

# 'A Legacy of Divided Nations': Partitions and the Making of North-Eastern India from Colonial to Post-Colonial Times

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### Introduction

It has been since a decade now that north-east India has become the focus of India's Look East Policy – a policy perspective that sought to re-define India's engagement with her south-Asian neighbourhood based, among others, on the pillars of connectivity and tourism. This re-imagination of a region that had become synonymous with politics over immigration, insurgency and insularity for decades, was at the core of the new thrust in India's foreign policy in the new century. Encapsulated in the idea of Look-East Policy was an engagement with the history of partition of the the eastern part of the sub-continent as well as the regional identity of this geo-political space that had become proverbial as the land of Seven Sisters- a tag-line to denote the seven states of the north-east.<sup>1</sup>The publication of the North Eastern Region Vision 2020, published and circulated by the DONER Ministry succeeded in generating renewed interest and ideation in academic and administrative circles on this geo-political space and the re-imagination of its regional identity at the turn of the twenty-first century. At the core of this re-imagination was the engagement with the history of north-eastern partition. The Vision document, published in 2008, was quick to point out that:

it is recognized that the Partition of India and the denial, since the India-Pakistan War of 1965, of transit facilities to physically link all but 29 kilometres of the north-east to the rest of India has severely limited the prospects of the North-East.

The Look-East Policy was therefore an 'imaginative leap in foreign policy, defence policy and internal security policy ... to end the region's geopolitical isolation and put it on the path to activated and inclusive growth.'<sup>2</sup>Few studies have actually gone into the cultural and historical roots of the regional identity of north-east India and fewer

still have made attempts to relate colonial cartography with the making of the regional identity of this peripheral region of modern India. This paper seeks to explore some of these gaps.

Map making has been an integral part of the colonial strategy stretching over more than one and half centuries. In fact, this has been an acknowledged part of the colonial policy in the Indian subcontinent. Today, when India is engaged in a renewed debate on the twin issues of nationalism and integration, reflected in public practices associated with the national anthem and the national flag, discourses on national and regional cartography and identities have assumed more significance than in a long time. B. D. Chattopadhyaya in a recent book argues that,<sup>3</sup>'the nation of India is of course, a recent unity'.... Two points that emerge from the voluminous contributions of geographers and anthropologists towards the understanding of diversities are: (i) centres as nodes for network and (ii) the implied relationship between spatial hierarchies which are conditioned geographically.

From the perspective of historical time spans, the points, although 'of heuristic value, have to be checked against historical evidence...' It is important therefore to also interrogate the antiquity of the north-eastern region in the context of the above discussed hierarchy between the nation-state and the region and often argued in politics and debated in historical studies.<sup>4</sup>As it exists today, northeast India is a land which is at the cusp of India's borders with countries of south and south-east Asia. Sharing boundaries with Bangladesh, Myanmar, China and Bhutan, the region, till today, is ethnically divided and territorially contested. The roots of this contested reality of north-east India based on international and ethnic claims and assertions perhaps is coterminous with the long history of Indian map-making which is founded on the conscious disruptions of traditional and pre-colonial connectivities in south-Asia. This story was acknowledged by none other than Lord Curzon himself

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in 1907, at a lecture at Oxford, fresh from his return from India. Curzon observed that:

...In the first place the idea of a demarcated frontier is itself an essentially modern conception and finds little or no place in the ancient world. In Asia, the oldest inhabited continent there has always been a strong instinctive aversion to the acceptance of fixed boundaries, arising partly from the nomadic habits of people, partly from the dislike of precise arrangements that is typical of the oriental mind, but more still from the idea that in the vicissitudes of fortune more is to be expected from an unsettled than from a settled frontier. ... In Asiatic countries it would be true to say that demarcation has never taken place except under European pressure and by the intervention of European agents. ...<sup>5</sup>

Though this assertion is founded on Curzon's experience of drawing the Durand line, the narrative of the making of north-east India is also essentially reflective of this disruptive philosophy and practice of map making.

### The Early Colonial Antecedents

Colonial exercise of map-making in northeast India is perhaps the most prolonged and complex which has not been analyzed by academics and policy makers as yet. Despite the passage of seven decades since the formal transfer of power by the British Government in India, boundaries between countries that emerged in the wake of India's colonial experience continue to be in a state of flux as the identities of people who came to ethnically divided by political boundaries of state-nations continue to be fluid and contested. This is visible now, than ever before, in what is understood as India's north-eastern region where till very recent times, the governments of India and Bangladesh had to grapple with the process of demarcation of boundaries.<sup>6</sup>The visit of two Indian prime ministers to Bangladesh between 2011 and 2015 and the fanfare around the signing of the land-boundary agreements notwithstanding, the situation is no better today than it was seventy years ago. While one can probably appreciate the tumult in the lives of the people and the nations and the unsettling situation at the moment of partition, it is bewildering to see lingering chaos that persist even as we write this paper. The porous borders, the un-demarcated boundaries between India and Bangladesh and the politics over citizenship and uncertainties and insecurities that afflict the lives of the Assamese, the Chakma, Hajong and the Khasi communities across the borders are grim reminders of the fact that the subcontinent's 'tryst with destiny' is far from over. Despite the claims of the Indian state in its Look-East and Act-East/ Neighborhood First policy seeking to move beyond the disruptive histories of partition of India, the attitudes on the ground have been far from positive

towards that direction. Politics in this region seem to carry the burden of history and the legacy of suspicion and antagonisms that characterized the early decades of the twentieth century. In northeast India, the idea of borders and borderlands is more nuanced and complex as they impact both national and regional politics in many diverse ways. Often the ideas of borders and borderlands with their elaborate paraphernalia for nation states mean little within the region and without understanding of the people who live within it. Nations therefore are as much a concern of the state as it is an engagement of the community of people who reside within the territory of the nation state. Partition, understood in international relations as dividing or tearing apart a unified territory, has its impact on relations between communities and regions and also seek to assert an inflexible character against any scope of porosity and fluidity. This idea is more important to appreciate both popular and statist response to human mobility, migration and settlement in areas which at some point of modern historical experience were a contiguous region till boundary lines split up the lands to constitute nation states.<sup>7</sup>

The genesis of partition as the corner-stone of political map-making can be traced to the inception of colonial rule in eastern India. The arrival of colonial rule in India in Bengal and the *divani* attracted the attention of the English East India Company officers and servants to the region located on the northeast of Bengal. In fact, the name northeast, which in its ordinary sense indicates a direction on the compass, came to mean a geo-spatial location in relation to the Company headquarter at Fort William. With the political expansion of the colonial rule, this geo-spatial reference acquired a political entity which has been shaped by many partitions beyond the more recent experiences of 1947 partitions. One of the earliest experiences of partition, drawing up of borders and mapmaking having its impact on the making of northeast India was on the borders between colonial Bengal and the Khasi-Jaintia foothills close on the heels of the East India Company acquiring the Dewani of Bengal. First such initiative can be traced to 1772 when an expedition was launched against the Khasi-Jaintia as the Company officers realized the value of 'monopoly of the lime quarries'. An important outcome of this expedition was the survey and demarcation of the boundaries between the Company controlled Sylhet and the Khasi-Jaintia territories ruled by indigenous chiefs. The outcome of the expedition also confined the Khasi chiefs to the mountains and left the plains and foothills of Sylhet free for colonial exploitation.<sup>8</sup>This was only the beginning of a long process as many such demarcations were to follow as colonial interests expanded into areas which were not exactly in the vicinity of Bengal. The visit of the Company

officers into the Naga hills in the early 1820s was an interesting precursor of expanding colonial interest and interference over areas there. These areas would become a contested frontier space and borderland of British northeastern frontier as the Patkai range watershed came to be recognized by the colonial state as the boundary of control, running across Naga inhabited areas since 1834. Such cartographic exercises were also rampant in the Manipur frontier as the defeat of the Burmese forces by the Company in the First Anglo-Burmese War brought about British colonial hegemony over Manipur. As Pradip Phanjoubam points out,

.....in the Manipur sector the border was officially made in 1834. After ending Ava(Burmese) occupation of Manipur and Assam in 1826 at the end of the first Anglo-Burmese War and the signing of the Treaty of Yandaboo, the Chindwin river was deemed the boundary of the British protectorate Manipur, putting the Kabaw valley under Manipur. But in 1834, ... the British persuaded the Manipuri king that a new boundary should be negotiated and Captain R. Boileau Pemberton as Boundary Commissioner drew what came to be known as the Pemberton Line along the foot of the 'Murring Hills' on the western edge of the Kabaw valley... In 1881, this boundary was realigned by the then British Political agent in Manipur, Major James Johnstone. ...In 1896, another British political agent in Manipur, Colonel Maxwell put 38 boundary pillars along this boundary which then came to be known as the Pemberton-Johnstone-Maxwell line<sup>9</sup>.

This was subsequently was ratified by India and Burma as the international borders in 1967. Such processes of map-making was also evident in the case of Tripura where scholars have shown how the idea of a colonial frontier subsequently transformed itself into an international boundary. The process of boundary demarcation in Tripura was, as in Manipur a long affair. In Tripura, the colonial interests of revenue and resource appropriation combined itself with demands of law and order and succession conflicts to culminate in an elaborate process of boundary demarcation which 'worked with contrasting dimensions.'<sup>10</sup>Therefore in 1782, 'when the Rani of Tripura asked the Tippera Collector to assist her son's succession, the Collector obliged, and in return, secured a new boundary at the base of the hills, inducing the Raja to move his capital to Agartala. The Raja kept private landholdings in Tippera District, but in 1782, his royal authority had officially retreated to mountains east of Comilla'.<sup>11</sup>The Company was therefore now free to constitute the district of Tippera in 1790. But subsequent disputes between the English East India Company and the Maharaja of Tripura over *khas* lands located in the bordering *pargana* led the English Company Government to appoint Mr. Henry Rickett to demarcate the boundary between Tripura and Tippera in 1846. The process

was a long drawn affair, with Mr. Rickett ordering a couple of surveys in 1848. But it was only by 1854 that the boundary between the hill state of Tripura and the British district of Tippera came to be settled after survey by the arbitrators Messers Leycester and Campbell. Brick pillars were erected in 1866 at the angles of the boundary and these were maintained by the colonial government. This boundary was not only the district boundary but also the imperial frontier line of British India.<sup>12</sup>The process of boundary demarcation cutting across the Zo territories was concluded in 1901 as the colonial state drew a boundary between the Lushai hills and the Chin hills. This boundary has also persisted and has since been legitimized as the boundary between the Mizo Hills District/ Mizoram and the Chin State of Myanmar. The process of boundary demarcations was not limited to the eastern borders of northeast India alone. In the north, the boundary between Tibet and India in the eastern Himalayas came to be formalized with an agreement signed between the representatives of British and Tibet in July 1914. This boundary came to be known as the McMahon line, named after the man who negotiated the treaty on behalf of the British government of India. The result of this exercise was the drawing of an 850 mile long line which ran from the northern edge of Bhutan to upper Burma and 'reflected the colonial concerns for a militarily defensible boundary alignment.'<sup>13</sup>The Bengal Boundary Award made on the eve of transfer of power in India demarcating the boundary between India and East Pakistan in 1947 by Sir Cyril Radcliffe, the barrister who headed the Commission, was the culmination of this process of cartographic manoeuvres by the colonial state in India. The political scientist and policy maker Sanjoy Hazarika sums up the situation well when he points out that 'what is not often understood is that the North-East suffered the impact of not one but two partitions.'<sup>14</sup>The First was the 1937 separation of Burma which split up the Nagas, Mizos, the Manipuris and the tribes of Arunachal between two sovereignties, devastating kinship relations and trade connectivities and the second was the partition of Bengal and Assam in 1947, culminating in the Radcliffe Line of 1947 which not only divided the Hindus and Muslims of this region on religious and ethnic lines, it also divided the smaller ethnic communities like the Khasis, Garos, Hajongs, Rabhas, Karbis Koch-Rajbongshis, the Reangs and the Chakmas, to name a few. These cartographic alignments though initially introduced with the philosophy of colonial exploitation, culminated in the drawing of many lines which till today, constitute to divide people and create disputed borders both internally and internationally shaping this region and determining India's relations with its immediate neighbours.



The coming of the English East India rule in Assam in 1826 was also therefore the beginning of a series of partitions and mapmaking in the region in the hills and the plains. In sharp contrast to the area being at the centre of connectivity between East Asia and South –East Asia, the region was transformed initially into a borderland of an expanding colonial empire and subsequently into bordered lands as economic and administrative frontier lines came to acquire the shape of international borders since the twentieth century. Thus the making of northeast India was endemic to the British colonial project of contested expansion and hegemony over the subcontinent which has to be appreciated through a reappraisal of colonial cartographic imagination and projects in South Asia.

### **Partition of Assam and Tripura and the Making of Northeast India In 1947**

Among the numerous partition initiatives that came to affect the northeast, one of the most profound was the Radcliffe Award. Though drawn up in less than forty days, it had a shattering impact on the ground, disrupting livelihoods and uprooting lives that had grown roots in the region over centuries. When the partition proposals came in June 1947, it was decided that if Bengal was to be partitioned, a referendum would be organized under the aegis of the Central government to decide whether Sylhet which was a predominantly Bengali speaking district of South Assam was to remain in Assam or to merge with East Bengal.<sup>15</sup> This pronouncement not only brought Assam as yet another colonial province into the vortex of partition politics and along with it, brought communities of the hills and plains of north-east India, who otherwise had no direct connection with the declaration on the proposed partition of the Indian sub-continent, into the partition discourse.

When the result of the Referendum was made public, it came to light that a majority of the votes were in favour of amalgamation with East Pakistan. Sylhet was put on the dissection table of the Boundary Commission. Therefore in the post-Referendum situation, the Sylhet question was placed before the Bengal Boundary Commission with the contending sides making detailed presentations. On the August 14<sup>th</sup>, Sylhet except three and a half *thanas* became a part of East Pakistan.<sup>16</sup> What remained in India became a part of the Cachar district of the composite state of Assam in post-colonial India.

Beyond the narratives of the administrative history of partition politics, when partition finally took place, it affected politics and the lives of the people in Assam in many ways. It physically separated northeast India from the rest of the country save through a small passage of 22

kilometres commonly known as the *chicken neck*. Assam lost 4,769 square miles of territory and a population of 2,825,282 persons. But the loss of territory was not as significant as was the loss in paddy fields, lime and cement industries and tea gardens of Sylhet.<sup>17</sup> The adverse impact of the transfer of the Sylhet district to East Pakistan was noted in the Census Report of 1951 which observed that: 'the far reaching effects of this loss will continue to be felt by Assam as well as India for many years to come.'<sup>18</sup> Partition disrupted the natural channels of riverine communication, rail and roads networks that linked the hill areas of colonial Assam through the Surma valley. One of the scholars crisply noted that, 'Assam's rail link with the rest of the country was snapped following the Partition. It was only in January, 1950 that the rail-link was restored by a metre-gauge line through the narrow chicken-neck corridor of north Bengal. The disruption of the rail link had a very adverse effect on Assam's economy. Partition also resulted in the loss of Chittagong port which was a major outlet for Assam tea.'<sup>19</sup> Partition of Assam and the loss of Sylhet<sup>20</sup> made Assam a land locked province as its outlet to the sea since 1904<sup>21</sup> was through the port of Chittagong, which became a part of East Pakistan.

Partition of colonial Assam in 1947 also adversely affected the social and economic lives of the various tribal communities residing within colonial Assam. It disrupted the traditional links that the tribal communities such as the Khasis, Jaintias and the Garos had with the East Pakistani districts of Sylhet and Mymensingh respectively. These tribes were settled not only in the hill districts of Assam but also in the plains of Sylhet and Mymensingh. At the stroke of a pen these people were internally split into Indians and Pakistanis depending on their residence. The traditional inter-community linkages in the area was so strong that these hill tribes 'for ages depended on their trade with the plains...'<sup>22</sup> Centuries old prosperous border-trade based economy was killed by closing the borders and erecting check-posts.<sup>23</sup> In the pre-partition scenario, the plains of Sylhet used to be the main market for the produce of the hills and foothills of the Khasi Jaintia lands. As a result of the partition of Sylhet, a border of about 150 miles in length was created across the Khasi –Jaintia hills. The boundary of the new state of East Pakistan partitioned the lands inhabited by the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo as boundary came to be demarcated 'from boundary pillar no 1071 located at the tri-junction of Rangpur district of Bangladesh, west Garo Hills district of Meghalaya and Goalpara district of Assam and ends at the boundary pillar no 1338 at the tri-junction of Sylhet district of Bangladesh, Jaintia Hills district and Cachar district of Assam.'<sup>24</sup> Partition and the amalgamation of Sylhet with East Pakistan caused 'a virtual economic blockade of

the Khasi hills.<sup>25</sup>The movement of goods were initially discouraged and subsequently stopped from moving between Khasi-Jaintia hills and East Pakistan. While the Khasi- Jaintia people of the hills found themselves cut away from their kinsmen in the plains they were also reduced to penury without a market for their agricultural produce and mineral resources. Trade which amounted to more than three crores of rupees annually in the pre-partition days came to a standstill which resulted in the tribal communities residing at the borders between Khasi Hills and Sylhet reaching the brink of starvation.<sup>26</sup>The affected in the Khasi Hills district amounted to about 80,000 people and about 16,000 households This resulted in largescale migration of people from these border areas to new settlements selected for their relocation in the Ri-Bhoi region of present day Meghalaya.<sup>27</sup>

The greatest impact of partition was clearly through migration of population from one region to another, both within the country and across newly created international borders and the resulting demographic transformation. Partition changed the way politics came to be perceived not only in Assam but in the entire northeastern India. While interprovincial borders of colonial era became international boundaries, perceptions about population migration also underwent a change. Inter-provincial migration which was easy and mostly unrestricted became restricted by the legal regimes governing international population movement. Though there was no restriction of people migrating from East Pakistan to Assam in the initial years after Independence, gradually the provincial governments and the Government of India began to discourage migration from East Pakistan to India by 1950. Partition introduced the 'foreigners' dimension into politics of northeast India with the introduction of the passport system in 1952. The situation became critical as the initial trickle of people wanting to migrate to India from East Pakistan rose dramatically by 1950 as the political atmosphere in East Pakistan became increasingly hostile to the minority communities. The Census Report for Assam, Manipur and Tripura, 1951 observed, that 'the recent influx of Hindu refugees from Pakistan constitutes the biggest migration stream into Assam during the last decade.' Following the partition, there has been an almost steady and continuous exodus of the Hindus of Pakistan into Assam. The number of displaced almost touched about half a million people by April 1950. The grave situation led the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan to meet in April and come up with an agreement, popularly known as the Nehru - Liaquat Pact. But despite the pact there was no improvement in the situation on the ground and a large number of displaced preferred to settle down in Assam. The Census of 1951 revealed that as many as 274,455 persons were

settled in Assam, predominantly in the plains. Partition of Sylhet from Assam and its amalgamation with East Pakistan had a major impact on the flow of refugees from East Pakistan to Assam. The Census Report pointed out that 'most of the refugees come from the bordering district of Sylhet.'<sup>28</sup>As community lives were disrupted in post-colonial Assam by the operation of partition, migration of refugees from East Pakistan had an adverse impact on community relations both in the plains and the hills of Assam. Settlement of these refugees in the various districts of Assam was viewed as a threat to the idea of political homogenization of spaces. In Shillong, in the Khasi Hills District where about 66 acres of land was requisitioned by the Government of Assam in two blocks of Bhagyakul estate and Umpling village for the settlement of 351 families, tribal- non tribal relations deteriorated as the non-tribals came to be perceived as '*dkhars*' or foreigners for the first time. Inclusion of non-Tribals in the District Council established under the 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule of the Indian Constitution led to staging of black flag demonstrations on 27<sup>th</sup> June, 1952 and attempts to obstruct the inaugural ceremony.<sup>29</sup>The protests were accompanied by processions which were 'dispersed by the police with tear gas which was used for the first time in Khasi and Jaintia Hills to break a political procession.'<sup>30</sup>It was almost prophetically noted in the Census Report of 1951 that, 'the far reaching effects of this loss will continue to be felt by Assam as well as India for many years to come.'<sup>31</sup>

The partition and the making of present Tripura, unlike Assam was unique as it was a princely state. Comprising the hills and plains, Tripura presented for the historians of partition an unprecedented situation. Contrary to the claims made in most standard texts, the princely state of Tripura was also partitioned as the lands held by the Maharaja in the plains of East Bengal were taken away from his control and with the creation of East Pakistan. The kings of Tripura since the fifteenth century were the rulers of both the hills and some areas in the plains of eastern Bengal especially Comilla and parts of Sylhet, Noakhali and Chittagong districts. These plains areas came under the sway of the colonial control in 1761 after an operation led by Lieutenant Mathews on behalf of the Chittagong Council. 'Marriot the collector was sent from the Chittagong Council on 15<sup>th</sup> March to settle and receive the revenues of Tripura...the paying part of Tripura lay on plains and was known as Chakla Roshnabad,'<sup>32</sup> a total area of 555 square miles. A reference to the plains is significant in the context of partition as hills of Tripura became the home for a multitude of people who migrated to from their homes in East Bengal since the eve of partition till 1970s. Though the Maharani, as the President of the Regency Council signed the Instrument

of Accession to the Indian Union on the 13<sup>th</sup> August, 1947<sup>33</sup> the award of the Boundary commission formalized the process of partition. Accordingly the estates of Chakla Roshnabad which belonged to the Maharaja of Tripura as a *zamindari* now came to be located within East Pakistan. Thus with the Partition of India, princely Tripura, along with Punjab, Bengal and Assam also experienced the process of Partition and the people living in the princely state of Tripura were also exposed to the vicissitudes of post partition politics. Confident about the wisdom of the rulers, the Hindu subjects of Chakla Roshnabad did not submit any memorandum to the Radcliffe Commission for inclusion of the *zamindari* into the post partition Tripura though they were an inalienable part of the territorial possessions of the king of Tripura much before the onset of colonial rule. After 1949 Tripura was made a Chief Commissioner's province and Chakla Roshnabad became 'the absolute private property'<sup>34</sup> of the Tripura royal family. With the formation of East Pakistan, Chakla Roshnabad was lost on transfer of power to East Pakistan despite the protests by the Hindu subjects and the subordinate zamindars, thus completing the partition of Tripura as well.<sup>35</sup>

### Partition's Post-Script in Northeast India

The situation became critical due to large scale migration to India from East Pakistan by 1950. The Census Report 1951 for Assam, Manipur and Tripura, observed, that, 'the recent influx of Hindu refugees from Pakistan constitutes the biggest migration stream into Assam during the last decade.' The Census Report 1951, observed that:

Soon after the 1949 Refugee Census occurred the incidences of Soneswar and Habiganj, the oppression of the Hajongs in Northern Mymensingh and the atrocities committed on the Santhals in Rajshahi, in East Dinajpur, etc. Then came the gruesome incidents over large areas of East Pakistan in February-March 1950, especially Dacca. These led to the inevitable result, viz, the desertion by hundreds and thousands of Hindus in East Pakistan of their hearths and homes to seek shelter in the neighboring districts of West Bengal and Assam whichever was nearer...<sup>36</sup>

The number of displaced almost touched about half a million people by April, 1950. A large number of displaced preferred to settle down in Assam. The Census of 1951 revealed that 259,946 persons were settled in plains areas, only 14,509 persons moved into the hill areas.<sup>37</sup> The political situation in East Pakistan only contributed to the inflow of more Hindu refugees into Assam. As against 273,000 refugees in the Census of 1951, the number of refugees returned was 628,000 in the Census of 1961. The influx of refugees contributed to social tension in Assam. Assamese elites feared danger to their economic,

political and cultural life. Situation became more critical by 1961.<sup>38</sup> The culture conscious Assamese middle class who initially welcomed these immigrants subsequently began to be wary of them as these immigrants became vote-banks of the ruling party in power.<sup>39</sup> The birth of Bangladesh on the Partition of Pakistan in 1971 made the situation worse. It added the 'Bangladeshi' dimension to the 'foreigners' imbroglio. The Assam Anti-Foreigners Agitations were launched in 1978. It came to a close with the signing of the Assam Accord in 1985. Despite the signing of the accord the threat of migrants from across the borders never dissipated from Assamese popular imagination, taking the form of anti-Foreigner demonstrations from time to time.

In Tripura, the partition of Tripura and the loss of Chakla Roshnabad only contributed to the aggravation of a social and political crisis. One of the pioneering scholars, Tripur Chandra Sen, in his *Tripura in Transition*, pointed out that '[h]ad the zamindari been included in the State of Tripura, the refugee problem would not have been so acute and injurious to the people of this country.'<sup>40</sup> This was similar to the situation in Assam where the loss of Sylhet deprived the Brahmaputra Valley of a buffer zone for absorbing the partition displaced from East Pakistan and exposed the Brahmaputra valley to refugee inflow. Partition also exposed Tripura to an enormous inflow of refugees. As a relatively peaceful state contiguous to East Pakistan and as an area that had welcomed the settlement of Bengalis from East Bengal under the patronage of the Maharajas, Tripura was perceived as a safe haven for the displaced Bengali Hindus from the various districts of East Pakistan after the Partition as East Pakistan witnessed a spurt in communal violence, especially after 1950. Most of the displaced hailed from those areas which formed the *zamindari* of the Maharaja. In 1950-51, the number of refugees who migrated to Tripura was as high as 1,84,000. With violent anti-minority movements breaking out in East Pakistan, the second high point of inflow of refugees was in 1964-65, when the Census data recorded the inflow of as many as 1,00,340 persons. Gayatri Bhattacharyya very aptly summed up the post Partition scenario when she recorded that, '[b]efore the partition the progress of settlement of the Bengalees was slow and steady. But after partition especially from 1951 there was a sudden spurt in immigration of the minority community of East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. At times the inflow of displaced persons slowed down but following communal troubles in East Pakistan and introduction of the passport system it again quickened... Today the displaced persons far outnumber the Tribal population.'<sup>41</sup>

Though some attempts have been made in recent times for an academic engagement with partition, these have been far from adequate and lack a comprehensive



character. The most significant gap in such studies is the inability to reconcile the history of Partition with the rise of insular regionalism and identity politics. There has been no attempt to overcome the limitations of partitioned lives and explore the pre-colonial connectivity across community lines. In this sense, there has been no decolonization in northeast India as communities have not only accepted their partitioned lives as a given-ness, they still refuse to rise above the colonial cartographic project on the ground and in their minds. We can only conclude by emphasising that the partition story in northeast India is a complex story far from the possibility of a definitive conclusion. Here, 'partition is a living history...yet to be recovered but which we are still only beginning to come to terms with.'

## NOTES

1. Now Sikkim also has been included in this formulation by the Government of India.
2. *North Eastern Region VISION 2020*, 2008
3. B.D, Chattopadhyaya, *The Concept of Bharatavarsha And Other Essays*, Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2017, 35-6.
4. P. Chatterjee, 'Claims on the Past: The Geneology of Modern History', David Arnold and David Hardiman, eds., *Subaltern Studies, Vol. VIII*, New Delhi: OUP, 1-49.
5. Lord Curzon of Kedleston, *The Romanes Lecture, Frontiers*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907, 48-9.
6. Land Boundary Agreement was signed between India and Bangladesh in 2015, which affected almost all the states of northeastern India.
7. Northeast India was a part of the large political unit often referred to as the Indian sub-continent constituting India, Burma, eastern Bengal which later became East Pakistan (later on Bangladesh).
8. H. Giri, *The Khasis Under British Rule*, New Delhi: Regency Publications, 36.
9. Pradip Phanjoubam, 'India's War Against Itself: A View From Manipur', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 50 (25), 20 Jun. 2015, 12-15.
10. Anandaroop Sen, 'Conquest and The Quotidian: Violence and the Making of Tripura (1760-1793)', Lipokmar Dzuwichu and Manjeet Baruah, eds., *Modern Practices in North East India: History, Culture, Representation*, London: Routledge, 2018, 56-88.
11. Ibid. 80-1; also see, David Ludden, 'The First Boundary of Bangladesh' *Journal of the royal Asiatic Society of Bangladesh*, 48(1), jun 2003, 1-54.
12. W. W. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Bengal*, Vol. VI, London: Trubner & Co, 1876, 356.
13. Berenice Guyot-Rechard, *Shadow States: India, China and the Himalayas*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, 51.
14. Sanjoy Hazarika, *Strangers No More*, New Delhi: Aleph, 2018, xi.
15. Bidyut Chakrabarty, *The Partition of Bengal and Assam*, London: Routledge, 2004, 177.
16. *Thana* means a police outpost. In administrative parlance it is often understood as the administrative area under an outpost.
17. *Census of India*, 1951, Vol. XII, Part I-A, 2-3.
18. Ibid, 3.
19. Udayon Misra, *The Periphery Strikes Back*, Shimla: IAS, 2000, 148, ft.nt. no.2.
20. Almost the entire district of Sylhet was transferred to East Pakistan except only an area of 709 square miles and a population of 291,320 persons in the three *thanas* of Bararpur, Ratabari, Patharkandi and a part of the Karimganj *thana* which was joined with the district of Cachar and formed a new subdivision. See the *Census of India*, 1951, Vol. XII, Part I-A, 2.
21. Since 1904, a rail link linking Dibrugarh with Chittagong was set up to carry the bulk of the tea trade from Assam. See Udayon Misra, *The Periphery Strikes Back*, 2000, 115.
22. Ibid, 115.
23. Ibid, 115-16 and 149; ft.nt.3.
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