoisie relations precisely there exist class conflicts however in subtle forms. The most accurate depiction may be the practise of chieftainship by these border communities where common people give their labour to the chief who would then distribute lands and resources to the commoners, comprising the relations between comprador bourgeoisie or petit bourgeoisie and the proletariat class. Historical identities also play a role in shaping unequal relations where the larger or dominant tribe is seen as superior to that of others although this perception has changed with modern encounterments. As a force to reckon mobilisation and channelising voices of the borders, Marxist studies might become essential. In other words, Marxists must remain informed and reflective of the basic and most common aspects of societies and their environment (Pal 2018, 1) The question now is how to bring in the theory and contextualised here in India-Myanmar border relations. A simple answer to this may lie in a Marxist understanding of IR that it is not just about states' foreign policy or the behaviour of politicians, but more about survival (or more broadly, life), reproduction, technologies and labour (Pal 2018, 2) Marxists also substantially ideated the vision of global citizenship, however it is not without concerns, and as for the Marxists, they failed to consider borders beyond the persistence of class struggles, however, interpretative elements may differ depending on contextual analysis. It is indeed an exceptional deduction by the Marxist to archive the distinctive ways where resistance strides around borders and migrants, opening a perspective on re-examining our stances on borders and community, and capturing the need to solidarize with the victims of erratic construction of borders. Pertaining to the politics of India-Myanmar border fencing, it is imperative to understand the ideological constitution around borders, the fears or perhaps indifference that perpetuates the communities, and how they wishes to be internalised or externalised by borders, this realisation transcends beyond physical demarcations urging the need for dialectics and distancing ourselves from arbitrary attempts to draw conclusions and suggestions in our study of border politics.

Gender, Borders and Agency

Borders are seen as diverse because of their locations and contexts. Individuals crossing these borders are also diverse. Women, men, boys and girls, whether seasoned air travellers, day

traders, migrants, tourists, refugees or those engaged in or victims of criminal or terrorist activity, cross borders for a variety of purposes. Stereotypes and assumptions about the different roles, responsibilities, needs, capacities and agency of women and men have profound implications for border officers and thus for those crossing borders and communities adjacent to borders. Integrating a gender perspective into the work of state institutions responsible for border management can have a significant impact on the ability of border officers to recognize and respond to the different needs and vulnerabilities of women, men, boys and girls. It can also help them to learn from the experiences and insights of members of border communities. This contributes to more effective detection of crime, as well as to these officials' compliance with human rights standards. Failing to consider the gendered needs of those who cross borders may result in poor decision-making, affecting individuals' rights and opportunities, and ultimately national and international security. Likewise, border institutions that discriminate against women and individuals of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity within their ranks fail to comply with national and international human rights standards and undermine their effectiveness in delivering services to their citizenry and the state (Mackay 2008, 2).

Globalization, that had gathered momentum from the 1970s onwards, has made some borders more permeable to accommodate specific interests in the flow of goods, people and money (for example, NAFTA, the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement). Meanwhile, movement across borders that is perceived by states as potentially negative or threatening, particularly from south to north and from developing to developed countries, has led to the strengthening of external borders (Altink & Weedon 2010, 1).

The debate on human rights is central to this current debate on globalization and is played out in questions of borders and gender. We see this through the many similarities in the study of borders and gender. In much of the literature, borders and gender are each defined by the lines of power and authority within a society. Both are a central part of the interaction and separation of people, which leads to the ability to access resources and institutions. These are based in political and cultural institutions, which are enforced by a nation's legal system. Whereby the legal system provides the link to the political and economic systems found in each country. It is a continuous, self-supporting loop that revolves around resources and power. In a global world, we can add in international law or transcontinental law and basic agreements on the fundamental human rights (Collins 2017, 1).

Most of the work on gender and borders thus far has come from the social sciences, especially sociology and anthropology, and has tended to concentrate on migration. Early work consisted mainly of adding women to the picture of migration within an assimilation

framework. By the mid-1990s, however, the focus shifted to showing that the patterns, causes, experiences and effects of migration, as well as the ties that link migrants to their homeland and receiving country, are heavily gendered. Various studies have pointed out, for example, that being a woman hinders your access to regular employment in the receiving country so that female migrants often turn to jobs in the informal sector, such as domestic or care work, or engage in illegal sex work (Altink & Weedon 2010, 3).

However, as Malini Sur in her essay "Bamboo Baskets and Barricades Gendered Landscapes at the India-Bangladesh Border" rightfully points and engages with local and trans-border permissiveness and the unequal power relations between border guards and trans-border travellers while challenging two dominant representations of violence on the border. First, she unsettles the representation of women's bodies at militarised borders as sexualised, dehumanised and exploited. She further points out how academic discourses remain content to frame men as economic migrants and women as unwilling and disempowered migrants who are sexually exploited by unscrupulous traffickers (Sur 2013, 126). While Women at borderlands are subject to a 'frontier culture of violence' occurring at the intersections of 'militarization, race, ethnicity, tribe, exceptionalism, and suspect populations, State-led projects of drawing, enforcing, and protecting borders are loaded with masculine discourses of 'men's work' and heroic civilizing missions (Wilkinson 2023, 24). When we look at mainstream perspectives of gender on the Indo Myanmar border, we see a common concern for human and sex trafficking, where women are again portrayed as lacking agency, someone who are "unwilling and disempowered migrants who are sexually exploited by unscrupulous traffickers" and there is no denying that such forms of violence do exist on the border. Of late, Moreh, a bustling commercial town bordering Myanmar has emerged as an important transit point for human trafficking. Previously, women and minor girls from Manipur were trafficked to other provinces of India as well as Southeast Asia to work in the sex trade. The province was a source of trafficking victims rather than a transit area. However, in 2019 reports surfaced that men and women from Nepal were being sent to Southeast Asia and West Asia via Moreh (Mahadevan 2020, 31). However, another perspective exists as well, broadening the scope of women's transnational mobility and understanding how and why women can negotiate a militarised border region are imperative.

Trade and Women's Participation; Negotiating Agency

The inhabitants of the Indo-Myanmar borderland have always been engaged in border-trade business. It may have to do with the fact that the communities that inhabit both sides of the

border share a similar history, tradition, and culture. To some extent, the people's livelihood on the border depends on the border-trade business as various items are being traded, including legal and illegal commodities. Border-trade is defined as 'overland trade' by way of 'exchange of commodities' from a bilaterally agreed list by people living along both sides of the international border. Most countries in the world have border-trade relations with their neighbouring countries. India also signed an agreement with its neighbouring countries, such as China, Bangladesh,

Pakistan, Myanmar, etc., concerning border trade. An agreement on border-trade between India and Myanmar was signed in January 1994. The cross border-trade business plays a significant role in the lives of the people inhabiting the Indo-Myanmar border. The Indo-Myanmar borderland can be viewed as the starting point or the vantage point, a space where interaction between the two communities has occurred. Instead of seeing it as a point of demarcation, it must be seen as a sociocultural space where inhabitants on both sides of the borders meet and interact. The border is also a site of negotiation in which negotiation takes place at different levels, such as between the people and the state (Lalpekhlui 2022).

Lalpekhlui's study on Women in Lopu Village in Mizoram highlights how women's engagement in the political sphere is almost invisible. Also, women continue to occupy an inferior position in one of the most important institutions, and traditional ideas about gender roles are prevalent. Hence the experiences and perspective of women in borderland reflect their daily struggle and how they negotiate gender roles to survive. It has been observed that it was women who carried out the economic transaction. To some extent, women benefit from border trade; for instance, the border trade business allows women to earn money which enables them to feed the family and give them some security. Since they were carrying out transactions within international borders, women had to negotiate with the state agency at both levels, such as MADC and Assam Rifles at the Indian side of the border and on the other side; they had to deal with Myanmar military, women manage their business and negotiate with officials, such as offering gifts of goods. Regardless of the political challenges, women in the borderland performed, contributed and played a significant role in sustaining border business trade for their families and survival. Women traders in the borderland usually travel in a group. This may have to do with safety concerns for women. Some of the items procured from Myanmar include dried ginger, animals such as pigs, cows, fermented fish etc. The dried ginger business is prevalent among the traders in the borderland. Apart from the business trade, people living in the borderland interacted daily, even to procure their daily needs or for transporting petty goods across the border. Women were also involved in the money transaction business;

however, this was not very prevalent as the other items. The shared history, beliefs, tradition, language and cultures continue to play an essential role in bringing people together from both sides of the borders. This close kinship and relations are highly visible and become more assertive in times of political turmoil as they take care of each other. Based on the present study, it has been observed that border-trade business provides economic mobility for women, such as stepping out of their homes, selling their products, and earning money to support themselves and their families. In a way, women are appreciated by their families for their hard-earned labour and are no longer considered a burden. As pointed out by Kramer 'an individual's link to the economy has a crucial influence on many aspects of the quality of that person's life: political power, material well-being, access to educational opportunities, and even length of life is closely tied to one's position in the stratification system. Lalpekhlui believes that to a certain extent, women's economic contribution is appreciated and seems to help them have limited personal autonomy (Lalpekhlui 2022).

Hence, women who cross the borders are not always someone who lack agency or are victims of sexual exploitation, as Malini Sur points out" The same border patrol that facilitates the mobility of women traders colonises the bodies of men and violently deports others" (Sur 2013, 147).

Therefore a gendered understanding of border is much broader, it challenges the mainstream perspective that women can only be victims of borders, while there is no denying of the exploitation of the female body on these very borders, it is essential to note they are not passive bystanders who lack agency and authority, they in fact are able to negotiate with the state, the border patrol and their defined gender roles in ways men cannot.

Colonial Lines, Post Colonial Times

The locations and meaning of nation-state borders have not only been transformed through gradual historical change. Borders have also been subject to abrupt transformation through conquest, one form of which is the violent imposition of colonial rule. As nation-states emerged with clearly defined borders and centralized repositories of power, many engaged in expansionist projects that violently projected their sovereign power beyond their own borders. These ambitions were justified by the construction of European culture as civilized, and those colonized as barbaric, with Europe engaged in colonization as a civilizing mission. Colonization required the erasure of existing borders, and the imposition of new borders constructed for the benefit of colonial rulers. Through the imposition of colonial borders was

integral both to capitalism-via the establishment of private property – and to colonial conquest, for which it performed a "world configuring function" (Weber 2023, 5).

Colonialism left numerous borders in its wake that subsequently became contested. These colonial borders have often been discussed as artificial, dividing communities, people or ethnicities that otherwise would belong together (Müller 2020, 1). Colonial empires mainly saw the delineation of territoriality as unbridled extensions of their own Westphalian territoriality visa- vis rival empires. As a political act, nation-state borders have thus always functioned as boundaries of differential inclusion and exclusion, often along racialized lines. Colonially imposed borders, institutions and legal systems did not necessarily vanish in the face of post-World War II decolonization. On the global stage, exploitative power relations established via colonial rule also continue to shape relations between nation-states within a neo-colonial world order that mobilizes racism to establish and maintain inequities. Within this world order, the relatively porous borders of formerly colonized countries enable practices of capital extraction to continue, while former colonial powers and wealthy settler states selectively fortify their borders in ways that simultaneously deliver a supply of insecure, illegalized labour, Mbembe dubs this effect "borderization", which is the "process by which world powers permanently [emphasis added] transform certain spaces into impassable places for certain classes of populations", noting that "the brutality of borders is now a fundamental given of our time" (Weber 2023, 5).

However, pre-colonial communities, whose living spaces experienced a depression through colonial territorial demarcations, moved to sustain their status quo ante. These communities deployed many strategies to tolerate or circumvent the presence of imposed borders, drawing heavily on the colonial border's extraversion and weak structure to maintain their livelihoods, communal ties, and social organisation. Colonial spatial delineation and the dynamics of colonial imperial competition destabilised local dynamics through imposing a reshuffling of geographical representation and spatial organisation (Wandji 2019, 292). Borderlands in Asia are often seen as marginal, isolated and remote. National borders in South Asia are distinguished by two features: first, topographic diversity and, second, the arbitrariness by which European colonial powers delineated South-Asian boundaries and imposed their notions of the territorial state. The result of these artificially created boundaries engendered many territorial disputes and left large areas porous for a variety of irregular and illegal cross-border activities. The Manipur-Myanmar border is one such example (Majumdar 2020, 3).

However, the persistence of colonial borders in a post-colonial era, comes to haunt the communities living across the Indo Myanmar Border, who again face the "brutality of borders".

Post Colonial Brutality of the India-Myanmar Border Fencing

Human being has always been territorial since time immemorial. Territoriality is "the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence or control people, phenomena and relationships delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area". "It is a 'spatial strategy' which uses territory and borders to control, classify and communicate-to express and implement relationships of power, whether benign or malign, peaceful or violent". The emergence of kingdoms in the past and the nation-states today is largely the byproduct of this penchant for a safe territory of one's own (Haokip 2023, 5).

Upon achieving independence, India's leaders faced the task of turning fuzzy colonial-era frontiers into clearly demarcated borders that encircled the political and territorial space of the Indian state. India's borders had to be institutionalized - given meaning and made visible – to make clear the state's power to its neighbours, the international community, and its own citizens. But institutionalizing border regions proved far more complicated. Policymakers in Delhi faced a host of issues. Not only did many of India's borders remain contested or lack clear demarcation, but frequently communities in India's frontier regions had more tenuous relations with state power thanks to the British colonial precedent (Leake 2022, 1). The populations of this frontier region, and its historically ambiguous relationship with the subcontinent's centres of power, complicated and problematized attempts to territorialize and clearly circumscribe state sovereignty. Border demarcation frequently took the form of pillars, not walls. Because of the potential for local communities to cross borders, they continued to be perceived by the state as not entirely 'Indian' and as a potential national security threat, thereby justifying top-down intervention and the use of force. The formation of the NEC offered one type of top-down initiative to make local populations 'legible' and incorporate them more fully in state structures, helping institutionalize the border, in turn, as a hard boundary between Indianness and otherness. The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), which legitimized the use of force and is briefly discussed, offered another. The NEC and AFSPA, in other words, formalized intermezzi arrangements, drawing colonial practices into a supposedly postcolonial world (Ibid, 3).

India's northeastern borderlands have been enmeshed with three enduring predicaments-territoriality, conflict and citizenship since the early decades of independence. The demand for and assertion of a territory in the region is often exclusive and ethnic in nature.

Such ethnic-territorial movements started within a decade after independence, and some even before formal independence of India from the British colonial rule. The Nagas of the then Naga Hills district was the first to make such a demand, followed by similar movement in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills and Lushai Hills districts of the then composite Assam state. Such movements culminated in the formation of new states, converting the hill districts into states. The demand for the formation of such ethnic states in Assam often went along with the demand for integrating the adjoining hills in the region into a greater homeland. During such movements border crossings in the India-Bangladesh and the India-Myanmar borderlands were common. Border crossings were not only of the movements of insurgent groups and their support, but also of common people who were forced to flee violence perpetrated by either the Indian forces or the insurgent groups (Haokip 2023, 4).

As a borderland, northeastern India represented a space 'where the state is there but its power is incomplete and fragmented' and where 'The political and geographic limits of sovereignty imply the presence of competing authorities'. Scholars have demonstrated that borderlands frequently are treated differently from state interiors, and violence and policing often occur as manifestations of a state's sovereignty and attachment to a territorially defined governing space. Because it was a border zone, situated at the intersection of Tibet, China, Burma, and India, northeastern India created concerns for colonial (and certainly later post-independence) leaders, who felt the need to affirm the territorial parameters of their rule, as well as their governance over local populations. Imperial and post-imperial border concerns manifested in two ways: attempts to create legible spaces in which officials could exert state power and attempts to make legible local populations in terms comprehensible, and thus governable, to the official mind (Leake 2022, 4).

Under colonial rule, northeastern tribe-non-tribe and hills-plains divides were exacerbated. Nevertheless, as political borders implemented by the British cut across longstanding ethnic and cultural affiliations, these frontiers did not match lived realities. Individuals and communities still moved across these invisible boundaries in pursuit of extant relationships and social and economic practices. As late as the 1960s, Indian state officials grumbled about 'tribals being coaxed across the border by the Chinese for the purposes of trade'. In other words, local populations continued to live across the nexus of what would become the Sino-Indian-Burmese border regions, as well as between East Pakistan and India. These pre-existing relationships thus tied 'northeasterners' to India's neighbours as much as to the Raj, further shaping their relationship with the rest of the subcontinent (Ibid p.5).

The India-Myanmar borderland is a territorial border that demarcates India and Myanmar. It was set during the colonial era, demarcating boundaries with India. The India-Myanmar border runs along with the three states of the Northeastern region, viz., Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland. The India-Myanmar holds an interesting story. It is home to various tribes who had been divided territorially with the advent of the British in the region. It is inhabited by communities that bear the legacy of the colonial demarcation of the area, subsequently followed by the post-colonial state. The inhabitants on either side of the border were knit together by the same history, tradition and culture. There has been a continuous flow of population movement with both legal and illegal goods. The cross-border trade business and the people's everyday interaction in the borderland also acted as a binding source for the population inhabiting the border (Lalpekhlui 2022, 152). Post-Independence, the Government of India realised that areas across the India-Myanmar international border comprise a single socio-economic space for the tribes, and the location of the border amidst it had created hurdles for the tribes, who habitually travel between the two countries to carry on with their traditional way of life and livelihood. This realisation propelled the Indian government to allow the hill tribes to cross the India-Myanmar international border without any travel documents. Accordingly, on 26 September 1950, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) published the Notification no. 4/15/50-F.I amending the Passport (Entry into India) Rules of 1950 whereby the 'hill tribes, who is either a citizen of India or the Union of Burma and who is ordinarily a resident in any area within 40 km (25 miles) on either side of the India-Burma frontier' were exempted from the carrying passport or visa while entering into India. In fact, this decision of India was based on the Burmese decision to allow tribes people of neighbouring countries to enter its territory. The Burma Passport rules of 1948 stipulated that the indigenous nationals (hill tribes) of those countries who share a common land border with Burma are exempted from passports or permits to enter Burma, provided they reside within twenty-five miles from the land border. In addition, the tribespeople were allowed to carry items equivalent to a headload. The Government of India also provisioned that citizens of Myanmar could stay for 72 hours in India, while the Myanmar government allowed only 24 hours stay for Indians in Myanmar. This unique arrangement is called the Free Movement Regime (Das 2024).

However, since the 1970s, India's NER has been grappling with the challenge of drug trafficking, primarily due to its proximity to the Golden Triangle-the geographic area encompassing Northwestern Myanmar, Northern Laos, and Northwestern Thailand which is one of the world's biggest centres of drug trafficking. This geographic proximity, coupled with the unfenced porous Indo-Myanmar border, facilitates a substantial flow of narcotics into India,

thereby significantly impacting the socio-economic of India's NER. Myanmar's ascent as the world's top opium producer in 2023, with illicit crop cultivation expanding from 99,000 to 116,000 acres, intensifies the drug trafficking threat in NER. Official reports revealed that in the fiscal year 2022-23, NER states alone recovered contraband worth over INR 2,000 Cr (around US$267 million). For instance, in 2023, Assam alone reported drug confiscations valuing INR 718 Cr (US$86 million) and the apprehension of over 4,700 drug traffickers. Similarly, the Manipuri police seized contraband worth INR 1,610 Cr (around US$193 million) between July 2022 and July 2023. Experts posit that 90 percent of the smuggled drugs to NER originate from Myanmar. The year 2024 demonstrates a continuation of this concerning trend, as evidenced by drug seizure reports across several NER states. An assessment of different media reports shows that Assam has intercepted narcotics amounting to over INR 454 Cr (around US$54.4 million). The primary substances trafficked include heroin, YABA tablets, Ganja, brown sugar, etc. These illicit narcotics are trafficked through India's NER, with Manipur and Mizoram serving as transit routes for onward distribution to mainland India. Another contributing factor is the influx of Myanmar refugees to India's NER, especially in Mizoram and Manipur. Manipur has witnessed a significant rise in refugee numbers after the 2021 military coup, with the Chief Minister (CM) Biren Singh and the majority community (Meitei) accusing it as one of the main reasons for the ongoing conflict. While Mizoram welcomes these refugees based on shared ethnicity, the long-term sustainability of this acceptance remains uncertain (Yumlembam 2024).

Hence the state with its attempts to construct India-Myanmar border fencing has received severe backlash from borderland communities who continue to face the brutality of colonial boundaries in post-colonial times. The National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak Muivah)-a prominent Naga insurgent group currently under ceasefire with the Indian government. They argued that it would disrupt the longstanding ethnic ties binding the Naga communities on both sides of the border. This position underscores their aspiration for a unified Naga homeland, 'Nagalim'- entailing territories in India and Myanmar.' Several Northeast Tribal Organizations from Manipur, Mizoram, and Nagaland have also strongly opposed the Central government's decision, highlighting their rejection of the colonial border demarcation (Ibid).

Conclusion

While it appears unproblematic to figuring out the hermeneutics of borders in virtue of these theoretical perspectives, realistic way of unearthing the essence remains a challenge. The correctness of theorising border lies on the methodology involved but this remains a ground of

contestations for many scholars. This study to a certain extent stranded to the descriptive conception and way of theorising borders, nonetheless what endures or perhaps exclusive to this paper is the introduction of vertic-horizontalism approach to this study whereby we see borders as an amalgamation of vertical and horizontal reflections through existing concepts and data, generalised to a limited degree, manoeuvred extensively to deduce the complexities in it while researching for specificities. The immediate problem arises with variances of specificities versus a generalised understanding, although in all its capabilities, this paper exerts its best effort to avert schisms that could distort the conceptions of border.

Chapter 2: Historical and Contemporary Dynamics of India-Myanmar Border Relations

- Pranav N Unnithan & Gautam Srivastava

Introduction

India-Myanmar border which is of 1643 km is shared by the Northeast states of India, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland and by Myanmar's Chin, Kachin and Sagaing state. Myanmar is regarded as the gateway to Southeast Asia. The proximity has helped the relationship to thrive. Also, it led to the minimal and user-friendly contact of two states people to make a friendly understanding. The India Myanmar borderlands are home to a wide array of racial groups. The tales of insurgencies in the region are long due and it has impacted badly on development while governance over the India-Myanmar border remains a tough challenge for both the states. Border fencing has been an issue that underscores the complexities in the borderlands of Northeast India. Matters of fencing are very serious and under any cost local communities in the borderlands do not accepts anything as barriers to their regions meanwhile, particularly on extreme ends like some North-eastern states, including Manipur or Nagaland as they do not want any kind of barriers between their ethnic groups living on both sides of the border. Unlike China and Pakistan, Myanmar has never been a threat to the Indian nation state. It is one of the friendly neighbours to India after Bhutan and Nepal. The borderlands along India-Myanmar consisting of the many tribal communities who though divided by borderlines continue to have transborder interactions from either side of the border.

The tale of Burma before its name was quite an interesting one as it was all in flow of the Indian subcontinent but is quite hard to trace the history properly due to lack of sources. It is difficult to see the history of Burma in its true colour and orientation, because material is lacking. (GE Harvey, 1925) The material evidence from the fifth to tenth century is quite rare and open to ambiguity. However, Burmese inscriptions from the eleventh century, which are mostly in Pali, provide a reliable stead of the past. Although some palace records were maintained in the Pagan and Pegu palaces before that time, the country lacked a developed civilization with widespread private or institutional documentation. Figures like Thohanbwa (1527-43) and Alaungpaya (1752- 60), along with rebels who burned down Bayinnaung's capital in 1564, contributed to the destruction of whatever records existed. Dynastic changes further led to the neglect and dispersal of these records. For those that did survive, there were no adequate methods for their preservation in proper record rooms.

Pre-colonial: Ancient and Medieval

The Burmese are of Mongolian race, yet their cultural roots trace back to India rather than China. Their historical accounts suggest a lineage from Buddha's clansmen, with origins in Upper India. Much of their folklore is also heavily influenced by Hindu traditions, which may also be evident by surplus of migration and similarity in naming of towns between the two regions. In Upper Burma, migrants arrived overland through Assam, while in Lower Burma, they came by sea from Madras. In regions such as Thaton, Prome, Pegu, Rangoon, and various towns in Arakan, Indian immigrants likely made up a significant portion of the population. The coexistence of Buddhism alongside Brahmanism was common, and archaeological findings in Burma often reveal Hindu influences with Buddhist ones. Some sculptures even depict Buddha as an incarnation of Vishnu, and the legend of Duttapaung, a Pyu chief, incorporates elements of Siva worship, with references to him having three eyes, and phallic symbols have been discovered in Pegu.

After the fall of Prome, ruled by a dynasty called Vikrama, possibly of Indian or mixed Indian descent, the population migrated to Pagan, where they merged with local tribes and became known as the Burmese. Pagan, originally a cluster of nineteen villages, grew into a town and eventually became the capital of Burma from the eleventh to the thirteenth century. In the 1050s and 1060s, King Anawrahta established the Pagan Empire, uniting the Irrawaddy valley and its surrounding areas under a single political entity. By the late 12th century, his successors had extended their influence further south into the upper Malay Peninsula and eastward to the Salween River. Repeated Mongol invasions (1277–1301) toppled the four-century-old kingdom in 1287. The collapse was followed by 250 years of political fragmentation that lasted well into the 16th century. (Lieberman, 2003).

The Arakanese Kingdom (15th to 18th century), which included Mizoram, Manipur, and portions of Lower Myanmar, had a significant impact on the cultural and political environment of the India-Myanmar border region. The kingdom's ties with neighbouring Indian states resulted in a rich cultural interchange, as seen by common customs and linguistic effects that continue to this day. Although Arakan kings paid tribute to the Pagan dynasty, the South was mostly free of Pagan suzerainty and largely cut off from the rest of Burma. Separated from Pagan by the Arakan Mountains, Arakan developed more independently from other Burmese regions. Arakan had close ties with Bengal, particularly as Bengal expanded eastward. In the early 14th century, Bengal captured Satgaon and Sonargaon. During the reign of King Min Hti of Arakan (1279–1374), Bengal launched a sea invasion, attacking the Hinya River near Chittagong. After the fall of Pagan power and Min Hti's death, Arakan entered a

period of instability with frequent raids by the Burmese and Talaing. In 1404, Narameikhla, Min Hti's great-grandson, assumed the throne. After 24 years in exile, he regained control of Arakan in 1430. Narameikhla ceded some territory to the Sultan of Bengal, acknowledging Bengal's sovereignty. As a result, the kings of Arakan, though Buddhists, adopted Islamic titles and began using Bengal's Islamic gold dinar coins in their kingdom.

The Toungoo Dynasty (16th to 18th century) was an era of Burmese hegemony that extended beyond Myanmar's boundaries into present-day Manipur, Assam, Meghalaya, and even to Vietnam. This era was marked by military conquests and power consolidation. The Toungoo dynasty is divided into two distinct periods: the First Toungoo Empire (1510-1599) and the Restored Toungoo Empire (1599-1752). The First Toungoo Dynasty was established by King Mingyi Nyo. His son, King Tabinshwehti, unified much of Burma, consolidating power and expanding southward. In 1544, Tabinshwehti was crowned as the king of all Burma in the ancient capital of Bagan. Bayinnaung, Tabinshwehti's brother-in-law, succeeded him in 1550 and ruled for 30 years, leading campaigns that expanded the empire, including invasions of

Manipur (1560) and Ayutthaya (1564). Bayinnaung, known for his energetic leadership and military prowess, transformed Toungoo into the most powerful state in Southeast Asia, with its borders extending from Laos to Ayutthaya. However, faced with internal rebellions and renewed Portuguese incursions, the Toungoo rulers retreated from southern Burma and established a second dynasty at Ava, known as the Nyaungyan or Restored Taungoo Dynasty.

Colonial Period: British Rule

British rule had a large impact on the relationships between the different ethnic and national groups. Britain, like many colonial powers, has been accused of using "divide and rule" policies that kept ethnic groups separate so that they would be easier to control and would not unite to get independence. However, British rule also created borders around the region, like in the Indian subcontinent.

During the colonial period, Burma was administered as a province of British India, a decision that had profound implications for the region's political and cultural landscape. The British exiled the Burmese royal family to India, and major administrative posts in Burma were often held by Indians. This policy, coupled with the British "Divide and Rule" strategy, fostered a sense of unease and resentment towards Indians among the Burmese population. The migration of people during this period, both forced and voluntary, further complicated the

socio-cultural dynamics between the two regions. This all started with the advent of British intrusion into the Burmese areas.

The Konbaung dynasty, also known as the Third Burmese Empire, was the last ruling dynasty of Myanmar, governing from 1752 to 1885. It played a significant role in shaping the geopolitics of the India-Myanmar border, expanding Burmese influence into regions such as Manipur, Arakan, and Assam. This expansion led to a blending of Burmese and Indian cultures, facilitated cross-border migration, and promoted the spread of Buddhism. Bodawpaya, the sixth king of the Konbaung dynasty, reigned from 1782 to 1819, a period marked by significant global changes. In Southeast Asia, the Dutch were losing their grip on trade, while in India, England and France were engaged in their final battles for dominance. Amid these shifts, Bodawpaya decided to invade Arakan in 1784, not out of aggression, but to prevent potential British or French intervention in the lawless region. In 1785, he led an invasion of Siam, but due to poor logistical support and his own lack of military experience, his forces suffered defeat. Despite regrouping, Bodawpaya ordered a withdrawal. Subsequent campaigns in 1786 and 1787 also ended in failure. These turbulent times within the Konbaung Empire ultimately created an opportunity for British intervention.

The foxy policies of East India Company worked so well that the king of Assam had wanted to be on the winning side, the king of Manipur wanted to please the British by breaking his ties with the Burmese. Burma was carved up by the British in three Anglo Burmese wars (1824–1826, 1852–1853, and 1885) and for much of the nineteenth century there were two competing Burmas, a shrinking independent state in the north and an expanding colonial entity in the south. The First Anglo-Burmese War (1824– 1826) concluded with a victory for the British East India Company. As a result of the Treaty of Yandabo, Burma was forced to cede the territories it had previously conquered in Assam, Manipur, and Arakan. The arbitrary drawing of borders, without regard for the ethnic and cultural ties that had existed for centuries, led to the creation of a new geopolitical reality. In 1852, a naval confrontation under highly questionable circumstances led to the outbreak of the Second Anglo-Burmese War, which ended with the British annexation of the Pegu province, later known as Lower Burma. In 1885, the British launched a third war, ultimately conquering the remainder of Burma and leading to its complete annexation. (Thant Myint-U, 2008)

Colonial rule in Burma significantly disrupted the traditional reciprocal relationships between the landed gentry and the peasants. In rural Burma, the village was the core unit of administration and social life. While the British utilised existing customs, such as requiring villagers to contribute labour to projects, they enforced these practices much more rigorously

than the Burmese kingdoms had. Those who did not comply faced fines or other punishments. The British-appointed headmen served as intermediaries between the colonial authorities and the Burmese population.

Colonial authority was reinforced by the widespread imposition of foreign institutions and practices that regulated or interfered with rural life more extensively than any indigenous central institution had done before. (Michael Charney, 2009) Tasks such as establishing land titles, paying taxes, and managing other administrative activities now required completing numerous forms, visiting township or district courts, and submitting to regular information gathering by government clerks and investigators. Customary practices were increasingly replaced by legal frameworks. Births and deaths had to be officially registered, and the colonial state conducted censuses in 1872, 1881, and every ten years thereafter until 1931, demanding detailed information on various aspects of people's lives, including their occupation, religion, and household members.

Post Independence Dynamic

Myanmar gained independence from British rule in January 1948, heralding the onset of bilateral ties between two newly sovereign countries dealing with internal problems. India-Myanmar relations are complicated due to several fundamental variables, including significant cultural and historical links before and during the colonial period, as well as geographical proximity, which makes it hard for one nation to live in isolation from the other.

Following their independence, both nations enjoyed a period of cordial relations. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, India's foreign policy was shaped by principles of peace and coexistence. Similarly, Myanmar's Prime Minister U Nu maintained a supportive relationship with India. This mutual understanding and respect culminated in the signing of the Treaty of Friendship in 1951, which laid the foundation for enduring peace and fruitful diplomacy between the two nations. However, this harmonious relationship faced challenges after the military coup in Myanmar in 1962, which significantly altered the dynamics of India-Myanmar relations. The 1962 military coup in Myanmar marked a turning point in the relationship between the two countries. The new military dictatorship, led by General Ne Win, followed an isolationist strategy known as the "Burmese Way to Socialism," which resulted in the nationalisation of companies, stringent economic control, and a major decline in Myanmar's involvement with the outside world, particularly India. This trend damaged previously amicable relations, since India, under Nehru's leadership, was devoted to democratic values and cautious when dealing with authoritarian countries.

Despite the onset of stringent diplomatic ties, cultural and historical connections between the two nations persisted. The shared religious heritage, particularly Buddhism, continued to serve as a bridge between the peoples of India and Myanmar. Additionally, the Indian diaspora in Myanmar, particularly in cities like Yangon and Mandalay, maintained a cultural link between the two countries, even during periods of political tension.

Contemporary Dynamics: An Analysis

Myanmar's political instability significantly affects its borders, especially with neighbouring countries like India and Bangladesh. The military coup in 2021 and the subsequent civil unrest have intensified existing tensions. The political turmoil has led to an increase in armed conflicts between the military and various ethnic armed groups. These clashes often spill over into border areas, risking the lives of civilians and disrupting cross-border movements. Political instability has also disrupted trade and economic activities along Myanmar's borders. Border crossings have been closed intermittently due to security concerns, hampering the flow of goods and services.

Myanmar plays a vital role in India's Act East Policy, serving as a strategic gateway to Southeast Asia. By fostering closer relations with Myanmar, India seeks to bolster trade, investment, and connectivity initiatives that can facilitate access to Southeast Asian markets, countering China's influence in the region (Gupta,2008). The India-Myanmar Free Movement Regime (FMR) 1950, has played a crucial role in facilitating cross border movement and fostering cultural, economic, and social ties between the two nations. The revocation of FMR could lead to delays, increased transaction costs, and decreased trade volumes, adversely affecting businesses and traders on both sides of the border. This affects small-scale traders and informal vendors, who heavily depend on cross-border trade for their livelihoods (Singh, 2024).

Economic Cooperations and Trade Relations

India shares both land and maritime borders with Myanmar and it is the only ASEAN nation to have so, therefore making it a "gateway" to Southeast Asia. India seeks to strengthen its trade, investment and other forms of economic cooperation with ASEAN, through its free trade agreement with ASEAN and the formation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) - between the 10 ASEAN governments and their six FTA partners. There are several trade agreements signed up between India and Myanmar (Taneja, Naing, Joshi, Singh, Bimal, Garg, & Sharma, 2019). For permitting locally produced commodities to be traded as per prevailing customary practices on both sides of the India-Myanmar border, an

agreement on border trade between India and Myanmar was signed on 21st January 1994 and operationalized on 12th April 1995. The Agreement declares that the border trade will take place through Custom Posts at Moreh in Manipur and Zowkhathar in Mizoram, corresponding to Tamu and Rhi in Myanmar (Taneja, Naing, Joshi, Singh, Bimal, Garg, & Sharma, 2019).

It is noted that there is an urgent need to improve the necessary border infrastructure at trading points to facilitate cross-border movement of goods between India and Myanmar. Major infrastructure facilities required include development of land port with modern warehousing facility, food testing facility, IT and telecom support, regular power supply, weighbridge, and development of the connecting roads and bridges (Bank, 2019). India's northeastern borderlands are socio-economically backward and have weak infrastructures. The insurgent movements along the borderlands could pose the challenges and threats to border trade. In recent times, given the importance of the border trade along the ASEAN regional connectivity plan, the Moreh-Tamu border regions should receive more focus and attention from the decision makers and policy planners (Shahriar, 2022).

People's Identity and Ties: Historical Social Relations

Mobility and migration of goods, ideas and people have deconstructed the idea of borders as fixed entities (Saikia & Chaudhary, 2019). Border communities along the India-Myanmar shares historical, ethnic, cultural and religious ties. The Chin and Mizo people, for example, share common historical, cultural and religious backgrounds (Golmei, 2019). These links, cemented by linguistic commonality or affinity, family and tribal ties, traditional trade exchanges, shared lifestyles and conflict and cooperation among rulers, began well before India and Myanmar emerged as nation-states (Bhatia, 2011). These linkages were rejuvenated and opened the doors for cross-border migration of Chin people from the other side of Myanmar borderlands in search of economic security and survival to India. It argues that 'the India-Myanmar border is an artificial line which is superimposed on the socio-cultural landscape of the borderland (Golmei, 2019). During January 25-29, 1892, at the Chin-Lushai Conference, held at Fort Williams to discuss the future administration of the newly acquired hill tracts, Alexander Mackenzie, the Chief Commissioner of Burma argued, "ethnologically they [Chin-Lushai people] may be so [the same], but politically they are a congeries of independent, and even hostile communities" (Pau, 2020).

Owing to 'historic ethnic linkages, people in the border villages particularly in places that share boundaries with Manipur and Mizoram, share cross-border land/property and have common 'socioeconomic interests' across the borders The Chins travelled to Mizoram and

settled in the state in search of livelihood. Apart from increasing discrimination in the job markets, the Chins have been facing serious problems related to public health (Golmei, 2019).

Geopolitics and Diplomacy: A Contemporary Analysis

After the collapse of USSR, India took a more kind of national interest-based approach. One of the first regional initiative of India was towards Southeast Asia, and was called the "Look East" policy. Among all the subregions of Asia and the Indian Ocean littoral, Southeast Asia promised to be the most attractive in terms of the political and diplomatic opportunities (Malik, 1994). Myanmar's strategic location, connecting India and Southeast Asia made it a geo-political vantage point.

Right till the time of the Indian economic reforms in 1991, the Indian Government maintained its support for the pro-democratic opposition. However, the real shift in India-Myanmar relations took place under the advent of the BJP and the "Eastern Strategy" pursued by Indian Foreign Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh. The shift in policy is due to several reasons. They broadly fall into three categories: the Indian northeast, the increased importance of the economic factor in foreign policy decision making and the China factor. (Lall, 2006). However, China built up a solid relationship with Myanmar, thus China being the most important trade partner of Myanmar today, which is a fact reflected in the Myanmar Government's recognition of China as senior paukphaw (cousin) (Chan, 2020).

China's inroads into Myanmar since 1990, especially the build-up of naval facilities in the Bay of Bengal and its possible use by the Chinese military, are, from New Delhi's perspective, serious encroachments into India's sphere of influence. The growing military nexus between China and Myanmar has recently prompted the Indian Government to reassess its policy towards Myanmar. Having high stakes in Myanmar given their long-term geopolitics and geoeconomic South and Southeast Asian plans, both India and China supported Myanmar's action against Rohingya Muslims (Taufiq, 2019)

Chapter 3: Fencing the India-Myanmar Frontier: A case of balancing Interests

- Isha Dhull & Devanshi Shrotriya

Introduction

The fencing of the India-Myanmar frontier represents a complex case study in balancing diverse national interests and regional dynamics. This border, stretching over 1,600 kilometres, has long been characterised by porous boundaries, cross-border ethnic ties, and challenging terrain. India's decision to fence portions of this frontier reflects a multifaceted approach to address security concerns, illegal migration, and transnational crime while simultaneously maintaining diplomatic relations and economic ties with Myanmar.

At the regional level, the fencing of the borders is going to impact the Northeast region in various ways both positive and negative giving rise to the need for effective border management policy that balances multiple interests as barriers and equipment have little value without the development of plans, operational doctrine, and exercises that address how the border capabilities are to be employed. The Free Movement Regime (FMR) is a unique border arrangement that allows certain ethnic communities living along the India-Myanmar border to move freely across the boundary was an attempt to facilitate the traditional movement of tribes and communities, allowing them to maintain their way of life and social connections without being impeded by the international boundary.

Border and Border Management in Northeast India under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is a critical aspect of India's overall national security strategy, given the region's strategic location and complex geopolitical landscape that requires a blend of security measures, infrastructure development, and cross-border cooperation. The Indian government has considered phasing out the FMR in a bid to strengthen border security. This move would involve stricter regulation of cross-border movement, replacing the FMR with a more controlled and monitored system.

Under the Ministry of Home Affairs, various security forces are deployed to secure the borders, while ongoing efforts to enhance border infrastructure and introduce smart technology are aimed at addressing the unique challenges of this strategically important region. The goal is to ensure peace, security, and development in the Northeast, which is crucial for the overall stability and progress of India.

The Many Degrees of Challenges

The myriads of challenges persisting at the India-Myanmar border can be understood from two perspectives- perspective of the people, who will be affected by the fencing and the perspective of the government, which is ultimately working in the direction of national interest and welfare.

'Identity' As A Challenge

In the contemporary era of globalisation when the world order is undergoing several changes and challenges, we encounter the problems of identity, the unique role it plays and the politics around it on the fencing of the India-Myanmar border. The multilayer character of the globalisation process that advocates for a borderless and interconnected world, needs to be scrutinised with respect to the key debates regarding ethnicity, citizenship, identities and past relations that govern the politics of fencing the border. Creation of borders leads to creation of identities that are complex in nature and understanding, creating a distinction between 'them' and 'us' and the principles that should inform this distinction have posed major challenges before political communities always and particularly so in the modern national political communities, eventually restricting the communal relations, exchanges at the border and overall development of the collective region.

Mizo and Chin communities share a history and culture, both coming from the Zo ethnic group, which followed animist traditions before British colonists converted most of the Zo to Christianity. This remains the dominant religion in Chin and Mizoram today, in contrast with Hindu-majority India and Buddhist-majority Myanmar. (Shah Fahad). For these people, travelling from Myanmar to India, especially Mizoram, is part of their daily commute for education, livelihood, health facilities etc. Fencing the border then would not only divide the communities but also what they consider as their 'homelands'- distinct from what is India and what is Myanmar.

The government on the other hand is of the view that this distinction between 'them' and 'us', 'citizens' and 'non-citizens' is imperative to preserve the territorial demography, integrity and sovereignty of the country as if not done then the current residents mostly tribal may witness their rights and property being threatened at the micro level and the same would pose 'security' threats at the macro level.

Geopolitical Challenges

The remote and isolated north-eastern region of India is a classic example of a forgotten frontier. Lying adjacent to Myanmar, it is an insurgency-ridden area with a vibrant smuggling

economy that connects South Asia with Southeast Asia and is also a zone of military and political contestation between New Delhi and Beijing. India's Myanmar fencing policy is significantly influenced by China's role as a geopolitical challenger. India must navigate a complex landscape, balancing its security needs, strategic interests, and regional relationships while countering China's growing influence as the policy decisions in this area have far-reaching implications for regional stability and the broader geopolitical landscape of Asia.

Broadly, India is concerned about China's "String of Pearls" strategy, which aims to establish a network of Chinese military and commercial facilities in the Indian Ocean region and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects in Myanmar that could potentially be used for military purposes, thus becoming a security threat for India. With these geopolitical dynamics in play, New Delhi suspects that Beijing is secretly arming the Arakan Army, a rebel group in Myanmar that, among other activities, is targeting Indian infrastructure projects in the country and can largely be seen as affecting the balance of power in the region. For its part, Delhi has been discreetly providing military equipment to the Myanmar government for several years in a bid to counter Chinese influence and attempt to restore that balance of power in the region.

In recent years, there have been proposals to revitalise the road as a trading corridor between India and China, notwithstanding the dispute over the McMahon Line, which lies on the India-China side of Arunachal Pradesh but not the India-Myanmar side. By trading with India through the Stilwell Road, most of which lies in Myanmar, China can technically preserve its irredentist claims to the bulk of Arunachal Pradesh's territory while simultaneously profiting from enhanced connectivity with India.

Policymakers in New Delhi are however wary of letting China have the best of both worlds. They worry that if Chinese goods were allowed easy access to Arunachal Pradesh, Beijing might begin to stoke up an insurgency through a combination of financial enticement and clandestine arms trafficking. (Mahadevan Prem, 2020, 'crossing the line: geopolitics and criminality at the India Myanmar border', Global initiative against transnational organised crime, pp. 13-14)

Another important geopolitical implication is that of relations with ASEAN and how the same would be affected with the fencing of the India-Myanmar border. India has been pursuing closer ties with Southeast Asian nations through its Act East policy. The border fence could be seen as contradictory to this approach, potentially raising concerns among ASEAN members about India's commitment to regional integration. Given the ongoing political crisis in Myanmar, ASEAN may have mixed reactions. Some members might appreciate India's

efforts to control the flow of refugees, while others may see it as potentially exacerbating Myanmar's isolation. The fence might affect ongoing and planned connectivity projects between India, Myanmar, and other ASEAN countries, such as the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway.

Social Challenges on The India-Myanmar Border

The social challenges along the India-Myanmar border are deeply intertwined with the region's history, geography, and politics. The recent move by the Home Ministry for fencing the entire length of the given border has been met by protests by residents in the northeastern states bordering Myanmar. The Indian government has indeed faced significant challenges in securing effective cooperation from Myanmar in jointly managing the India-Myanmar border to address insurgency issues. Despite several attempts at collaboration, the outcomes have often fallen short of expectations.

Historically, Manipur–Myanmar borderland is a home to many ethnic groups, namely, Chin, Kuki, Mizo, Nagas, and Tsinphos. The exotic nation has fostered an age-old interconnectedness with the Indian Subcontinent. People of Indian Origin in Myanmar constitute about 4% of the total population of the country and possibly it could be more. To basically understand the depth of this, and understand their future trajectory, we need to reflect on the broad picture of their evolution through history.

Fencing could further heighten the regionalist aspirations within these communities, thereby straining their relationship with the Indian state and distancing them from India. The substantial tribal populations along the India-Myanmar border underscore their close connections. Given this demographic reality, border fencing and the abolition of FMR would likely become major concerns for people on both sides, potentially disrupting ethnic ties and people to people relations, an indispensable factor for India's ambition to strengthen ties with Southeast Asian countries through its Act East Policy. As said by Aung Sang Suu Kyi, "Friendship between countries should be based on friendship between people and not friendship between governments. Governments come and go and that is what democracy is all about. But people remain and as long as our people remain bound in understanding and mutual respect, the friendship between our two countries will last far into the future". The crossing of state borders by the borderland communities, workers from Myanmar and even school children on a daily, unrestricted, basis in the Nagaland-Myanmar border or the Manipur-Myanmar border for example is an indication of an integrated borderland and transition zone, as is the act of intermarriage between members of different cultural and religious groups which makes

the cross-border linkages central to historical changes than previously acknowledged. (Majumdar, 2020, p. 61)

These were majorly the challenges faced from the perspective of people. Looking from the lens of the government, the challenges are cross border insurgency, illegal migration including undocumented movement, refugee influx, drug trafficking, human trafficking, smuggling of fake Indian currency notes and challenges to security and social stability. The Indian government must navigate these complex social challenges by implementing policies that address both security concerns and the socio-economic needs of the border population.

Economic Challenges

The Northeast Region (NER) of India, encircled by international borders, acts as the country's gateway to the East. Rich in natural resources, the NER serves as India's powerhouse, with abundant reserves of oil, natural gas, and hydropower. The region's unique agro-climatic conditions also contribute to the cultivation of valuable agro-forest products, making it a key player in the nation's agricultural and resource-based economy.

Again, the economic challenges of the region are influenced by the region's geographical, political, and social complexities. When it comes to the economic challenges in the Northeast Region (NER) of India, there is a clear difference in how the government and the local population perceive and prioritize these issues. While the Indian government views fencing to enhance security, prevent illegal activities, and regulate cross-border movement, for the local population, it introduces several economic difficulties, the primary one being impact on border haats or informal cross trade prevalent in the region. Fencing restricts the movement of goods and people, disrupting this trade and leading to economic hardship for those dependent on it. Other challenges include reduced access to traditional markets, increased transportation costs, impact on traditional practices, such as shifting cultivation, livestock grazing, and artisanal trade, increased dependency on informal trade, severing of long-standing social and economic ties between communities on both sides of the border can lead to economic and social isolation, etc. The economic challenges posed by border fencing are complex and multifaceted. Addressing these challenges requires a careful balancing act between national security interests and the economic well-being of border communities. Moving on from the perspective of the government, fencing of the India-Myanmar border is a strategic initiative for national security; it poses significant economic challenges for the Indian government.

Looking through the lens of the government, the fencing of the India-Myanmar border is a strategic initiative for national security but at the same time it poses significant economic

challenges for the Indian government. These challenges include the high costs of construction and maintenance, the potential disruption of local economies, the need for substantial investment in alternative economic development strategies, affects local economies & reduces revenue from customs duties and trade taxes, balancing the allocation of resources between security needs (fencing) and development priorities (infrastructure, education, healthcare) in the border regions, etc. The economic challenges posed by fencing can lead to discontent among border communities, who may feel economically marginalized or disconnected from the national economy. Balancing security concerns with the economic well-being of border communities is a delicate and complex task that requires careful planning and resource allocation.

Case Studies

India- Bangladesh Border

The India-Bangladesh border presents unique challenges and opportunities for both countries, shaped by historical, geographic, and political factors. Spanning approximately 4,096 kilometres, it is the fifth-longest international border in the world and runs through diverse terrains such as rivers, hills, forests, and heavily populated areas. The nation implies the State with well-demarcated geographical boundaries. In the case of the Indian subcontinent, contiguous socio-cultural factors facilitate the migration of people. (Prakash, 2011, p.33) The case study of India- Bangladesh border fencing can provide valuable insights into the challenges and implications of such projects. Both borders have unique contexts but share similarities in terms of security concerns, socio-economic impacts, and management challenges. The porous nature of the border has made it a hotspot for smuggling activities, including human trafficking, arms, narcotics, and cattle, illegal immigration, militancy and insurgency, etc. The Government of India decided to fence the entire India–Bangladesh border due to its serious complexity and to prevent the illegal immigration from Bangladesh, to hinder the cross-border illegal and antisocial activities. (Datta, 2018, p.42)

The border fencing was initiated in 1986, in a phased manner. The single wire border fencing which was created in the first phase has been replaced by the composite type of barbed wire border fencing a few years ago. As of 2023, a significant portion of the border is fenced, though some areas remain difficult to secure due to geographical challenges like rivers and marshlands. There are stipulated times fixed for the movement of the people. Their ingress into the Indian mainland is limited to these four hours in a day, and all entry and exit are recorded in a register. Their livelihood, social activities like marriages or recreation, and even health issues are decided by the opening and closing of the gates.

After the installation of the border fencing, there has been a noticeable reduction in criminal activities across the border. However, this development has had several adverse effects on the local villagers. The border fencing has limited the citizenship rights of the people, living outside the border fencing and restricting the availability of welfare services. In total, the social, political, economic, civic, life of these people has been ruptured. Even the necessities are denied to them.

As a result of the fencing on the India Bangladesh border, the strong bonding and sense of collective among the community. People are no more prevailing as stronger as before it was. Even the fenced-out community is getting deprived of the social status and recognition because they are living outside the border of fencing, hence the border fencing is not only diminishing the old sense of belongingness, but also the emotional attachments that existed among the people. The barbed wires have divided their homes, social lives, natural resources and means of livelihood, excluding them and forcing them into miserable subsistence. (Prakash, 2011, p.34)

The case study of India- Bangladesh border fencing reveals that residing on the edge of the country, beyond the border fencing, often means living under the watchful eye of the neighbouring country's border guards and facing the risks posed by various anti-national elements. The key lessons from this case study highlight the need for the government to take appropriate measures to protect the interests of citizens trapped between the zero line and the border fencing on Indian territory. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of ensuring that welfare initiatives are implemented fairly and without discrimination.

Government can ensure proper source of drinking water, housing facilities, availability of electricity, basic health facilities and at least the elementary educational facilities at the border area especially in the left out geographical location, then most of the problems could be resolved (Datta, 2018, p.57)

Us-Mexico Border

A case study of the US-Mexico border, particularly focusing on environmental impacts, reveals several key insights regarding ecological damage and border management. The US-Mexico border presents a multifaceted case study encompassing a wide range of issues, including immigration, security, trade, environmental conservation, and humanitarian concerns. This border, stretching nearly 2,000 miles from California to Texas, is one of the most heavily traversed and regulated in the world.

CPNWR is Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge WR provides an excellent example of the environmental outcomes of shifting U.S. federal policies and management practices for rural areas along the US-Mexico border (Lybecker, 2008. p. 335). This border spans diverse ecosystems, including deserts, rivers, and mountain ranges, which house a variety of species. Areas like the Sonoran Desert, Rio Grande Valley, and the Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge are especially vulnerable.

The impact of huge trafficking is clear as abandoned vehicles and tons and tonnes of trash, degrade the landscape. The ecological damage in the refuge is primarily a result of unauthorised border crossings into the United States. Many familial and community connections span the border. Migrants crossing through protected areas often create new footpaths, leave behind trash, and cause damage to vegetation. Border Patrol activities, including the construction of surveillance towers, roads, and regular patrols, have their own ecological footprint. The increased presence of vehicles, as well as lighting and noise pollution from enforcement operations, can disturb sensitive wildlife species and alter animal behaviour.

Result of this more impermeable border is that fewer unauthorised plants are created, fewer native plants are destroyed by cleaning or burning, and fewer invasive species are introduced. The construction of border barriers aimed at limiting crossings also causes significant environmental damage. One major consequence is the disruption of wildlife migration and natural habitats. Construction of border walls and roads has damaged habitats and disrupted wildlife migration, especially in ecologically sensitive areas like national parks and wildlife refuges. Species like the jaguar and ocelot, which roam across both countries, are threatened by barriers that fragment their habitats.

For example, high-voltage lighting along the border poses problems for bats; and roads created to maintain the barrier present additional obstructions for wildlife (Minard 2006). Various conservation groups, environmentalists, and governments on both sides of the border have been trying to mitigate the damage. These efforts include setting up wildlife corridors that allow animals to bypass barriers, promoting conservation initiatives, and advocating for more environmentally friendly border enforcement methods. Migrators are typically individuals seeking economic opportunities or asylum from violence in Mexico and Central America. In recent years, there has been a surge in asylum seekers from countries like Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, driven by crime, poverty, and political instability.

Many people in the US acknowledge that the measures taken to prevent illegal migration in the country has not been successful as illegal crossers are still entering the US territory. A more comprehensive approach may require addressing deeper underlying factors,

such as economic disparities between the U.S. and Mexico, along with the demand for inexpensive labour in the U.S. However, these issues are complex and intertwined with broader economic, political, and social dynamics.

An analysis of the functions of the US-Mexico border highlights two key issues. First, the strategy of creating an increasingly impermeable border has proven ineffective. Despite the expansion of physical barriers to deter illegal crossings, the result has been environmental degradation in border areas. These barriers disrupt ecosystems, affect wildlife migration, and damage natural landscapes, adding to the ecological strain on the region. Second, creating a border that fluctuates between permeability and impermeability doesn't fully address the underlying challenges. Rather than solving the issue of unauthorised crossings, these barriers merely shift the problem to other areas along the border. This relocation fails to tackle the root causes of migration and contributes to a never-ending cycle of enforcement and displacement without offering long-term solutions.

A more effective solution relies on finding ways for the border to function as a gate or filter - providing protection through restricting the flow of people or goods that have not met specified criteria for entry, while still allowing for passage of desirable entities, including people that meet given criteria, and wildlife. (Lybecker, 2008, p. 347). Proposals have been made for the development of a virtual fence composed of lower impact technology, such as sensors, satellite imagery, and cameras. While virtual fences aim to enhance surveillance and reduce illegal crossings without the environmental impacts of physical barriers, questions remain about their long-term effectiveness over such a large area. One of the major challenges is that technology is expensive, and it must function in the desert environment of the US Mexico border.

From the case of the US Mexico border, we can say that while isolation through strict border policies can offer a certain level of security, the broader consequences, such as reduced cultural exchange and continued environmental harm, often overshadow these benefits. As U.S. officials consider future policies and strategies for managing the U.S.-Mexico border, it is crucial to explore approaches that prioritise more than just security.

Pakistan-Afghanistan Border

Historically, the issue of legality, territorial claim and management of the Pak-Afghan border has been one of the bilateral irritants between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Since Pakistan's independence, except for Nadir Shah and King Zahir Shah, both had begun to acknowledge the legality of the Durand Line as well as the present-day Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and

Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) as parts of Pakistan's territory. However, successive Afghan governments including the Taliban have refused to accept the legality of the Pak-Afghan border. Afghanistan has raised territorial claims over Pakistan's territory i.e., present day KPK and has also challenged the legality of the Durand Line on the basis that these "contested areas" belonged to Afghanistan in the 18th century, through an agreement signed in 1893, between the Foreign Secretary of the British Indian government, Sir Mortimer Durand and the then ruler of Afghanistan, king Abdur Rehman Khan which demarcated the 2640 km border between British India and Afghanistan.

Subsequently, Pakistan being a legal successor state was entitled to enjoy full sovereignty over this area and has all the rights and obligations towards the people of this area. However, Afghanistan continues to contest these areas and acknowledges that the Durand Line terminates Afghan sovereignty over the territory or influence over the people living east of it. While Afghanistan's claims on Pakistan's territory did not gain any support, successive Afghan governments began to raise the issue of 'Pakhtunistan' - demanding a separate land for the ethnic Pashtun group living along the Pak-Afghan border. The Pashtuns live on both sides of the Pak-Afghan border and often hail from the same tribe, they are not as closely united as often expressed or perceived by Pasthun nationalists or proponents of Pashtunistan. After the creation of Pakistan, Pasthun organisations that promote independence like the Khudai Khidmatgar Movement were banned in 1948. Successor parties like the National Awami Party (NAP) formed in 1957, and headed by Abdul Wali Khan, remained "on the borderline between autonomy and independence" and eventually suffered because of a power struggle and lack of support for Pashtun independence,while this is not to deny that certain segments within the Pasthuns did demand national independence, the majority of them preferred to stay within the context of the Pakistani state even if there was an ongoing struggle between the centre and the provinces over the question of autonomy. Hence, the movements in Pakistan that promoted independence wanted among Pasthuns in Pakistan, however it is only a matter of time before the debate and demand for a united homeland for the 'pashtuns' is raised by the afghans once again.

The porous Pak-Afghan border witnesses an unprecedented and unmonitored movement of around 50,000 to 60,000 people daily, with more than 90 per cent of the flow originating from Afghanistan into Pakistan. Therefore, Pakistan has started taking strict measures on its side of the border and has initiated phased fencing of its border with Afghanistan in KPK (1,230km) and Balochistan (1,381km). So far high infiltration prone areas of Khyber Agency, Bajaur and Mohmand are being fenced in the first phase. Whereas in the

second phase, fencing of the remaining border areas, including Balochistan, would be completed. Besides fencing, the Pakistan Army and the Frontier Corps KPK are constructing new forts and border posts to improve surveillance and 'defensibility'.

Apart from fencing, Pakistan no longer allows people without a valid passport and visa to enter the country through key crossing points pivotal after the success it has achieved because of Operation Zarb-e-Azb, launched in 2014, against the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in North Waziristan which is in its final stage currently been fought in the Khyber agency. Hence, Pakistan has made several attempts to explore options for workable and practical options for border management through formal negotiations; however, successive Afghan governments have been less forthcoming.

Similarly, in another effort to monitor the border and influx of militants, the Pakistani authorities installed a biometric system at the Chaman border crossing 'Bab-e-Dosti' (The Friendship Gate) in Balochistan, in January 2007. Although the biometric system was installed on an experimental basis, its purpose was to replace the previous permit system by issuing border passes based on computerised National Identity Cards (NIC) issued by the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA). In June 2013, to curb illegal movement as well as undocumented trade, which according to officials surpasses US$2.5 billion annually, costing millions of dollars a month in lost customs duties. Pakistan began the construction of a 100-kilometre-long trench in Balochistan on the Chaman- Kandahar border.

Pakistan has been calling for effective border management and has begun to implement measures on its side of the border to prevent militants crossing into Pakistan from Afghanistan and vice versa. The Afghan side continues to accuse Pakistan of "pushing a major series of global terrorist networks into Afghanistan." Hence with no compliance from the Afghan side, Pakistan, since its creation in 1947 and for the first time in its bilateral ties with Afghanistan, has begun to implement border rules which include the construction of numerous infrastructures as well as valid travel documents for both Afghans and Pakistanis moving across the border, with the exception of residents of Landikotal who would continue to travel to Afghanistan under easement rights as their 'rahdari' (permit) would remain valid for crossing the Pak-Afghan border. As a result, the terrorist safe havens in FATA have largely been eliminated and violence in Pakistan has significantly reduced.

Despite several recent interactions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Afghan government has not responded positively to Pakistan's border management proposals and the same has further reinforced Pakistan's call for border modernisation.

Israel-Palestine Border

The separation fence in Israel is a prominent example of such a demarcation. It is not an international symbol like the Berlin Wall was. However, it is important within the Middle East conflict, which regularly sends global shock waves. From the Israeli point of view, the separation fence is a response to the violence that erupted during the Second Intifada. Viewed in isolation from the international context, border issues in Israel and Palestine offer the possibility of examining the meaning of borders for society and society's influence on the geography of the state.

In the Middle East, the perception of boundaries plays a central role in conflicts of nation building, territory, and resources. In Israel and Palestine, for both sides the concept of the border "is a vague, elusive and problematic term, after they have lived more than one hundred years without clear boundaries, but lived with constant, mutual attacks" (Grossmann 2003). The drawing of political borders generally fails because of the fact that internationally accepted borders may serve to separate something from something else but they only work if the people they separate recognize them as legitimate (Wokart 1995).

The conflict in the Middle East shows that a national border can encourage mutual recognition of national sovereignty. Since the peace agreement with Egypt in 1979 and with Jordan in 1994, the boundaries between Israel and these two Arab neighbours have been set. The borders with Lebanon, Syria, and the Palestinians have yet to be settled, however. The absence of immovable national boundaries is the driving force behind today's political and social discussions in Israel. The fence in Israel is ostensibly intended to fulfil only security functions for the citizens of Israel, for the former UN ambassador and negotiator in the peace process with the Palestinians, Dore Gold, the fence is purely a military barrier (Gold,2003). Since its founding, the concept of border is of central importance for Israel and its boundaries have been subject to constant changes since 1948. The unilateral construction of the separation fence could be seen as defining a new horizon for relations between Israeli and Palestinian societies. It is doubtful that the eastern border, in the form of an impenetrable wall will ever guarantee security for the state of Israel and therefore a basic question arises- "will the fence function as a border between both societies at all?"

One example of the problems associated with the wall as a means of improving security lies in the fact that Israeli settlements were established beyond the Six Day War armistice line of 1949. Their position clearly complicates the regulation of a state border along the West Bank. Many settlements are located beyond the bounded territory. The presence of settlers, whose properties expressly belong to the state of Israel, precludes any possible claim that the

wall is intended to mark a political border. Eva Horn argues that settlers are not on this or that side of the border. (Falke Simon, 2013, pp. 255-266)

Rather, their political significance derives from the fact that they themselves represent the border (Horn 2004). The settlements therefore mark a different argumentative level in the Israeli-Palestinian border conflict. Characteristically, Eyal Weizman has employed the term "elastic borders" (Weizman 2009). For this reason, a political significance can hardly be ascribed to the separation fence. According to Georg Simmel, a political border should symbolise the consciousness that power and right do not extend to the other side (Simmel 1983). So far, however, settlements in the occupied territories have prevented the creation of a politically binding, mutually recognized border between Israeli and Palestinian society. "At no stage has the state of Israel defined its own borders – optimal, official, secured – or acted to constitute these borders and win international recognition for them" (Zertal 2005). In the Middle East, national borders are judged necessary to produce identity, peace, and security (Rabinowitz 2001). The lack of such borders, argues Tom Segev (2007), means that the citizens of Israel live in uncertainty and tentativeness, which hinders their search for their own identity.

India's Fencing Policy

India's fencing policy, particularly along its borders with Myanmar, can be understood through the lens of realpolitik strategy of Kautilya - a political philosophy based on practical rather than moral or ideological considerations that gives impetus to the notion of 'INDIA FIRST' and strategies benefitting the 'security' parameters of India. The fencing policy in the contemporary globalised world however should reflect changing world order and geopolitical interests making it necessary to map and foresee the importance of the northeast in near future and scrutinise the fencing policy with Myanmar in particular.

Mapping Northeast on India's Fencing Policy

The Northeast (NE) is strategically, politically and economically, the most sensitive region of India connected with the rest of the country through a 22 km corridor called the 'chicken's neck' which connects this region to mainland India. The region during colonial times was home to an 'extraordinary mix of different races, cultures, languages, and religions, leading to a diversity in Northeast rarely seen elsewhere in India' (Bhaumik, 2009, p.1) The region has the potential to transform India into a continental power within Asia and solve decade long problems of insurgency, economic marginalisation etc., provided its geographical location and inherent diversity is used strategically.

India's north-east shares most of its border and ethnic ties with Myanmar making it a focal point in the fencing policy decisions of India with Myanmar. The necessity to map

northeast in India's fencing policy arises from the instances of conflicts with neighbours in the past giving an impetus to existing problems and the notion of 'illegal/forced integration with India', illegal migration, insurgency etc.

Economically, in the contemporary era of globalisation and increased interdependence between nation states, the relevance and importance of the Northeastern region is non-negotiable, with the Western expansion of the Association of Southeast Nations (ASEAN) and inclusion of Myanmar into ASEAN as a member, it has become the gateway to ASEAN countries for India and Northeast, the gateway to Myanmar. Moreover, its geographical location places it at a strategic advantage providing ease to 'Act East', both in words and action and will help to cultivate a much closer relationship with its eastern neighbours is full of possibilities to make India's neighbourhood policy more accommodative and sensitive towards the needs of Northeast India.

There may be occasions when the overall national interest of a state may fail to address the needs and concerns of a specific border region within it because of the peculiar history, level of economic development and geo-strategic location of that region. (Patgiri and Hazarika, 2016, p. 236). In the recent past, instead of taking a proactive role, India remained a mute spectator to the emerging Sino-Myanmar economic and political collaborations. India's disengagement in Myanmar and its failure to evolve any counterstrategy not only harmed India's business interests in Myanmar, but also escalated the internal insecurity of Northeast and blocked its prospects for development (Das, 2012, p. 12).

India's Fencing Policy with Myanmar

The India-Myanmar border is a great example in establishing that cross-border linkages are far more central to historical change than previously acknowledged. India and Myanmar share a long land and maritime border in the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal. The whole topography of the border varies from low mountains to high ridges. To address the concerns of the borderland community and promote greater interaction among them, the Free Movement Regime was introduced by the Indian Government, which allowed communities to intermingle and has helped them continue to maintain their age-old ties and engage in barter trade with head loads. (Majumdar, 2020, p.64). But as the years have passed by, the Manipur-Myanmar borderland has become a haven for drug smuggling, insurgency, ethnic strife, human and animal trafficking. The once neglected zone has transformed into a zone of vulnerability as several transnational challenges were on the forefront.

The provision in the FMR that allows tribal people to carry head load has facilitated smuggling of arms and narcotics from across the border as these head loads are largely

exempted from standard custom procedures and hence are seldom checked. (Majumdar, 2020, p.65). In a recent development, the Indian Home Minister Amit Shah has unveiled the government's decision to fence the entire length of the India-Myanmar border to stop the free movement of people. This decision aims to curtail the unhindered movement of people across the 1,643 km border. India plans to spend nearly $3.7 billion to fence its 1,610-km (1,000-mile). The decision to construct fencing all along the border between Manipur and Myanmar was primarily for security reasons because strict patrolling is almost impossible owing to the hostile and harsh terrain. (Majumdar, 2020, p. 65). According to sources, the committee of senior Indian officials has also agreed to build parallel roads along the fence and 1,700 km (1,050 miles) of feeder roads connecting military bases to the border.

So, fencing can be seen as an attempt to solidify certain border areas as de facto demarcation lines, offering a straightforward solution to the complex issues of cross-border security, drug trafficking, and more. The construction of barbed wire fencing along the border near Moreh town in Manipur was specifically aimed at addressing problems such as insurgency, irregular immigration, human trafficking, and the smuggling of drugs, goods, arms, and counterfeit Indian currency (Das, 2010). Manipur had already suspended the FMR in 2020 but Mizoram and NSCM of Nagaland opposed the fencing move of the Home Ministry. As our national policy prioritises national security and sovereignty above all, there is no doubt that if these non-state actors and/or extra-constitutional super empowered individuals or organisations are allowed to continue their activities, they will become lethal and unmanageable at some point in time. (Majumdar, 2020, p.65)

Strategizing the Frontier: Striking the Right Balance
Infrastructural Development

Accessibility, in terms of physical infrastructure, is a key concern for the bordering villages. The regions are exposed to a variety of security threats and dealing with the same requires a robust infrastructure in terms of all-weather roads, facilities to facilitate the habitation of the region etc, the same is necessary to deal with the 'China factor' from a security perspective and to promote rural development. The volatile regions are also deprived of digital accessibility, accessibility to justice and accessibility to basic social welfare. The same can be ensured provided 'accessibility' and connectivity of the region is emphasised upon. Border regions and villages are the most vulnerable regions to climate change, security threats etc. Therefore, there is a need to build 'resilient infrastructure' that is sustainable to the needs of the region.

Many initiatives have been taken by the government to build the infrastructure and connect the region with the mainland and they are-

1. Border Area Development Programme-

   The Ministry of Home Affairs has devised a special scheme for the spatially remote places with sparse populations on the border areas called the 'Border Area Development Programme'. It was initiated in the border areas of the western region during the Seventh Five Year Plan period for ensuring balanced development of border areas through development of infrastructure and promotion of a sense of security among the border population.

2. Vibrant Village programme-

   The Vibrant Villages Programme (VVP) is an initiative launched by the Indian government in February 2023 to develop and enhance infrastructure in villages located along the country's northern border. This program specifically targets villages in border areas of Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, and Ladakh. It is a comprehensive approach to infrastructure development in border areas, aiming to address the unique challenges faced by these remote communities while also serving broader national interests.

3. Operation Sadbhavana-

   Operation SADBHAVANA', Indian Army is undertaking multiple welfare activities such as running Army Goodwill Schools, Infrastructure Development Projects and Education Tours etc. for the children living in remote areas of Union Territory (UT) of Ladakh. To improve the standard of education and to provide them with quality education, Indian Army is presently running seven (07) Army Goodwill Schools (AGS) under 'Operation SADBHAVANA' in Ladakh Region. In addition, a total of Rs 8.82 crore of 'Operation SADBHAVANA' funds have been allotted for the Union Territory of Ladakh during the current financial year 2022-23. The funds are being utilised for various activities like Human Resource/Skill Development, Sports, Healthcare, National Integration, Infrastructure Development, Ecology, Environment and Education. Women in remote areas of Ladakh are being empowered through various training programmes organised and funded through 'Operation SADBHAVANA' in Vocational Training Centres, Women Empowerment Centres and Computer Centres at various locations in Ladakh.

Establishing Unity of Effort

Unity of effort will be essential to any border management system. An overarching national strategy for identifying Key organisations, their roles, and their responsibilities and authorities can be useful for de-conflicting activities for border management. Given the need to balance competing national needs-securing borders and facilitating commerce a broad cross-section of the government, the economy, and the populace should be involved in creating a border management system. Organisations from the national to the community level will also play important roles in border management activities. Gaining support from communities will be essential: They represent the "front lines" and must live with the border management system that is established.

A comprehensive border management system also requires a framework that facilitates the movement of information. Such a system should be accepted by each of the participating organisations and would instil a formal commitment to intelligence-sharing. To succeed, this type of endeavour must have buy-in from the most-senior levels of the government ministries involved in the nation's security, and it must be directed from the top (e.g., from the office of the president of the country). Exercises from the national to the local level ensure that border management capabilities are adequately organised, trained, and equipped to address the myriad threats likely to be encountered. They also ensure that border management organisations' authorities and responsibilities are aligned toward a common purpose, understood, and coordinated throughout the stakeholder community. Often, developing unity of effort requires putting aside differences among government entities to work for the common good.

Integration of Science

Integrating science and technology in the management of the India-Myanmar border is crucial for improving security, monitoring, and cross-border cooperation. Integrating the use of technology at the governance of border areas will further enhance the integrity and security of the region. The major challenge that will emerge here is geographical challenge pertaining to rugged terrain, dense forests. Other challenges that will include the resentment from the locals. Areas of integration include satellite imaging, Drones and UAVs for real time surveillance, for night-time surveillance, thermal imaging technologies can detect human presence in dense forests and hilly regions where visibility is low. As for fencing, use of Smart Fencing like Modern border management systems incorporates sensors, motion detectors, and CCTV cameras, which are linked to central command centres to detect any unauthorised movement, use of laser-based intrusion detection systems can help monitor gaps in fencing and detect

intrusions in real-time. Thermal imagery indicates the body heat signatures of any living being that moves towards the boundary in the dark of the night at 3 km, while NVD, long-range radars, battlefield surveillance radars, etc. catch the slightest of vibrations. Also, use of GIS helps map the entire border area accurately, providing detailed terrain information. For regulating movement across the border, biometric verification can be effectively used. At designated border crossings, integrating biometric systems (fingerprints, iris scans) ensures that individuals crossing the border can be accurately identified, reducing illegal crossings. Facial recognition systems can also be integrated. We can even collaborate with Myanmar, on solutions like Cross-Border Intelligence Sharing and Joint Monitoring Systems like establishing joint border management systems, leveraging technology to monitor and control movement, would ensure stronger bilateral cooperation. Moreover, the use of science can help in the overall rural development of the region in the following ways-

1) Use of science can help in the better implementation of government schemes like for example

Eg- SVAMITVA (land mapping using drones) can be implemented using alternate techniques like that of satellite imagery.

2) Satellite Communication- A mechanism of spreading awareness in regions with negligible educational opportunities

Eg- Setting of up of satellite Televisions can play an important role in the development of the region. In subsequent years, as cross-border threats increased and the BSF embarked on a modernisation process, the organisation acquired more sophisticated devices, such as Hand Held Thermal Imagery (HHTI), Long Range Reconnaissance Observation System (LORROS), Battlefield Surveillance Radars (BFSR), etc. for remote surveillance of the international borders.

The Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System is presented as a more robust and integrated system, which would address the gaps in the present system of border security by seamlessly integrating human resources, weapons, and surveillance equipment. The CIBMS essentially constitutes three components. The first component is surveillance devices, such as sensors, detectors, cameras, ground-based radar systems, micro-aerostats, lasers, etc., which captures images of movement of persons. The second component is an efficient and dedicated communications network consisting of fibre optic cables and satellite communication to transmit the data gathered by these diverse high-tech surveillance and

detection devices. The third component is the command-and-control centre where senior commanders are updated about the happenings with the images. In subsequent stages, a gate management system along the fences is also proposed to be incorporated within the CIMBS.

Region Specific Solutions

Region-specific solutions for border management refer to tailored strategies that address the unique challenges and characteristics of each specific region along a border. In the context of the India-Myanmar border, region-specific solutions would involve adapting border management strategies to address the distinct needs of each of the four Indian states that share the border with Myanmar-Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram. For example, in Arunachal Pradesh we can use solutions like Aerial Surveillance with Drones. Given the difficult terrain, drones equipped with high-resolution cameras and thermal imaging should be deployed to monitor remote and inaccessible areas. Moreover, emphasising on cross border cooperation by enhancing local-level intelligence sharing between Indian and Myanmar authorities to combat cross-border smuggling and insurgent activities. Similarly in Nagaland, to deal with insurgency, arms and drug smuggling, we can promote community driven intelligence gathering by engaging local naga communities on both sides to report unusual movements. In areas with persistent insurgent activity, laser-based intrusion detection systems can be installed to monitor unauthorised movements through forested areas. Establishing joint patrol mechanisms with Myanmar border forces, particularly in areas with significant insurgent activities.

The state of Manipur can effectively use Smart Fencing which basically is installing smart fencing with motion sensors and cameras in open, more accessible stretches of the border to prevent illegal crossings. Along with this, Riverine Monitoring Systems can be deployed for areas where rivers form natural borders, smart buoys with motion and vibration sensors can detect unauthorised crossings via water routes. Again, establishing a joint task force with Myanmar to counter drug trafficking, utilising modern drug detection technologies and monitoring cross-border routes.

In the case of Mizoram, Border forces can productively utilise Biometric verification systems. Since legal cross-border trade and movement are common, integrating biometric verification systems at designated crossing points (like Zokhawthar) can ensure better monitoring and accountability. Besides, using sensors and cameras to monitor wildlife movement and illegal poaching, given the sensitive biodiversity in this region. Same as Nagaland, leveraging local ethnic communities for intelligence gathering can be effective. In

dense forest areas, deploying sensors on trees to detect movement, combined with rapid response units stationed at strategic locations.

Other measures will include measures like promoting the unique culture of every bordering state village can provide an impetus to the local economy. It will enhance connectivity with the mainland. Additionally, making border villages as 'First Line of Defence" can be impactful. Recently, the defence minister has described border villages as the country's first line of defence in dealing with multiple challenges posed by India's geo-strategic location. But how will Border Villages act as First Line of Defence? Answer is simple yet complicated- through Intelligence gathering- Residents serve as Eyes and Ears for border forces due to familiarity with local terrains, crossing points, patterns of movement. More measures like tackling workforce shortages are included in this. E.g. Residents of Chushul village (Ladakh) in 2020 helped the Army in securing supplies during the standoff with Chinese troops. Lastly and importantly, developed border areas discrediting adversary claims: E.g. people and infrastructure on the ground confirms the true situation and counters any misleading claims. Initiatives already been taken for this include - Vibrant Villages Programme aimed at overall development of border villages, reversing outmigration, and preserving local culture, Border Area Development Programme (BADP) to meet special developmental needs of people near international border, Improving connectivity: Through projects like Atal Tunnel, Sela Tunnel, and Shikun-La Tunnel and enhance digital connectivity: E.g. Government-funded 4G Airtel service in Lumpo, Arunachal Pradesh.

The challenges to these include infrastructure bottlenecks (due to hilly and difficult terrains). E.g. Northeast. Other challenges include scattered population and low population density, persistent law and order problems due to illegal cross-border movements, insurgency, smuggling etc, Trust deficit due to feeling of being deprived of the developmental facilities and low Socio-economic profile and lastly development of border villages by adversary countries. E.g. China's new border village policy along Line of Actual Control (LAC).

Region-specific solutions in border management consider the unique terrain, security threats, social dynamics, and infrastructural needs of each area. For the India-Myanmar border, the solutions vary based on the geographical and political landscape of the respective states, ensuring that the strategies are effective, sustainable, and aligned with local conditions. Each state along the India-Myanmar border requires a tailored approach to border management that considers the region's geography, socio-political dynamics, and security challenges. By leveraging science and technology, and integrating local communities, India can achieve more effective and sustainable border management along the Myanmar frontier.

Chapter 4 - The political economy of Border fencing: Interests, actors and outcomes

- Navya V Nair & V.L Chihanring Hungyo

History of the Tribal community and the land

The major tribes along the India-Myanmar border include the Naga tribes (Manipur and Nagaland), Kuki-Chin-Mizo tribes (Manipur and Mizoram), Singphos (Kachins or Jingphos in Myanmar) of Arunachal Pradesh. The exact timeline of when these tribal communities settled in the India-Myanmar border region is not well-documented due to the ancient and migratory nature of these populations. However, we can infer from historical and anthropological studies that these tribal groups have inhabited the region for several centuries, likely even millennia.

The Greek geographer of the second century A.D., Claudius Ptolemy, locating what the Hindus spoke of as Nangalôg or naked people (Nagas) in approximately the area which they still occupy, writes of them in about A.D. I50. in his book Geographia. (Yonou, 1974), The Singpho tribe in Arunachal (also known as Kachin or Jingpo) distributed and scattered in three different countries namely India, Myanmar and China are said to have migrated from around 700-800 BC (Machey, 2018). Ptolemy also identifies the Kuki-Chin-Mizo tribes with Tiladai who are associated with Tilabharas, and places them 'to the north of Maiandros, that is about the Garo Hills and Silhet (Haokip, 2007). S.K. Chatterjee also noted that from 2000 B.C. onwards, Sino-Tibetan spreads from China pushed south and west, and entered India.

It was only during the British colonial period in the 19th and early 20th centuries, that the India-Myanmar border was more clearly defined, (Munmun, 2020) but the tribal communities continued to live in their traditional territories, often straddling both sides of the border without significant disruption. After the independence of India (1947) and Myanmar (1948), the formalisation of the border in 1967 did not initially disrupt the traditional movement and settlement patterns of these tribes due to policies like the Free Movement Regime. Initially, tribals along the border within 40 kilometres could move freely across borders for informal trades until the Border Trade Agreement on 21st October 1994 led to the signing of the three Land Customs Stations (LCS) on the Indian side – Moreh in Manipur; Zokhawthar (Champai) in Mizoram, and Nampong in Arunachal Pradesh and was enforced in the following year (Oinam, 2022).

However, following the socio-economic complexities of the tribal regions, the Indian and Myanmar government in 2012 undertook an MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) to open border haats in Pangsau Pass, Arunachal Pradesh and subsequently Somra, Manipur and

some other potential haats were opened on pilot basis until they were shut down during th 2020 Pandemic.

Socio-cultural implications of India Myanmar Border Fencing

The communities living along the India-Myanmar border in Northeast India are of Indo-Mongoloid racial stock and speak languages from the Tibeto-Burman Group (Sharma, 2011). Ethnic communities such as the Mizos, Chins, Kukis, and Nagas, along with their sub-tribes, straddle both sides of the border and even within the border thus the border acts more as a zone of contact rather than a line of separation (Bufon, 1993). Thus, the border's complex topography and shared ethnic ties on either side complicate the border fencing initiative. This includes major socio-cultural implications too on both sides of the border affecting thousands of people, both Indian and Myanmar citizens.

As a landlocked and underdeveloped region with primarily agrarian economy, there is a possibility of potential disputes for essential resources such as land between the local village communities. This was hinted by Martin Kamodang, an interviewee whose village, Ramphoi in Manipur is some 3 kilometres away from the India-Myanmar border. The fencing could also further heighten the growing separatist aspirations within these communities, thereby straining their relationship with the Indian state. An interview with a local, Mathanmi, from Ningchou village, Manipur of the Tangkhul Naga tribe which is within the 16-kilometre radius spoke about cultural exchanges in the form of sports meet wherein people from both sides meet alternatively. He also talked of the barter system still prevalent wherein, king chillies (ghost pepper) are exported from the Indian side in exchange for bags of rice.

India-Myanmar border: Escalating human trafficking concern

The instability in Myanmar has created a conducive environment for human trafficking at the India-Myanmar border with IT workers being made victims to it. The instability, unrest, and power struggles within Myanmar have given rise to criminal syndicates that exploit vulnerable individuals and profit from illicit activities. One of the most significant trends observed in post-coup human trafficking is the promise of fake IT occupations in Thailand, with salaries that seem too good to be true. The Myawaddy region, where the trafficking issue is the worst, is located within Myanmar's Kayin province which shares a border with Thailand. While both nations have enacted laws that criminalise trafficking and protect victims and have also ratified international conventions related to human trafficking, the current political instability hinders proper and prompt measures to ensure the safety and protection of trafficked victims.

Ongoing and likely impacts of Border Partition

Fencing and guarding the border would hasten the already ebbing connection, leading to the potential disarticulation of the community (Datta, 2018). Tribal communities like the Naga and Mizo people inhabit areas on both sides of the border, fencing could disrupt the traditional and familial ties that have existed for generations. It may hinder the free movement of the Naga tribes across the border for cultural, social, and economic activities, affecting their way of life and potentially straining cross-border ethnic relations. Personal accounts of restricted movements even in cases of medical emergencies and the border communities' economy which heavily depend on cross border trade are at risk. There is also the negative impact on the humanitarian response to the military junta's persecution. Two of the respondents to our questionnaires speak of the uncertainty of the Longwa village in Nagaland which supposedly enjoys dual citizenship, wherein, the Longwa chief's house and some villagers' houses are divided between the two nations.

Economic implications and trade of India Myanmar border fencing. Through the Lens of Political economy

India is an emerging power with fast economic growth, geographic size, natural resources, and dynamic population. It has adopted a new foreign policy and economic orientation towards its Southeast Asian bordering neighbours including Myanmar. Growing trade relations and bilateral economic engagements of both India and Myanmar. India's Northeastern border issues, ASEAN connectivity, the BCIM economic corridor of the BRI, India's neighbourhood policy, as well as the geo-political dynamics, among other factors, are the principal factors affecting India-Myanmar border trade. India and Myanmar are increasingly engaged in cross-border trade and economic cooperation. But fencing of the border will affect the economic relations of both the countries. FMR is a mutually agreed arrangement between the two countries that allows tribes living along the border on either side to travel up to 16 km inside the other country without a visa. It was formally implemented in 2018 as part of the Indian government's Act East policy. In addition to fostering people-to-people interactions, the Free Movement Regime (FMR) was envisioned to boost local trade and business activities. The area has a rich tradition of cross-border commerce facilitated by customs and border haats. Fencing of the Manipur-Myanmar border created barriers to economic exchanges and livelihood while dividing cultures and family. The border fencing rather effects both the economics of the countries. During an interview with Mr Gandhi Riyang, a student of international relations at

South Asian University (SAU) New Delhi remarked how Political economy could be viewed along the lens of ethnic geographical ties and this area consists of a vast potential for further research. How people living along these areas have been closely related not just ethnically but through trade too.

Border fencing is an expensive business. Fencing the India-Myanmar border, which runs along treacherous territory dotted with dense forests, hills and rivers, would be even more costly. New Delhi has so far spent more than Rs.35 crores in fencing just 10km of the Manipur-Myanmar border. Extrapolating, fencing the rest of the border would incur an astronomical cost of more than Rs.5,700 crores to the exchequer. Similarly, according to a tender published by the Assam Rifles in March 2023, the allocated cost of the pilot project on Hybrid Surveillance System (HSS) for a one km stretch of the Manipur-Myanmar border – which Shah mentioned in his 8 February announcement – is Rs.3.3 crores. The total cost of installing an HSS along the entire border, therefore, would be around Rs.5,420 crores. These sums could instead be invested in building better border trade infrastructure, civil facilities for local communities, and non-fence alternatives that use modern technology to monitor adverse movements without an actual barrier.

But, beyond the domestic economic costs, a hard India-Myanmar would do serious damage to India's Act East Policy (AEP), which was launched in 2014 as an upgrade to the Look East Policy (LEP) of 1991. The AEP framework envisages stronger economic, physical and people-to-people linkages between India, Myanmar and Southeast Asia. For starters, formal border trade between India and Myanmar is already dismal. According to a 2019 ICRIER report, it stands at less than one percent (Taneja et al. 2019). New Delhi has taken steps to improve the situation, such as by building a Land Custom Station (LCS) in Zokhawthar (Mizoram), an Integrated Check Post (ICP) at Moreh (Manipur) and border haats in Arunachal Pradesh. These moves have barely made a difference, and fencing the whole border does not help.

Fencing would, particularly, discourage informal trade undertaken by local communities and small traders through their own customary channels. While trade can happen at stipulated border haats or other formal crossings, the fence could abruptly punctuate the natural commercial mobility that is a hallmark of the India-Myanmar border. Fencing would also hamper progress on building west-to-east corridors, such as the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway. It is, therefore, against the AEP's core spirit, which was about leveraging Northeast India as a gateway to Southeast Asia.

Fencing is also counter to the current Union government's own argument in favour keeping the border open "to provide connectivity and enhance interaction of the people of Northeastern States of India with the people of Myanmar", as stated in the cabinet note on approval of the India-Myanmar FMR agreement in 2018 (PIB 2018). Just as importantly, fencing the border would send a wrong signal to the people of Myanmar and other ASEAN countries at a time when India is increasingly being seen in the region as an overly protectionist economy because of its decision to not join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

Environmental Implications

The forest area along the India Myanmar border is part of the Indo-Burma Biodiversity and the Himalayan Biodiversity hotspots characterised by dense tropical, subtropical and alpine forests. Thus, fencing the border, which runs through ecologically sensitive areas, could also harm environmental security. It would require extensive deforestation in several patches, leading to a decline in the forest cover. The Northeast India-Myanmar Pine Forests ecoregion is one of the only four such pine forest ecoregions in the Indo-Pacific region and they are rare representatives of a vegetation type with restricted distributions. The tribes living around the border employ jhum cultivation, a primitive subsistence agriculture which needs new patches of arable land every few years and fencing the border will result in lesser agricultural land for the poor and marginalised section. It is also to be noted that this type of cultivation is one of the main factors contributing to environmental degradation.

India's Forest (Conservation) Act (FCA), 1980 protects notified forests from invasive measures, but in 2023, Parliament amended the act to exempt non-notified and non-recorded forest land and other forest land "up to ten hectares, proposed to be used for construction of security-related infrastructure" from the FCA's purview. However, due to negligent surveys, rare wildlife thriving zones are sometimes termed as empty forest making such forests at risk of being deforested for developmental purposes. Such is also the case for Arunachal Pradesh, while not as prominently affected by ethnic ties as the other states, the state's border areas could see environmental and economic impacts from fencing. The state's biodiversity-rich areas such as Namdapha National Park, which is also a Tiger Reserve could be disrupted, affecting both conservation efforts and the livelihoods of communities dependent on natural resources. However, a positive light in the event of a fenced and guarded border, is it can lessen cross border illegal activities, illegal logging of woods across borders and smuggling of forest products like teak, sandalwood, and poaching.

Stakeholders

Government:

Central government; the central govt holds a great influence on fencing the border. The current decision of fencing the border is also that of the Home Ministry Affairs of the Union. They have empowered the Assam Rifles for guarding the India Myanmar border. State Governments (Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram); while the Manipur government and the Arunachal government want the border to be fenced, there is a strong resistance from the tribal states within, such as the Kuki, Naga and Singpho tribes of the states.

Tribal communities view: There is distrust and concern. The state actions are purportedly perceived to favour certain ethnic groups over others, potentially exacerbating ethnic tensions. The Manipur conflict being evident of such distrust.

NGOs and pressure groups:

The non-governmental organisations and pressure groups present in the tribal communities such as student bodies, play a vital role in mobilising masses and their opinions. In an interview with the director of RREA, a nonprofit organisation registered under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, he talks about the roles the nonprofit organisations play to empower marginalised communities along the border. On February 22, the NGO Coordination Committee (NGOCC), an influential civil society coalition in Mizoram, held a rally in Aizawl to protest the fencing (*The Morung Express* 2024). On February 8, the Nagaland government announced that it would hold consultations with tribal bodies and civil society organisations to discuss the Centre's move but is yet to do so (The Times of India 2024). Kuki-Zo groups in Manipur have opposed it too (*Deccan Herald* 2024b).

Indian Security Forces (Assam Rifles, Border Roads Organisation):

The Assam Rifles (AR) under the Ministry of Home Affairs is tasked with guarding the 1643 km India Myanmar border stretch, they also take on counter-insurgency operations while the BRO (Border Roads Organisation) is tasked with constructing roads and the fencing of the India Myanmar border. The AR is also involved in civil action programs, such as construction of community halls, medical camps, and water supply schemes. They are also first responders in natural and man-made disasters, providing immediate medical assistance to locals.

Tribal communities view: The Assam Rifles in the context of Manipur through our survey have received mixed reactions. While some of the tribals view them in a benevolent light for their services, especially the tribals around the proximity of the border have openly praised them for the aides, amenities provided to them. However, one also mentions officials who at

times have blatant disregard. This mixed review could possibly stem from the discrimination they have faced from the 'draconian' activities the AR have done under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), 1958, which is still imposed.

Gender:

Women Traders and their Contribution There is a lack of literature regarding women in the borderland. Some of the work includes Banerjee (2010) that deals with the border and women in the context of India, and the work of Anzaldua (2004). Anzaldua argued that territories are socially constructed, creating borders and redrawn boundaries. She argued in the context of the USA and Mexico. The creation of borders between these areas resulted in the Mexican losing half of its territory and the subsequent stigmatisation of the Mexican-American/Chicanos, which created the notion of 'others' and 'foreigner'. The work of Anzaldua is crucial as it depicts a discourse on women in the US-Mexico borderland. These writings are essential while analysing women's experiences on the border. Women's experiences can be different from the male, as women on the border sought to improve their livelihood by using various forms of negotiation.

Based on the present study, the experiences and perspective of women in borderland reflect their daily struggle and how they negotiate gender roles to survive. It has been observed that it was women who carried out the economic transaction and as it is often argued Women lift economies. To some extent, women benefit from border trade; for instance, the border trade business allows women to earn money which enables them to feed the family and give them some security. Since they were carrying out transactions within international borders, women had to negotiate with the state agency at both levels, such as MADC and Assam Rifles at the Indian side of the border and on the other side; they had to deal with the Myanmar military. One of the respondents narrated how they negotiated with the armies on the Myanmar side. The border-trade in the India-Myanmar borderland in MADC is not as populated, compared to another India-Myanmar borders such as Zokhawthar in Champhai District or Moreh in Manipur. Recently, in Mizoram, the areca nut business has become an important issue across the border. There are incidents where the military crackdown on illegal trade across the border in Zokhawthar village.

Other illegal transactions commonly carried out in Zokhawthar border trade include gold, weapons, tiger skin, rhino horns, and drugs like heroin and yaba. The commodities traded along the Lopu-Myanmar border include fermented fish, elephant food yam, dried ginger, tobacco, medicines, coconut, edible items, electronics such as television, vehicles and parts,

and animals' cow and pig, goats etc. Based on the study, it can be stated that the inhabitants of the Indo-Myanmar borderland are increasingly engaged in border-trade and economic transactions. And the role and participation of women in border-trade business cannot be ignored as they continuously contribute to the economy of the village and family.

Chapter 5: The Way Forward

- Ananya Mehta & Khawaish Bansal

Border Fencing in a Nutshell

Politics with territory does not only end as becoming national symbols, like border fencing along the India-Myanmar frontier, it also actively participates in the politics of governance and security for both nations. The oversea mountainous and hilly borders which separate states of India and Myanmar is 1643 in kilometres and are isolated with atrocities of drug trafficking, arms trafficking, and insurgency. This feature however is not a simple wall, both physical and conceptual, but it is entwined in the lives of the residents who in most cases get affected and history of trade practices which spills to family structures.

On the other hand, in looking for ways to address these problem situations, this fencing policy should also take note of the physical landscape, citizens of both the countries and the past. The ethnic demarcations established by the British colonial rule remain and continue influencing the Nagas, Kukis and other ethnic groups. Hence, there is a need for fencing to go hand in hand with the population-centred approach. For example, instead of being extremely tough with hard border barriers separating India and Myanmar, the two countries should seek to create reasonably controlled zones for the movement of people and shipment of goods strictly for security reasons. Moreover, policies such as movement control policies which are relaxed like the existing Free Movement Regime within the border will change from being a wall to being more like a regulatory channel.

Along with that, due to the uneven surface of this part of the world, erecting poles becomes costly as well as impractical. Erecting physical barriers need not be the only solution towards border monitoring as contemporary instruments like drones and Artificial Intelligence based controlled surveillance systems can allow prompt identification of dangers in the borders. Such systems can help regulate illegal activities across the borders or terrorism in a more active manner without disrupting the normal life of the population. Also, improving the mechanisms for intelligence exchange between India and Myanmar will help in dealing with the terrorist or insurgent threats long before they become issues that require police action with all its ramifications.

Multiplicity of Borders:

In today's

world, the concept of borders has developed into a more complex and multifaceted concept than simply geographical lines. The India Myanmar border is not a mere line dividing two

countries but also includes economic, cultural as well as spatial aspects. Dealing with these diverse types of borders, however, requires a multi-dimensional approach which considers the various aspects and linkages.

- **Geographical borders**: Physical geography of the India-Myanmar border is almost as challenging to fence as it is diversified. Ranging from dense forests, rivers, to mountains, it creates such terrain conditions making it even tough and more costly to fence. Matters of fencing in those areas eventually become porous with time where insurgents and smugglers exploit the loopholes. Instead of just building fences, modern surveillance systems would take the form of drones fitted with thermal cameras or AI-powered monitoring software, which would be much more flexible and cost-effective. Such technologies combined with an emphasis on community engagement for intelligence gathering may ultimately provide softer yet more efficient border management.

- **Economic borders**: "Once we account for complex ways the border wall impacted the economy, we found that almost all workers were made worse off. Even those who did benefit did so by a very small amount. This is more striking given the substantial construction cost." - *Treb Allen*

As much as borders control security, they also control trade and labor circulation. India Myanmar border region is an important informal trading site where the communities on either side of the border conduct cross-border exchanges of immense importance to their survival. For such communities, high fencing poses a direct threat to their very economic survival. Thereby, cross border movement is restricted, which directly impacts the more traditional traders and farmers or laborers. Thus, the informal economy, sustaining it for centuries, is disrupted. To tackle this issue, policies must address the development of cross-border economic corridors. Such corridors are special zones that permit local traders to continue their business under regulated conditions, and the control of such zones can be given to local councils with representatives from both the nations. This would ensure local trade practices are preserved, and national security is maintained. Thus, striking a balance between economic need and sovereignty, can help foster cooperation between India and Myanmar. This way, the fencing, which was an act of division earlier, turns into an arrangement meant to provide legal economic exchange in the local economy.

- **Socio-cultural borders**: Following the collapse of socialism in central and eastern Europe, interest in border studies increased significantly. There were also many emerging disciplinary ideas that popped in. India and Myanmar share cultural ties in terms of Buddhist heritage and shared history of colonialism. This laid the foundation for stronger, diplomatic and

cooperative relations and mutual understanding among both nations. A common cultural past with India and Myanmar makes this feature often ruptured by physical border controls. Ethnic groups divided in this fashion by colonial borders are divided between states; they consider themselves one people despite living in two countries. Fragmentation in terms of culture has often been a source of alienation and marginalization, which becomes responsive to border policies. However, border policies should not be all exclusionary. Programs that allow for better cross-cultural understanding can reduce the perception of difference. For instance, holding periodic cultural celebrations that bring communities from both sides of the border together can be a source of strengthening shared identities. Technology, including AI-driven Natural Language Processing tools, may also be used to contribute to the preservation of local languages and dialects, thus ensuring links to their cultures during the enforcement of security measures. The incorporation of the border management policy by and between the two countries as relating to cultural preservation may help win over goodwill and cooperation by borderland communities, in such a way that the fencing does not become a cultural or a social barrier.

Critically Evaluating Cultural and Economic Impacts of Border Fencing:

Border fencing involves an enormous, diverse impact on culture and economy, creating myriad ramifications that must be dealt with seriously. While border fencing is a strategic measure to secure one's borders, it can be damaging in local economies as well as cultures, particularly in zones such as the India-Myanmar border.

● **Cultural aspects**: On the cultural front, border fencing affects the people's cultures and sharpens the effect where many share wide cultural ties across borders. Divided ethnically, the India-Myanmar border cuts through ethnic groups that have lived together for centuries, thereby creating artificial divides that disrupt familial, religious, and social interactions in loss of cultural heritage, as curtailed traditional practices rely on cross-border interactions. Then, border policies should focus on the promotion of interaction and engagement of these fractured communities. For instance, the government can host cross-border cultural festivals or encourage joined religious engagements that build community cohesion. Moreover, technology is very crucial in preserving cultures. The capacity to use AI-based natural language processing tools will ensure documentations and preservation of the languages and customs of these border communities and not allow them to be lost in the sea of growing securitization.

● **Economic aspects:** Border fencing intensively affects the local economies, especially border regions where trade and labor tend to cut across even national boundaries. Any rise

in movement restrictions will most probably limit cross-border trade since such movement restrictions deny informal markets access. In regions where formal employment opportunities are scarce, and communities rely mainly on informal cross-border trade, such becomes critical. For example, fencing parts of the border between India and Myanmar has reportedly restricted up to a third of the trade between the two groups. However, these economic slowdowns can be restricted through policies that allow for zones of regulated trade. For instance, corridors that ensure local traders at reasonable scales can ensure flows of the economy but prevent illegalities. This not only increases local economies but also consolidates bilateral ties between India and Myanmar. In addition, local trade councils can ensure that the economic needs are met without implicating the security-related concerns on both sides.

Challenges Related to Border Security

● **Gender-Related Challenges**

Malini Sur in her article 'Bamboo Baskets and Barricades' views borders as having expansive connotations. Taking into consideration several instances from the US-Mexico Border and the India-Bangladesh Border, she throws light on the gender-related challenges or "body- politics" at the border. Endemic poverty, social imbalance, political violence, and militarisation marginalize women, especially those belonging to minority communities (Banererjee 2010: 115). The existence and prevalence of such gender-related challenges at the notorious Indo-Myanmar Border become a central focus. Women's transnational mobility is often impeded as border crossings are projected as lethal. The border trade economy heavily relies on women traders, who play a crucial role in supporting their families and local economies. As Banerjee and Chaudhury (2011) argue, border securitization often has gendered impacts, with women bearing the brunt of increased restrictions on movement and economic activities. For instance, women's labour migration is frequently restricted or prevented by framing them as infantile, victims, or docile citizens (Kapur 2005: 118; Kodoth & Varghese). What follows are more sophisticated ways of moving people across the border, often escalating the risks involved. A similar fate is said to be pre-destined when it comes to restricting movement across the Indo-Myanmar Border, following the scrapping of the FMR.

Gender mainstreaming should be fully incorporated in policies towards border challenges. The possible solutions that can mitigate these gender-related challenges, in the long run, include- the appointment of dedicated trade facilitation centres for

women, offering women skills and business development through microfinance, and gender-sensitive border management training for customs officials to respect the rights of women exercising their economic activities that cross borders.

● **Environmental Challenges**

The India-Myanmar border region is a part of two biodiversity hotspots: the Indo-Burma and the Himalayas. Dense lush green forests characterise this region. Fencing this ecologically sensitive region may lead to habitat severance and landscape vandalism. Moreover, it would also affect the traditional jhum cultivation, a primitive subsistence agriculture, practiced by the tribes of the area. To this, Dutta notes that border infrastructure may have ecological ramifications on otherwise sensitive regions.

To mitigate the environmental impact of border fencing, a multifaceted strategy should be adopted. Concerning this, comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessments can be conducted in the region as proposed by international mandates (UNEP 2018). Agrawal and Gibson (1999) advocated community-based conversation programmes with a dual focus on conserving biodiversity and enhancing local livelihood. Initiatives like wildlife passages and eco-friendly designs in fence architecture should be incorporated even when it comes to the Union government's decision to fence the Indo-Myanmar border.

5. Assessing The Efficacy of Border Fencing as a Solution:

Border fencing is the solution to security problems; however, it remains ambiguous to determine the usefulness of the said concept, as a subject of debate among scholars and policymakers alike. At the geo-political level, this border is not a warring one such as the Israel- Palestine or India- Pakistan borders; yet it continues to be a site of land and identity conflicts and gross human rights violations (Sur, 2021). The implementation of the central government's decision to fence the entire stretch of the Indo-Myanmar border will pose a significant threat to the rugged terrain, dense forests, and numerous river systems of the area. Not only this, but these geographical features also render surveillance and maintenance of fencing infrastructure extremely costly and labour-intensive. This is also reflected in Brown's (2017) study of border walls. This in turn leads to a false sense of security, evoking Lund's notion of fragmented sovereignty.

From an economic perspective, the estimated cost of over Rs. 5,700 crores for fencing the entire border raises serious concerns about cost-effectiveness. Andreas (2009) has demonstrated that increased border fortification often leads to a "balloon effect," where illegal

activities are not eliminated but rather redirected to more dangerous and less monitored areas. This phenomenon could worsen the prevailing gender-related and environmental challenges in the border regions.

This will not only lay bare the vulnerabilities of women engaged in cross-border trade, but also marginalize indigenous communities of the area. Moreover, the proposed fencing could severely disrupt wildlife corridors and fragment critical habitats in a region recognized for its exceptional biodiversity. The potential for fencing hinders humanitarian assistance and can have far-reaching consequences, especially in times of natural disasters or health crises. The severance of historical ties and disruption of traditional lifestyle will follow as a result, posing a significant danger to the ethnic and cultural ties which have been integral to the social fabric for generations. It is also crucial to consider the long-term geopolitical implications of border fencing. Jones (2012) argues that fencing serves more as a political symbol than an effective security measure. In the context of India's "Act East" policy, the construction of a physical barrier along the Myanmar border could send conflicting signals and potentially hinder broader strategic initiatives. Considering these multifaceted challenges, alternative approaches to border management become considerably significant. Scholars like Ackleson (2005) advocate for a more holistic approach to border security that goes beyond physical barriers. This perspective aligns with the concept of "Smart borders," which integrates technology, intelligence sharing, and community policing to enhance security without the negative externalities associated with physical fencing. Integrated Border Management (IBM) strategies, as proposed by Castan Pinos (2020), offer a more comprehensive framework, emphasizing coordination among various stakeholders and policy domains and offering more sustainable and effective solutions. Moreover, community-based approaches to border security, as advocated by Newman (2006), could prove to be more effective in addressing the unique challenges of the India-Myanmar border region. By involving local communities in border management decisions, security could be significantly enhanced while preserving the social and cultural fabric of borderland communities. In conclusion, while border fencing may appear to be an appropriate solution to security challenges, its efficacy in the context of the Indo-Myanmar border is highly debatable. The myriads of challenges—ranging from geographical and environmental constraints to socio-economic and humanitarian concerns—suggest that alternative, more nuanced approaches to border management are necessary.

Community Echoes

The Indo-Burma borderlands have been too often seen only from the perspective of the colonial and postcolonial states which see the border as the "outer land limits" (Nail, 2016).

Drawing upon recent trends in contemporary borderland studies, there emerges a need to confront the state-centric conceptions of borders as "fixed lines" with a society-centric analysis that emphasizes "social processes" across the border. Instead of perceiving the "border" as being synonymous with "walls," "cell," "frontier," "boundary," "checkpoint," "fence," and so on (Nail 2016, 2), the focus should be on its duality or paradoxical character. In other words, it is an attempt to examine the connected history of the transborder people within the broad framework of borders and relationships. These "transborder peoples" constitute the minority in the states where they live but share a connected history. For them, the indigenous notions of space, territory, and identity have been displaced, reconfigured and fragmented by colonial map-making, territoriality, and classifications in the Indo-Burma borderlands. Their native lands have been reduced to the status of a lesser known "peripheral" area which has for far too long been only seen from the perspective of the colonial and postcolonial states. The regions bordering Myanmar exemplify what Dunn and Cons call a sensitive space, where people are subject to multiple 'interwoven projects, logics, goals and anxieties of rule operating at once'. The conflictual views on fencing of the Indo-Myanmar Border worsen the situation. However, recently there have been instances of overcoming this prejudice as scholars have addressed the historical connections, ethical ties, and concerns of the "transborder people". Yasmin Saikia established the Tai-Ahom connect through "fragmented memories" (Saikia, 2004) and the "possibilities of openings and interactions between people, cultures, and histories in the Northeast" (Saikia and Bhaisya 2017, 6). Cederlof (2014) situates the Indo-Burma borderland at the crossroads of old commercial trade routes between India, Burma, and China. Lintner (2016) refers to this region as "Asia's most volatile frontier" of the Indian subcontinent, China, and Southeast Asia. Hence, it becomes imperative that while colonial and postcolonial borders divided indigenous communities, thereby creating "difference"; it also "unifies" and facilitates the revival of relationships among the "transborder peoples" through dialogue, interaction, and exchange across the border. This ideology was reflected in the Free Movement Regime (FMR), until recently when it was scrapped by the central government. This decision to fence the Indo-Myanmar border is, in a way, contrary to the current Union government's own argument in favour keeping the border open "to provide connectivity and enhance the interaction of the people of Northeastern States of India with the people of Myanmar" (PIB 2018). Fencing the entire 1643 kilometers of the Indo-Myanmar border will not only deter the age-old ethnic ties of the communities inhabiting the region but also sever the linkages between their past, present, and future (Paasi, 1998, 80).

Future Proofing the Borders - Radical Solutions to Overcoming the Challenges:

Discussions on border fencing along India-Myanmar reveal solutions as multi-layered in nature by integrating both physical and socio-economic realities of the region. Be it technological intervention or focusing on community policy, what is thrown up by fencing in a particular region are innovative and sensitive approaches.

- **Technological solution:** In the age of the digital world, scrutinizing and diving into the tech-based solutions with regards to border fencing is the need of the hour. Thereby, with mitigated hardening impacts, border security is one of the key enablers that technology provides. The current usage of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) technologies enhances the capabilities for real-time surveillance and predictive capabilities. For example, an AI-based border surveillance system can scan the possibility of smuggling or insurgent activities before they rise as problems. Advanced sensors mounted on drones might prove to be unreachable or hard-to-access territories, requiring little physical fencing in difficult terrains. Another area is how the patterns from the historical data of illegal activities can be used in making interventions. Predictive risks help authorities make appropriate usages of resources without unnecessary broad fencing policies that are really hurting the local communities. The algorithms also help in analyzing the upward trend of social media communications online to give insights into what and how potential unrest is emerging in the border regions.

- **Policy Changes:** Other policy reforms must also be undertaken to hurdle the impediments fence building poses. The cross-boundary economic zones referred to earlier would have trade and labor regulated in such a manner that the local economies would not be disturbed. These are indifferent areas where communities can exercise their lawful economic activities under both governments overseeing the matter. Such policies will easily ease the tension between communities and governments because economic interdependence turns the border into a site of cooperation rather than conflict. Such policies would thus represent the needs and views of local communities. Community participation would be involved in decisions for border management to ensure that the policies are not imposed from above but are produced with the people most affected by the policies.

- **Cultural Integration:**

Border management policies also must involve cultural efforts. In this regard, governments should engage in more cross-border cultural events with festivals, religious congregations, or possibly learning institutions. Such a rich cultural heritage can pave the way for easing alienation caused by physical fences. At the outset, the fencing on the India-Myanmar frontier forms a lot of complexities; it forms a multi-dimensional approach to answer the problem. A

blend of technology, economic cooperation, cultural engagement, and localized policymaking would turn the challenge of fencing into an opportunity of greater cooperation and security between India and Myanmar. This is not boundary building but constructing a bridge respecting the epoch, culture, and economy of the region and protecting national interests.

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