

Border Crossings in Mizoram: Desirables and Unwanted Communities*

Dr. N. William Singh

Associate Professor, Sociology, DAAD Fellow & UGC Fellow
Pachhunga University College (Constituent College of Mizoram University)

BA Sociology – Hindu College (Delhi University)
MA MPhil & PHD (JNU), Post Doctrate (Freie Universitat, Berlin)

(* Acknowledgement to ICSSR for funding the Project – Asymmetrical Borderlands)

Why Mizo community migrants from Myanmar are given help by the Mizo society? Since 2020, more than Twenty Thousand refugees from Myanmar have been seeking refuge in Mizoram. They took shelter in temporary makeshift tents. They are concentrated mainly at the outskirts of major townships. They faces issues - no proper water connection and periodic load shedding. By 2022, media reported – more than 35000 refugees from Myanmar crossed the border. Pilot survey confirms that more illegal migrants, hence more refugee camps and makeshift tents are visible in major townships. Due to the Military mayhem in Myanmar, since 2020, border crossing has been an everyday activity at eastern borderland of Mizoram. Various civil society and government agencies provide help to the refugees. Mizo cultural practices - *Tlawmngaihna* (help and service above one's self) – providing basic medicines, health check ups' and providing basic needs – dal, edible oil, used clothes, ration rice to kerosene to sugar distributions are visible in the refugee camps. Identity cards are issued to the migrants from Myanmar by the Home department of Mizoram. With the identification cards, Mizo migrants from Myanmar get access to health, Ration and subsidized basic needs – food, cooking gas, kerosene and solar lamps. The migrants are also frequent Church attendees.

What about the illegal migrants from the Chittagong hills into Mizoram? Unwelcoming, suspicious, lack of trust and accusations are the acronyms given to illegal Chakmas migrants at the western borderlands of Mizoram. It is a problematic one, compounded due to ethnic, cultural, belief and mistrust between

Chakma and Mizo. It is a different *levenswelt* altogether. State agencies and civil society in Mizoram are critical towards illegal Chakma migrants.

Are there any means to reconcile by Mizo society towards illegal Chakma migrants? Mizo considers them as illegal. Even Chakma families that have been settling since 1950s are also blamed for providing shelter to the illegal migrants.

What about cards issued by the Mizoram state? The state does not issue any cards. Also, they are considered as suspicious on all counts. Chakma settlement in South-western borderland – Chawngte (in Mizo lingua) / Kamlanagar and Tlabung / Demagiri (in Chakma lingua) are under the jurisdiction of 6th schedule area - Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC). State agencies have been blaming CADC for the uneven demographic increase in CADC areas. They accuse CADC for helping illegal migrants. Migrants from Chittagong hills cross border on everyday basis - to seek refuge, for better livelihood, because, wage is high in Mizoram. Fieldwork notes reveal that CADC authorities help migrants to obtain Aadhar cards and ECI voter cards without formalities and background checks.

What are the main objectives and themes? Why border and borderland epistemologies are useful in understanding border crossing? What are the facts, methodology, data sources and main findings? The aim of this paper is to show the relevance of border and borderlands studies in understanding refugee and illegal migrants. Combining epistemologies of border, borderland and refugee widen the scope of research on forced migration, refugee studies and border crossing. Such combination provides new narratives on everyday life activities of the refugees at borderlands.

The paper shows that - use of archival documents, photos, images, novellas, lyrics, popular culture, musical exchange, roles of church, civil society, role of state agencies, media reports and analyzing 6th schedule institutional role - widen our understanding in border crossing and refugee studies. Fieldwork, narratives and interview with elders at both sides of the border helps in getting newer academic insights on border crossings.

The paper analyzes two pivotal roles by civil society, state authority and community organization dealing with illegal migrants seeking refuge in Mizoram.

First, roles played by authorities and civil society towards Mizo migrants from Myanmar provides help – on humanitarian factors and close ethnic ties. Hence border crossings at the eastern borderland are not cumbersome, mainly due to close community and multi-layered relationships. Such

notions are instrumental in understanding border crossing. Mizo migrant from Myanmar is the case in point.

Second, the paper provides an overview - narratives, meanings, blaming and accusations - towards non-Mizo community. Non-Mizo migrants face on everyday basis, unfriendly attributes by the mainstream society. Mizo society does not appreciate on all counts towards illegal migrants at the western borderland. Illegal Chakma migrant is the point in case.

What is the main finding? The paper argues that historical ties and ethnic similarities play a role in border crossings. Further, the paper elucidates - how state agencies and civil society create different meanings to illegal migrants in Mizoram. These meanings are socially constructed. The meanings also help in understanding issues faced by illegal migrants, refugee and border crossings activities at the borderlands.

What are the five main sections, the details, findings and explanations? The paper is divided into five sections. First section delineates moments from history, map making, media's role and civil society role in analyzing Mizo networks (old & new) divided by map making and imposition of border.

First section analyzes historical reports from the Archives. Role of civil society, application of conceptual meanings of border and borderland are indeed useful in understanding refugees and border crossings. It analyzes historic facts, existing border-crossing laws, and the nature of connect and disconnect between refugees and the host community. It shows the relevance of ethnographic fieldwork and narratives from case studies. Broader applications of epistemologies in refugees and internally displaced people are delineated. The main aim of the first section is to apply epistemologies of border, borderland and map-making in understanding the flight of refugees and border crossings.

Second section refines the theoretical and conceptual insights of border and borderland. The section shows the historical effects of border in the borderlands of Mizoram and Myanmar. It incorporates themes like - belonging, shared history, claims and counterclaims by the borderland communities. It highlights problematic issues - illegal border. Deals with the nature of porous borders used for trading illicit items. Porous border escalates as transit points for sneaking out and seeking safe havens for illegal migrants and many other unwanted activities - the drug-lords, insurgents and rebellious groups.

Third section focuses on Kinship ties between Mizo's in Mizoram and Myanmar. It emphasizes on narratives, which maintain networks by descendants between families divided by the Indo-Myanmar

border are useful in understanding border crossing. The networks are multi-layered. Families migrate from Myanmar to Mizoram during times of unrest and hunger at Myanmar. Fieldwork findings are reflected in the third section. One main finding during fieldwork at the borderlands is that societies felt that the imposition of border to them is a clear example of a 'divider' dividing the ethnic brethren's. The elders labeled the imposition of border - first, as an imposition of a fraught history, and, second as a part of the postcolonial displacement occurred in South Asia. They also felt that the principle of riverine, natural stream, mountain crest, trench and foothill should be the border benchmark. Border should not be a divider, not a unifier. They felt that border divides and did not bring any histories of satisfaction.

Fourth section explains the level of mistrust between Mizo and Chakma. Mizo society suspects that there is a big difference between the total number of Chakma in the official figure and the actual head counts conducted by MSU and other civil society groups, in this borderland. Mizo society is of the opinion that Chakma population in the official figure is not correct. Actual head counts by Mizoram civil society claimed that actual population is twice of the official population data maintained by CADC and Census 2011. The section narrates findings from fieldworks. During fieldwork, it was found that prime priority of all the households in CADC area is to acquire cards and ration cards. Level of suspicion and unwanted/non-desirable towards illegal migrants and misuse of official position by CADC officials, doing favors to the illegal migrants are detailed in the fourth section.

Fifth section is the conclusion. It argues that more and more refugees from Myanmar will be seeking refuge in Mizoram. Migrants will be increasing. Church and civil society organization will continue to help migrants from Myanmar. Also, demand for more aid, basic needs and medical needs will be the future of the migrants from Myanmar.

On the other hand, accusations and suspicions by Mizo society towards Chakma will be the future concerns. Accusation and suspicions are derived from material and physical presence of new settlements. Chakma villages are increasing year after years. More and more houses have been built in the village roadsides. Hence in Mizoram refugees and illegal migrants connote different meanings. Increase in Chakma villages also increases level of mistrust.

The following pages are the five sections. The sections elucidates and shows various analysis of facts, reports and fieldwork narratives that are instrumental in understanding the relationships between border, borderlands, ethnic ties, cross border migration research and study.

I

To draw clear distinctions between illegal border crossings, forced migration and refugee studies is not an easy task. In this study, terms – refugees, internally displaced, infiltrators and border crossings are used *inter alia*. The field of study is Mizoram, where issues are different from the other geographies due to its close proximity to South Asian countries – Myanmar and Bangladesh. In refugee studies, the subject matter of investigation varies from region to region from issue to issue. Analyzing the issues and facts of different studies differ due to differential existential issues – from conflict to displacement, to persecution, economic hardships, to responses in the host society, to curtailing of basic rights and differential treatments.

Further, field of investigation differs due to application of legal theories to human rights arguments to historiography to live experiences of everyday life by border crossing communities. It also differs based on level of acceptance and mistreatments, misdemeanors and all sorts of labeling. Significant developments in forced migration studies during 1980s unfolds emergence of refugee studies as a distinct field of studies and policy analysis (Malkki 1995). Many negative terms – persecution to conflict to hunger to poverty to instability are also deployed to carry out researches in understanding the *levenswelt* of illegal border crossers. At the same length, border crossings also deploy many positive terms – better livelihood, more secure, more accessibility, assurance of basic needs, treat with respect without by passing any ethos of universal human rights to the migrants.

Since 1980s, there has been exponential growth of research on refugees and internally displaced people (See Harrell-Bond 1986 & Colson 1971). Conflict, atrocities, misery, loss of basic rights, exclusion, disempowerments (Zetter 1991) and being qualitatively different in the host nations (Hathaway 2007) were the mainstream academic takeaways in refugee studies.

No one follows Border Crossing Rules on the eastern borderlands of Mizoram. Cross border movement between Mizoram and Myanmar under the Rule IV of Indian passport entry rules 1950 exempted visa and passport requirements. Exemptions are based on close ethnic ties and on kin and family ties. Gazette of India - Part II, dated 1st July 1968, stated:

‘Passport Entry Rules will be exempted to every member of the hill tribes, who is either a citizen of India or a Citizen of the Union of Burma and who is ordinarily resident in any area within forty kilometers on either side of the Indo-Burma frontier entering into India across the said frontier’.

By 2010, gazette notification of 1950 was modified. Free cross border movement and exemptions of passport-visa requirements of forty kilometers at the borderlands was reduced to sixteen kilometers. It was reduced with a purpose to eliminate training camps. Mizoram –Myanmar borderland is a notorious geographical domain. These borderlands are the breeding grounds for terrorist activities and favorable place for insurgent training camps.

On 21st July 2010, a newer notification by Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India reduced the forty kilometers benchmark to sixteen kilometers. The Gazette of India, Part II laid the following changes:

‘A permit issued by the Government of India or State government may specify for the purpose and he/she shall not on the basis of that permit move into the area in India which is beyond sixteen kilometers from the aforesaid frontier’.

During fieldwork, it was found that many of the Chins migrating to Mizoram hardly follow border-crossing rule on an everyday basis. Like-wise, people from Mizoram crossing to the other side of the border do not abide the rules. Indo-Myanmar border is one of the most unfenced and the most porous regions in South Asia. Aizawl is more than hundred kilometers away from the border stones. Only few abide the law, obtain permits, pay permit fees, and deposit identification cards at the border checkpoints. The rest, simply do not.

Facts and that has been unfolding events on migrants at the borderlands are reported in media. There is still an absence of rigorous investigation and studies on everyday life activities of the illegal migrants. Such events are unique and can be analyzed through ethnographic fieldwork. Also, the present events are analyzed both from historical facts and historiographies of treaties, laws and institutional norms. Over the years, rise of dictators, mass killings, mass displacement due to development projects of the state – big dams and industries in the name of development, human rights, poverty and emergence of frictions between minorities and majority groups were the main issues for academic engagements on refugees and border crossing. During the last three decades – refugee studies relied on growth of legal concerns, on human centric laws, on human rights, aid by nations plus global institutions, more voices from activists and newer social problems. Point is academic lenses in doing research on refugees and internally displaced communities are expanding and adopting all sorts of techniques based on the context and objectives of the study.

Border and map-making divided solidarities of a community – bloods, belonging, kin, relatives - at the borderlands. Border divided the community and made them different subjects with differential laws and

unequal amount of citizenship rights. Facts told us that in times of conflicts, crossing the border has been the only hope to ease the woes of community divided due to map making.

This paper analyzes movement of refugees and the nature of border crossings from one borderland to another borderland (refugees from the Myanmar and from the Bangladesh to Mizoram). It shows the need for considering conceptual frameworks - border, divided borderland, homelands divided by borders. It considers borderlands as a site for study for internally displaced communities and refugees. How asymmetrical borderlands in terms of (variances) – political atmosphere, socio economic impulses, conflict and livelihood activities must be essential components in understanding refugee life-world, lived experience and internally displaced studies?

The paper emphasizes on ethnographic fieldwork as an important tool in understanding refugee situations. This paper also narrates that human conditions such as labeling, exclusion-inclusion, support versus unwanted-mistrust between host community and refugee seekers are also important tools in expanding the academic horizons in understanding refuge and illegal border crossings. It attempts to look at shared histories of the same community at the borderlands, all tempered and divided due to borders that emerged during postcolonial displacements of South Asia.

Postcolonial displacement is a unique symptom and unsolved issue in postcolonial South Asia. Also more and more flow of refuge have been witnessing during post-world wars and post cold war. UNHCR (2013) reported that since 2012, an average of 23,000 people a day are becoming refugees. Such push factors for flow of refugee unfolds due to high urges to cross borders due to the close cultural, kin, relatives and ethnic ties. Colonial map-making bypassed all human elements like blood, kin, relatives in map making. European cartography practice was a blunder – a divider, not a unifier - whether in Asia and postcolonial geography.

Issues and problems in nation states multiplied since the end of cold war. South Asia has never been in peace since Second World War. Series of war occurred during cold war. Post cold war, series of tyrants and dictators dismantling democratically elected South Asia nations in the name of corruption and incumbency. South Asia has never been in peace for the last two hundred years. This region is always in conflict in some way or other. Persecutions unfolded due to internal and external issues at the borderlands. One common pain witnessing in South Asia is the flow of migrants and refugee from one region to the other.

Historiography, images, music-lyrics and popular culture in analyzing networks (old & new) between divided communities (social media). Historical reports from the Archives, role of civil society, application of

epistemologies of border and borderland are indeed useful tools in understanding refugees and border crossings. It analyzes historic facts, existing border-crossing laws, and the nature of connect and disconnect between refugees and the host community. It shows the relevance of ethnographic fieldwork and narratives from case studies.

II

Borders have both positive and negative aspects. Borders were clearly drawn with the absolute notion that every power of the state will extend till the border. Ernst Gellner's (1990) detailed that sovereignty and taxes stopped only at the border; then another border exists with new laws and different sovereignty. Some border remains un-demarcated and is an origin of conflict between the states. Some border experiments to stop illegal border crossing by erecting huge walls. Some porous borders are used for trading illicit items. Some borders are used as transit points for sneaking out and seeking safe havens for the drug-lords, insurgents and rebellious groups. No matter how official maps, how many customs officials are appointed, or how many watchtowers are built, people will ignore borders whenever it suits them (Baud & Schendel 2007).

This study shows the historical effects of border in the borderlands of Mizoram and Myanmar. It incorporates themes like - belonging, shared history, claims and counterclaims by the borderland communities. The mapping of borders, according to Stephen Jones (1945) undertook three stages: establishment, demarcation, and control of the border. Even after a border was created, state's power in the borderland remain restricted and unstable. Borderland community uses democratic institutions to meet their ends and to critic established order. Hence, in borderlands, facts and events that unfolded were mainly associated with border crossings, violence, welcoming by host community, unwanted by host communities and a routine visit by state officials on periodic basis.

III

Kinship ties, spiritual links and narratives on maintaining networks by descendants between families divided by the Indo-Myanmar border are useful in understanding border crossing. The networks are multi-layered. Families migrate from Myanmar to Mizoram during times of unrest and hunger at Myanmar. Networks and memories are reinforced through both mediums - institutional (civil society) and personal levels. Such networks are beyond the larger meanings of demarcated border. These mediums evolved over time and redefine the very relationship of community across borderland.

Historical facts revealed that Mizo networks extend beyond geographical markers – border fences and demarcated borderlines. Networks maintain indelible link of cultural ties, spiritual fulfillment, and movement of people across borders. Networks and relationships evolved with the passage of time. Political situations also shaped the nature of networks and relationships. Whatever the political situation is, a common ground

exist, which is the unending attempt to unite and maintain solidarity between kin, even if, they are divided by the border.

One main finding during fieldwork at the borderlands is that societies felt that the imposition of border to them is a clear example of a 'divider' dividing the ethnic brethren's. The elders labeled the imposition of border - first, as an imposition of a fraught history, and, second as a part of the postcolonial displacement occurred in South Asia. They also felt that the principle of riverine, natural stream, mountain crest, trench and foothill should be the border benchmark. Border should not be a divider, not a unifier. They felt that border divides and did not bring any histories of satisfaction.

During 1948-50, Lushai hill District Council (LHDC) reported that four hundred and thirty one Mizo households from Mizoram migrated to Tahan in Myanmar (See Endnote 1). LHDC also reported that they migrated to Tahan, for seeking better livelihood and as students to receive higher education at the townships of Mandalay, Kalemmyo and Rangoon. LHDC also reported that during 1947-48, one hundred and sixty five Mizo joined the Burmese army.

Earlier, *Mautam* (Famine) played a significant role in cross border movements of families across the Mizoram-Myanmar borderlands. Alexander MacKenzie in his text 'The Northeast Frontier of India' (1995, Reprint) mentioned that the famines of 1892 played a significant role in the history of migrations across the borders. Mackenzie also mentioned that numerous Mizo villages existed at the Chin hill of Burma. At that time, border crossing was not strict as, of the present. Famines occurred due to flowering of bamboos in erstwhile Lushai hill. The infamous post-colonial Lushai famine (*Mautam*) of 1959 resulted to the emergence of Mizo insurgency that disturbed the state for two decades, 1966-1986.

The outcome of 1959 famine was the Mizo insurgency under Pu Laldenga. During famine, cross-border migrations from Mizoram to Myanmar occurred. Aid agencies like Church and civil societies played huge roles. During fieldwork, many Mizo elders commented that during 1966-1986, i.e during the time of *Rambuai* (Mizo Insurgency) and during famines of 1959-60, many Mizo families migrated to Myanmar to seek better livelihood and decent living. Narratives from fieldwork revealed that during 1950s, Mizo took their higher education at University of Mandalay. Higher education at Indian universities was a second choice.

During fieldwork, it was found that families from Myanmar cross the border on everyday basis - beside taking shelter - into Mizoram for a day or more, to trade and do business. They return to their villages on Myanmar side after trading their goods. Likewise, Mizo trades their goods to Myanmar. They trade all kinds of goods

from legal to illegal items. On many occasions, few were caught with contraband items within Mizoram. It was also found that families from Myanmar who crossed the border to trade smuggled goods - contraband items - rely on families living in Mizoram. Many a times, they also skipped checking from the border guards due to the porous and unfenced border.

At the moment, it is rather opposite. Since the Military coup of 2020, latest figures in Mizoram media informed that more than 35,000 migrants are sheltering in Mizoram. After the 1962 military coup in Burma, General Ne Win government instituted the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP). The new regime ensured that every citizen should have a decent standard of living with special emphasis on basic sustenance. The promises were not realized. The ethnic minorities, especially, suffered under Ne Win's regime. Since 1970s, Mizo families from Myanmar relied on previous relationships and economic opportunities across the border. This results to the outflow of migrants, seasonal labors migrating looking for all sorts of job at Mizoram. They crossed the border in order to survive and to have better livelihood.

Mizo and Myanmar musicians moved easily between Mizoram and Burma (Pachau and van Schendel 2014: 385). Western Music scene popped out at the main towns of Mizoram during the midst of *Rambuai*. It was a healing remedy for them, during the two decades (1966-86) of insurgency. The Music scene did not confine within Mizoram. The All India Radio (AIR) at Aizawl played Mizo and gospel songs. Media channels informed us that songs broadcasted from at the AIR – Aizawl - were hustled and listened in the Mizo inhabited Chin hills of Myanmar. By late 1970s Mizo rock bands and musical groups from Tahan (Chin hill) became hit songs in Aizawl. During 1981, the bands toured and performed in concerts at Aizawl during *Rambuai* (Pachau & van Schendel 2014).

Vumson (1993) explained the music scene and cross-border exchange of music and lyrics in an apt manner –

“As an example of cultural exchange, a music group called Zodi, from Tahan, visited Aizawl in 1980. The group became so popular that All India Radio of Aizawl was very often requested to play music by the group. In 1981, another music group from Tahan, the Vulmawi visited Aizawl. They became so popular with the people of West Zoram that they decided to tour the whole western area. They appeared (performed) in Kolasib, Serchhip, Lunglei, Saiha and Champhai, form where they returned to Tahan”.

(Vumson 1993, p.321)

On many counts, their campaigns and efforts mentioned about cross-border links and ties. They never denied of their brethren at the other side of the border. The press (Accessed from MZP General Headquarters) release (See Endnote 2) mentions -

“The Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) and Mizo Students’ Union (MSU) appreciate the initiatives taken by different NGOs and the government of Mizoram for the relief and aid of *Zohnahthlak* (Zo tribes and its sub-tribes), the victims of natural Calamities in Chin hill. The two students’ Organizations - MZP and MSU - also requested to all the students to donate for our brothers in Chin hill”.

“The MZP and MSU joint committee meeting was held at the MZP General Headquarters on 6th August 2015 discussing how the community students could help those victims of Myanmar natural catastrophe. The two students’ organization body requested all the students to donate the equivalent of a day’s lunch for our brothers who are suffering from floods and landslide in Chin hill. There is a plan for donation so that most of the students can donate for them. By remembering that even though their clans and sub-tribes are scattered in different places due to partition, mutual aid is always observed in times of suffering, the MZP and MSU are requesting each one of the students to donate money worth of their one day lunch for helping our brothers, our blood relatives who are suffering on account of floods and landslide in the Chin hill”.

Networks between Mizo societies of Mizoram and Myanmar have come into play through efforts of MZP, MSU and other civil society organizations. The newer networks created by mediating institutions and activities reveals the message of solidarity and to maintain links with a common playing field like the issues of common identity, common history, belongings, yet - divided by the border.

IV

On 26 February 2016, students from Mizo Students Union (MSU) – the largest students body of Mizoram - burnt down a primary school at the Chakma village, Lunglei district, Mizoram. A week earlier, Mizoram Chakma Alliance Against Discrimination (MCAAD) condemned MSU for demolishing a house belonging to a Chakma family. MSU further threatened forty-nine families to vacate the village, because, the families crossed the Indo-Bangladesh border, illegally. Prior to the incident, on December 17, 2015, Mizoram authorities had issued eviction notices to those families.

During fieldwork in the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) of Mizoram, it was found that the many Chakma families (besides the recently illegal migrant) have been living for decades. Mizoram authorities have extended all facilities including middle school, assistance for beneficiary under the New Land Use Policy (NLUP) (See Endnote 3) ration card, voter card and electricity.

Denying facilities provided by the government, the student body was of the opinion that many families are suspicious of being recently migrated. The student’s body emphasized that CADC officials have been doing favor - evading proper screening procedures of the law - so as to obtain ration card, electoral card, driving license and Aadhar card. The minority in this southwestern borderland is considered first - as suspicious

outsiders, second - many of them are illegal infiltrators through the porous border of southwestern Mizoram adjoining the Chittagong hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh.

Mizo believed that Mizoram is the land only for the Mizo. On many occasions, historical books and MNF documents revealed that Pu Ladenga during his several public speech reiterated that Mizoram is the land for the Mizos. On everyday basis, idening gulf between Mizo and non-Mizo is noticeable, in media channels and in the public sphere.

During fieldwork, it was found that prime priority of all the households in the CADC area is to acquired cards and ration cards. Level of suspicion and unwanted/non-desirable towards CADC and Chakma infiltrator's is intense. Misuse of official position by the CADC officials, doing favors to the illegal migrants was also found. Official dictums often diluted by CADC are the recurring questions witnessed during fieldwork in this borderland. Staffs and officials of CADC were often treated with suspicion by the Mizo society. Issues of unwanted towards illegal Chakma migrants are the main features of everyday life activities at this borderland.

Chakma as non-indigenous community of Mizoram is incorrect. Details from 'People in India – Mizoram volume, Anthropological Survey of India' (Singh 1994:48) mentioned there was only one Chakma village, near Demagiri (at present Tlabung, in western Mizoram). The village was established on 1863 by the Chakma migrant's from CHT.

In a book, 'Chakma Settlement in Mizoram' by the former Mizoram Minister C. Chawngkunga, he mentioned, "During 1900-1905, there were few Chakma who were living on the banks of Sazuk River, Khawthlangtuipui River, Thege River and Tuichawng River, under the direct control of the Chiefs of Pang, Bawm, Thangluan and Tlanglau tribes in Lushai hill" (See Chawngkunga 1983). Later, "during 1944, The Chakmas were also allowed to settle in Mizoram and treated according to the standing order issued by the Superintendent, South Lushai hill, Lunglei, vide No. 173 D/C 1119 of 22nd March 1944" (See Chawngkunga 1983). Chakmas living in Mizoram also does not qualify to be looked upon as 'illegal immigrants' for the same reasons. These tribes, mostly they have been living in these regions since those times when T.H. Lewin made Demagiri (Tlabung – a town in Mizoram south-western borderlands), his home in the 1870s.

Prior to the 1972 Indira –Mujib agreement, Chakma villages existed in and around the Tlabung (Demagiri was the old name of Tlabung) area. During fieldwork, elders recalled that there were around fifty Chakma villages prior to the 1972 agreement. CADC officials during fieldwork mentioned that at present, there are eighty-three Chakma villages in Mizoram. One thing is clear, the number of their villages increased many fold after the

1972 agreement. The further increase of villages was mainly due to the inception of CADDC – the sixth schedule autonomous district provision under India’s constitution. Few elders mentioned that, an estimate of more than one lakh Chakma had migrated from East Pakistan (Bangladesh, at present) to India during 1964 - 1971, because of - ethnic violence, mistreatment by East Pakistan government and the submergence of cultivable land by Kaptai hydroelectric dam. During 1964, the Indian government began to resettle refugees without granting them citizenship. In 1972, the ‘Indo-Bangladeshi Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace’, was signed in the aftermath of the Bangladeshi Liberation war. The agreement resulted in the influx of a quarter of million refugees fleeing from East Pakistan to various parts northeast India. One of the contending elements in the agreement was the grant of citizenship, for those, who had entered India before 25th March 1971. As part of the agreement, many of them were resettled, as refugees and deported into the Northeast Frontier Agency (present Arunachal Pradesh).

During fieldwork, copy of a memorandum was obtained from the MZP headquarter at Aizawl (See Endnote 4). The figures as submitted in the memorandum are based on the registrar of headcounts (See Endnote 5) maintained by the MZP and Young Mizo Association (YMA) – the most influential and powerful civil society in Mizoram - units in the minority settlements of Mizoram. The figures are not based on the figures as per Census of India. Rather, the figures are based on their registrar. Details of the memorandum -

“From 1901 till date, the Chakma population has increased by 44,004 percent, which is not a possible normal human reproduction. Going by historical records, the MZP stated that they have never lived in Mizoram and have never been considered as indigenous people of the Mizoram. During the British rule, the Lushai hill (Mizoram) administrators issued several orders time after time to control foreigners, and the Chakmas were one of the foreigners mentioned in those orders. Under the British administration, they were allowed to stay for a year within Mizoram if they were willing to help - digging the roads around the state’s border. They were also permitted to stay up to three years, if the administrators give them a special permit. During the second census in 1911, there were 302 Chakmas in Mizoram. The population increased to 680 (225 percent growth) in 1921, then further to 836 (122.94 percent increase) in 1931. In the 1941 census, their population skyrocketed to 5,088 (608 percent increase), then further to 15,297 (300.64% growth) in 1951. In 1961 census, the figure rose to 19,327, and again to 22,392 in 1971, to 39,905 in 1981 and jumped to 80,000 in 1991. As it was no longer allowed to segregate the population by caste from 2001, the exact growth of Chakma population is now not known, but it is certain than they are roughly around 1,50,000”.

Mizo society suspects that there is a big difference between the total number of Chakma in the official figure and the actual head counts conducted by MSU and other civil society groups, in this borderland. The dominant society is of the opinion that the total number of the minority population in the official figure is not correct. During fieldwork, it was found that the demographic registrar of CADDC, mentioned that till 2015, the total Chakma population in Mizoram is 55,413.

At present, there is an ongoing resentment by the minority towards the state authority for changing names and localities into Mizo terminologies. State engages on changing names of non-Mizo towns and localities into Mizo names in the official records. CADC headquarter was not spared. From “Kamalanagar” (a Chakma term), was officially changed into “Chawngte”, which is a Mizo term. During fieldwork, minorities commented that changing nomenclatures promotes the notion that Mizoram is the land for Mizos. It promotes Mizo identity into geographical spaces of non-Mizos.

The political emancipation of Chakmas in Mizoram occurred, first during 1953. During that time, Mizoram was the scheduled district of Assam. During 1950s, Lushai hill District Council (LHDC) had no elected member from minority community in the council. As a result, the Assam Government nominated Medhi Chakma - a Chakma - representative into LHDC administration as member by nomination. By 1953, Chakma Regional Council (CRC) was formed.

During fieldwork, Mizo elders commented that since 1953, Chakma leaders were not in favor to build ‘international border fences’ in the porous borders between India and Bangladesh. Chakma elders opined that migrants from Chittagong hills, settled prior to the 26th January 1950 in Mizoram. As a result, they were given the right to vote in election in consistent with the Representation of India Act, 1950. But, elders refused allegations and accusations that CADC does favor to illegal migrants. Elders opined that hosting illegal migrants and demographic explosion is not true on all counts.

Mizo elders commented that Chakmas do not need a Political party to win elections from the two Chakma majority constituencies – Kamalanagar & Tlabung. They do not vote for Mizo candidates. They vote for the Chakma candidates only – cementing ethnic belongings are supreme. To a Chakma, political ideologies and affiliations are secondary and ethnic sentiments are primary. Ethnic sentiments define the political affiliation at the borderland. Party based ideologies and political dictums are mutually opposite at the borderland.

V

Refugees from Chittagong suffer from accusations and suspicions by the Mizo society in the Chakma borderlands. Despite of such accusations, a fact is that Chakma villages are increasing year after years. More and more houses have been witnessing in the village roadsides. Increase in Chakma villages increase level of mistrust. This is a fact at the South-western borderlands. During 1997, authorities noticed the sporadic growth of Chakma population in Mizoram. Media discussions followed. Census figures of 1991 and 1981 confirmed that population growth rate was much faster than the overall growth rate. Published works pointed that during

1951-61, decadal growth of minority population – Chakma - in Mizoram was sixty seven percent, much higher than the state's overall growth rate (See Partha S Ghosh 2016 & BG Verghese 1997). At the moment, a fierce reaction by Chakma to state authority was the demand for creation of a Union Territory at the South-western borderland threatening break up geographical spaces.

On the other hand, refugees from Myanmar are issued refugee cards by the state. The economic conditions of the refugees are vulnerable. With the cards, they can get access to subsidized food and medical helps. Church and civil society organizations lend help. More refugees from Myanmar will seek refuge in Mizoram. More social problems will occur.

It is clear that during fieldwork, Mizo's viewpoint on Chakmas are migrants, their settlements were not that old and they are non-indigenous ethnic unit within Mizoram is indeed problematic. Lack of historical documents aggravated such ongoing divisions of 'us' and 'them' – welcoming to migrants from Myanmar and unwanted to illegal migrants at the south-western borderland is a social construct. A proper historiography is required such distorted narratives. The dominant society - Mizo - label them as 'outsiders', 'non-indigenous without referring to valid historical documents is odd on all counts.

REFERENCES

- Baud, M and Willem van Schendel (1997) "Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands" *Journal of World History*, 8(2), 211-242.
- Chawngkunga, C (1983) *Chakma Settlements in Mizoram*, Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute.
- Colson, E (1971) *The Social Consequences of Resettlement: The impact of the Kariba Resettlement upon the Gwembe Tonga*. Manchester: University of Manchester Press.
- Gellner, Ernst (1990) "Tribalism and The State in The Middle east" *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, Eds. Philip Khoury and Joseph Kostiner. Berkley: University of California Press, 109-126.
- Ghosh, Partha S (2016) *Migrants, Refugees and the Stateless in South Asia*. New Delhi: Sage.
- Harrell-Bond, B (1986) *Imposing Aid: Emergency Assistance to Refugees*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hathaway, JC (2007) "Forced Migration Studies: Could we Agree just to 'Date'?" *Journal of Refugee Studies* 20(3), 349-69.
- Jones, Stephen B (1945) *Boundary Making: A Handbook for Statesmen, Treaty Editors and Boundary Commissioners*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- MacKenzie, Alexander (1995, Reprint) *The Northeast Frontier of India*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 363-366.
- Malkki, L (1995) "Refugees and Exile: From 'Refugee Studies' to the National Order of Things", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24, 495-523.
- Mizoram State Archive, Sl. No 1031, CB-85.
- Pandey, Gyan (2001) *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pachau, Joy LK and Willem van Schendel (2014) *The Camera as Witness*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.
- Sahlins, Peter (1989) *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 275-276.
- The Mizoram Gazette (2003), 'Extraordinary', Vol. XXXII, Pp.1-2.
- The Gazette of India (2010), 'Extraordinary - Part II', Vol. XXIII, Pp. 1-3.
- UNHCR (2013) Global Trends 2012: Displacement – The New 21st Century Challenge. http://unhcr.org/globaltrends/june2013/UNHCR%20TRENDS%202012_V08_web.pdf. (Assessed on 4october2022)
- Verghese, BG (1997) *India's Northeast Resurgent: Ethnicity, Insurgency, Governance, Development*. Delhi: Konark Publication.
- Vumson (1993), *Zo History*, Aizawl: Published by the Author.
- Zetter, R "Labeling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 4(1), 39-61.

ENDNOTES

1. The present day Mizoram was known as LHDC – an autonomous district of Assam – during 1947- 1972. It became a Union Territory on 1972 and finally achieved statehood on 1987.
2. Press Release Copy obtained from MZP General Headquarters, 4th November 2016

3. NLUP is the flagship development program of the congress party under LalThanhawla. On assuming office during December 2008, the congress ministry of Mizoram planned NLUP to progressively wean away *jhum* families from destructive *jhum* practices and open opportunities for more productive and sustainable livelihood options. It was first launched as a pilot project during 2009-10.

4. Memorandum Submitted on 13th April 2015. During fieldwork on November 2016, a copy of the memorandum was obtained from MZP General Headquarters, Aizawl.

5. Since 1997, YMA and MZP have been doing headcounts at their branch units in Mizoram. Such headcounts are illegal and has never been challenged in Mizoram.