

Malini Sur: *Jungle Passports: Fences, Mobility, and Citizenship at the Northeast India-Bangladesh Border*. Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania. 2021. 248 pp. Rs. 2,252.

Illegal migration, people at margins, and politics over national boundaries became more evident in the twenty first century. The adverse outcomes of migration whether legal or illegal on host state and home state came to represent dilemma at multiple levels for post-colonial countries. Critical political changes in the last century attributed to altercations in the material conditions of the people concerned, with that, inhabitants living in the peripheral regions became susceptible to various security challenges and in some cases were forced to migrate.

The intellectual tradition associated with migration is strikingly divided into two blocs' namely pessimistic and optimistic one. Optimistic approach derives human security concerns and pessimistic approach pursues national security objectives. Setting in this light is the recent book by Malini Sur, whose work has encapsulated the plight of borderland communities through her ethnographic research undertaken from the year 2007 to 2015. As claimed by scholar, the pitiable livelihood patterns in the peripheries of India–Bangladesh led to formation of dubious identities and transnational economic activities conducted under the rubric of 'jungle passport'.

To begin with, this book persuades the readers to eschew state perceptions on border making and signals deep skepticism on the state's role in surveillance. Man versus state is the principal focus where former's volition is formulated through deontological reason. As far as the structure of the book is concerned, it is divided into six chapters and has employed four components namely, the ecosystem of India-Bangladesh borders along North – East India, infrastructures like fences, critical exchanges between

borders where manipulation takes place and finally the mobility. Each component corresponds to develop a network of interconnected links that define everyday life of borderland communities. For further examination, critical analyses of each chapter are required.

The introductory chapter has precisely explained the subject matter of the book and one could situate the normative aspects involved in developing a theoretical base. In the first chapter, author has selected Rowmari-Tura road for the study that once formed a single unit for mobility, now stands separated by international borders termed as national fault lines. Historically, as claimed by author, in both colonial and post-colonial phase, Rowmari-Tura road has fallen prey to Cartographic anxieties and inhabitants experienced geographical transformations as constructed by states. Second chapter investigates the ascension of agrarian politics that has disrupted the traditional rural practices of rice farming. With the division of borders, peasants and traders were locked in an uncertain situation as the securitization norms came to dominate their lives and has used the metaphor 'rice wars' to delineate evolving distress. At one level state's imposition of limits of sovereignty and alienated situation of the borderland inhabitants is presented as juxtaposing positions.

Semantics of the term 'Fang Fung' is analyzed in Chapter three. The Fang Fung lacks any literal meaning, although it depicts the local culture of power and authority involved in the illicit business of cattle smuggling. The overlapping communal identities along India and Bangladesh borders have firmly established the manipulation of state controls. Without state sanction, entry and exit points along the borders are operated through kinship based passages as known as 'Jungle passports'. Through chapter four author aims to split open the gender and communal stereotype in

the infiltration narrative. As she explored the journeys of *Garo* women who have traversed the international borders through local networking known as 'jungle passport'. The lingering point before the state actors is to shun the linear projection of everyday lives of border inhabitants through communal lens.

Politics and muscle flexing on the project on fencing received attention in chapter five. The condition that prevails in borderlands is dubbed as 'infrastructures of fear'. The escalation of violence and hardships of the people taunts their right to normalization. In this chapter and in previous chapters, author categorically imposes Indian troops as 'Hindu troops' against the Muslim masses that live along borders. At the same time author asserts to break the pre-conceived notions on the communal identity of those who have crossed the borders for livelihood. The fencing project surfaced in Indian policy decisions right from 1980s and intensified in the first decade of the twenty first century. Author has categorically ignored the instances of safe havens of Indian insurgent groups on the Bangladesh side of borders. Human security and state security perspectives looms contradictory, yet one cannot clearly dispose any of the two as both manifest the material and ideational conditions of human lives developed along modern state system.

Sixth chapter revolves around the question of citizenship that has dominated the politics of Assam state of India since 1980s. The question of legality in the matters concerning citizenship has a history associated with Radcliffe line, as millions were forced to flee for survival from communal persecution. Settlements along borders became the zones of bustle as the newly constructed peripheries acted as the melting pot of state and nation making. In this chapter, author has traced the personal accounts of the concerned population in the backdrop of National Register for Citizens that led the drive to detect illegal migrants residing in

Assam that kick started in 2015. As per author, the fears of deportation became evident with BJP's over enthusiasm to implement NRC, and to the other extreme, the communal and ethnic cleavages that have set social boundaries became more detrimental. She also unraveled the fact that rampant corruption derailed the judicious process involved in the detection of illegal residents.

Critical insight to this work could be commenced from the fact that author has provided meagre attention towards the transnational threats that have moved across borders through routes of illegal migration. Secondly, in terms of border politics, there is a general tendency among the scholarly community to discuss only BJP's position and to the least that of AASU and AGP, whereas there is a categorical absence of debate on other stakeholders. Thirdly, Bangladesh's poor border management coupled with BDR's (later BGB) human rights violations remained untapped field of enquiry.

This book is a compilation of author's personal observations meted out during field work and it has enhanced the intellectual grip on the plight of people at margins. The borders became a site for contestation ever since partition was announced by the colonial administration in 1947, hundreds of books were written on the theme of woes of refugees. Only recently scholars have paid attention to the nuances of border making on the inhabitants at peripheral regions. Willem van schendel, Hosna Shewly, Jaosn Cons, Reece Jones etc., have stretched their academic knowledge to unearth the shades of border politics and Malini Sur's work in this review is a novel addition to the existing list. Each essay is designed for enhancing reader's thought process and to engage seamlessly to understand the illustrative anecdotes. For career scholars and academicians working in the field of border politics,

this work will help to widen the vistas of knowledge and open new avenues for critical enquiry.

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