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OPEN VERSUS CLOSED BORDER : INDIA-BANGLADESH BORDER IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

Border generally represents the demarcating line between two nation-states. It is the symbol of state sovereignty. States often consider border from the perspective of national security and give importance to the securing of its international border for maintaining its sovereignty. However, understanding the concept of border is contested, as border can be understood with the purpose it serves. For example, it provides political identity, facilitates economic trade, cultural exchanges, operation of transnational human rights bodies etc. According to the Globalists, nation-state and its borders have lost its significance. Border is no longer remained as a barrier between nation-states as there has been tremendous flow of goods and services across the borders. The process of globalization had made borders interconnected. One little change in one parts of the world brings impact to the other side of the world. In the midst of these arguments and counter arguments an attempt has been made in this paper to study India-Bangladesh border in 21st century from the perspective of open and closed border dichotomy.

Key words: border, nation state, national security, globalization, development

Introduction

For every nation-state border represents the symbol of state sovereignty. Border is the demarcating line between two neighboring states. Border, however, has its own characteristics. If some borders are open borders, some remain as closed border. Scholars of border studies have come with their own arguments in support and against of open and closed borders. In 21st century, on the one hand the unstoppable forces of globalization have made state borders more permeable by allowing free movement of goods and services across the borders and on the other hand, there are, of course issues which have made the whole world to rethink of the process of re-bordering of borders from national security perspective. In the South-Asian region, it has been found that the borders such as India-Bangladesh border are the sites of tremendous mobility of goods and people across the borders. Hence, India-Bangladesh border is considered as a porous border of the South-Asian region.

In fact, whether a border is a closed border or open border it depends on the nature of border to a great extent. In case of India-Bangladesh border it has been found that it is because of the porous nature of the border, India has gone for re-bordering process through the construction of border fencing to prevent illegal flows of people, goods and services from neighboring country, i.e., Bangladesh. It has been found that the illegal movement of people from Bangladesh to India is also associated with the origin of India-Bangladesh border which can be traced back to the partition of Indian sub-continent into two different dominions on religious ground with Hindu majority in Indian province and Muslim majority in Pakistan. No doubt, India has gone for the process of construction of border fencing keeping the national security into account, but in 21st century along with national security, there were some other issues which too made India to rethink of border fencing due to the people's demand to the same. The necessity of an open border and closed border in the context of India-Bangladesh border can be explained by looking at both the arguments and counter arguments against an open border and closed border. But before moving to those arguments/counter arguments, it is pertinent to understand the multiple connotations of the concept of border.

Understanding Border

The term border has been defined by different people different manner which has contributed towards the conceptual understanding of the concept. Initially, it was Friedrich Ratzel, a German Geographer and Ethnographer who first coined the term “Living Space” by the name “Lebensraum” and through his work he could make a foundation for German variant of Geo-Politics. Borders, according to him, are not fixed boundary line,¹ that is subjected to change. He substantiated his argument by saying that like human body, states are also organic, subjected to growth and development, and borders are the expression of the power of that organic state.² Following the organic state theory, later on it was Karl Haushofer, Frederick Jackson Turner, also made an attempt to conceptualize the term. Karl Haushofer stated that borders are delimiters of territorial control and ideology.³ Again another geo-political theorist, Frederick Jackson Turner, an American geo-political theorist, provided an American variant of Geo-politics. He stated that frontier is the line of most rapid and effective Americanization. For him, frontier is the meeting point between savagery and civilization and it played a major role in shaping the unique national character of America.⁴ Border, however, became an important matter of discussion especially for the geographers since the end of the 19th century. There were some important changes that took place in International Relations which contributed towards the growing importance of border and border studies among scholars/ academicians belonging to different disciplines. First, it was the end of cold war that drew an *ideological border* among the Europeans by dividing them into two power blocks- The Capitalist and the Socialist. Then the disintegration of Soviet Union into fifteen separate Republics and then the formation and enlargement of European Union, the 9/11 terrorist attack in the United States - all had raised the significance of borders and border became a matter of great concern for all including academicians, researcher, and state authority. The notable thing is that, the initial works on borders primarily discussed borders from the Geo-political point of view. Later on, people/scholars started viewing border from different perspective and in course of time border studies have gained an interdisciplinary character.⁵ From that point of view it can be said

that the definitions of border vary from time to time for which the term does not have any specific definition which is unanimously accepted. Border is viewed from different perspectives, such as political, social, and economic and sometimes borders are also discussed from *psychological perspective* as they create cultural and mental differences between people living on either side of the border.⁶ As mentioned above, there are, however, some remarkable definitions of border put forward by people working on borders. J. Agnew defined border as “a line on maps or barriers on the ground, whose existence are confirmed on many grounds: political, economic and social.”⁷ Gabriel Popescu defined border as the lines represented on the map which separates earth’s surface. To him, borders carry with them a sense of division or separation in space and at the same time borders have the power to inculcate a sense of commonness among some people and also people’s perception on neighbors.⁸ For Malcolm Anderson, border is not just a line; these are processes as well as institutions. Wolfgang Zeller, in the book entitled, *What makes Border Real –In the Namibia-Zambia and Uganda –South Sudan Borderlands*, has expressed the view that a border is the limit of territorial sovereignty as well as a living space and membrane of everyday interaction between borderland inhabitants and frontline agents of state authority on both sides.⁹ While discussing about borders the writer has held the view that it is the political, economic and cultural relations between the people of both sides that makes border real. Observing the mutual economic benefit brought by the settled boundary agreements between two states, Simmons has stated that borders are institutions that produce joint gains.¹⁰ Tayyab Mahmud has stated that drawing of boundaries is the inaugural gesture of the law, whereby the lines of demarcation that separate legality from illegality often create zones where bodies and spaces are placed on the other side of universality, a moral and legal no man’s land, where universality finds its spatial limit. Regarding border it has been found that border assumes the normative function of filtering the legal from illegal and often the illicit. This tension between legal, illegal and illicit makes the border an exceptional space within a nation-state. Sometimes border is understood as linear dividing line, fixed in a particular space, meant to mark the division between political space and or administrative units.¹¹ In contemporary period, however, the most widely accepted definition of border is the line that

divides two territorial entities. It needs to be mentioned that people belonging to different disciplines have made remarkable contributions towards the conceptual understanding of border and in this regard, David Newman, Brunet-Jailly, Malcolm Anderson, Donnan and Wilson, Michiel Baud and William Van Schendel etc., may be noted as the most celebrated authors of border studies who have made valuable contributions towards the conceptual understanding of the concept 'Border'. It needs to be mentioned that North America and Europe played an important and dominating role in producing literature on border studies which has evolved into an interdisciplinary field of study from a disciplinary specific perspective.¹²

Closed Border and Open Border: An Understanding

Border, the demarcating line between two nation-states, can be an open border as well as a closed border and it depends on different factors. Most importantly the national security question/factor is closely associated with this. Most often it has been found that states go for a closed border paradigm keeping the national security issue into account. States have their own justification for a closed border.

However, there are scholars who have talked in favor of an open border. In this context, border scholar Joseph H. Carnes may be mentioned. Carnes, with the help of three contemporary approaches to political theory has tried to construct arguments for open borders. According to Carnes, the general perception people hold regarding border and border guards is keeping out the criminals, subversives and invaders. But, should a government treat those innocent people who enter into a foreign land just by crossing the border for the sake of a good and decent life in the same way as with those criminals. For most of the people though the answer is yes but Carnes has strongly opposed/challenged this by arguing that border should generally be open and that people should normally be free to leave their country of origin and settle in another. With the help of three contemporary approaches to political theory i.e., *Rawlsian, the Nozickian and the Utilitarian principles*, Carnes has argued that there is little justification for restricting immigration. These three theories begin with some kind of assumption about the equal worth of individuals. As far as the Nozickian principle is concerned, following John Locke, Nozick

assumes that all the individuals in the state of nature had same natural rights and when people entered into the minimal state from the state of nature, the state has an important role to play. The state which was created with the sole aim of protecting people within a given territory is obliged to protect the rights of both citizens and non-citizens equally because the state enjoys a de-facto monopoly over the enforcement of rights within its territory. Individuals have the right to enter into voluntary exchanges with other individuals. They possess the right as individuals, not as citizens. The state may not interfere with such exchanges until they do not violate someone else's rights.¹³ From the above discussion, it is clear that a Nozickian government has no grounds for preventing immigrants as Nozick states that the land of a nation is not the collective property of its citizens. The state can legitimately exercise over that land is limited to the enforcement of the rights of individual owners. Prohibiting people from entering a territory is not a part of any state's legitimate mandate. The state has no right to restrict immigration.

In the same way, following Rawls, Carnes has argued that John Rawls provides a justification for an activist state with positive responsibilities for social welfare. After discussing Rawls, Carnes has come to this point that even in an ideal world people might have powerful reasons to migrate from one state to another. One might fall in love with a citizen from another land, one might belong to a religion which has few followers in one's native land and many in another, moreover, one might seek cultural opportunities that are only available in another society. These are some of the reasons that make migration across state boundaries important.¹⁴ Again, following utilitarian principle which seeks to maximize utility, Carnes has argued that any utilitarian approach would give more weight to some reasons for restricting immigration. For instance, if migration hurt citizens economically, then there should be restriction on it. It needs to be mentioned that it is not only economic factors, but if immigration would affect the existing culture of a given society that would count against open immigration. However, there are differences among utilitarian scholars regarding the quality of all pleasures and following that not only Carnes, there are some other scholars who have also argued in favor of an open border.

According to Teresa Hayter, people have migrated throughout their history. In every stage of human history, it has been found that the ruler tried to exclude others from their territories in different ways. In the article titled, "Open Border: The Case against Immigration Controls," Teresa Hayter has mentioned that, comprehensive controls to stop immigration are a recent phenomenon. Governments adopt different measures to stop the process of migration or to exclude the people they do not wish to receive in their territories. Those people are treated in such a way which undermines the different norms of liberal democracy including the rule of law and human rights.¹⁵ It needs to be mentioned that though the right of free movement across frontiers is not a right enshrined in any declaration on human rights, still its denial can be worst and most vicious abuses of human rights.¹⁶

Open border or no border in fact, permits the unconstrained migration of people. Harald Bauder regarding human mobility stated that it is not only just crossing the physical border line, it also addresses other aspects of the border such as the unconstrained mobility of people within a territory after crossing its border and the ability to engage in society and the labor market as equal members.¹⁷ When open border is talked of, according to the imagination of Bauder, it implies the territorial nature of political organization and the existence of territorial borders. According to Bauder, in the contemporary geopolitical situation, open borders and no border perspectives are a critique of existing border regulations and bordering practices. Border and migration controls are a means to selectively permit some people to enter a national territory as immigrants, future citizens, visitors and temporary residents while putting restriction in mobility to others. Border serve as a tool to manage national labor markets, foreign affairs agendas and security concerns, they create identities of belonging and non-belonging. From a liberal political theory perspective, migration controls violate the overarching liberal principles such as human equality. Again, from a liberal utilitarian position, it is difficult to justify migration controls. In the words of Carnes, open borders would be of greater collective utility than borders that restrict mobility. In the same way, the Marxian perspective too criticizes border for creating and reinforcing social injustices. According to the Marxists, migration restrictions enforce the

segmentation of labor between the rich and poor countries and they argue for the abolition of border restriction.¹⁸

In the same way, the feminists as well as the scholars of anti-colonial struggles all oppose borders because of the role they play in the formation of oppressive subject identities.¹⁹ In support of their argument, they have stated that in contemporary periods national borders are instruments of implementing these practices of oppression, subordination and political exclusion. As expressed by Anderson and other border scholars the national borders have created different subject identities like citizen, non-citizen, migrant, immigrants etc. at the borders.²⁰ It needs to be mentioned that though the above-mentioned perspectives are different from each other in their emphasis on different philosophical ideas, but regarding border control and restriction, they have arrived at this common conclusion that border needs to be open. Border controls and migration restriction, in fact, enables the unequal treatment of human beings who are otherwise equal. It also facilitates exploitation and different forms of oppression in a different manner.

From the above discussion it has been very clear that the arguments for open borders are made in terms of free movement. Generally, individuals exercise their right to freedom of movement for various reasons such as desire to relocate for improved employment opportunities, to be closer to their loved one, to travel, to join a community of like-minded people and so on.²¹ It has been stated that open borders are the only ways through which people's freedom of movement as a fundamental right can be protected.²²

However, there are some other scholars, who have provided their arguments in support of closed borders keeping the national security issues into account. Those who talked against of open borders, including the Communitarian have provided various grounds and on the basis of that argued in favor of a closed border. Culture is one such issue/ground and the communitarians have talked in support of closed borders keeping the issue of culture into mind. According to them, culture has a moral status. The critiques of open borders hold the view that the movement of outsiders/people across borders may threaten the moral status of culture of a nation-state. The argument that states or nation states have the right to control their borders

is based on the political philosophy of Michal Walzer who stated that state should do so to protect one's own culture. Michael Walzer believes that the presence of temporary workers can and does have a profound impact on the culture of the host country; hence the members of a nation states have a strong interest in protecting the public culture they share. The shared life of a community is in same sense embodied in the shared territory and therefore, its members have a right to control entry into the territory.

In 21st century, every nation-state is concerned about its border and national security, European nations as well as United States of America, India are too concerned about their borders and about their national security. States like USA do spend more on border security, they have focused too much on building fences, hiring more border patrol agents and also on sophisticated electronic surveillance system at the border,²³ and thereby has made an attempt to create a peaceful situation by maintaining a healthy relationship with its neighbors. It has been found that there is always a possibility to transform that peace into both higher levels of economic integration and also broader and deeper security against transnational threats from illicit actors.

Following the above discussion, it can be said that India-Bangladesh border can neither be completely said as open border nor a closed border. No doubt, a large portion of the India-Bangladesh border has been fenced. The movement of people, goods etc. is strictly prohibited. But there are some border regions where free movement of people and goods are a common view of daily life.

India-Bangladesh Border:

India-Bangladesh border is a densely populated border and it goes through farmlands, rivers and hills. It is partly fenced, mostly porous, cuts through rivers, seasonal chars, and hilly terrain. It crosses backyards, pastures and ponds. For some, simply moving from one part of home to another means crossing international border. Regarding India-Bangladesh border it has been found that smugglers, drug carriers, human traffickers and cattle rustlers from both countries continue to cross the border to ply their trades, often with the support of Indian and Bangladeshi border guards.”²⁴

India-Bangladesh border has been a contested colonial inheritance. Cyril Radcliffe, the man who was asked to draw the boundary between India and Pakistan did not have a detailed map of the region. All he had to work with were revenue maps prepared by the colonial administration to collect taxes from various landlords, tax documents and the 1941 census. It has been stated that the border between India and Pakistan was drawn by Sir Cyril Radcliffe on the basis of the two-nation theory. In the book *Vijayan* has mentioned that the India-Bangladesh border is a hurriedly drawn border that cuts through villages, markets, rivers farms and even houses. The border turned neighbors into citizens of different countries –India and Pakistan in 1947, after the liberation war of 1971, East Pakistan became Bangladesh, and these rules were confirmed again in the 1974 Land Boundary agreement between India and Bangladesh.

India and Bangladesh which share almost 4,096 kilometers of land border is considered as porous border and there are different reasons behind this. The demarcation of the border was done in such way that it carries so many problems with it. Scholars have argued that problems lie behind with the drawing of the India-Bangladesh Border which later created tension between the two. The most notable problems which have been considered as irritant causing trouble to both countries is the problem of infiltration/migration, illegal flow of goods and services across borders, human trafficking, massive human right violation at the borders etc. The government of India has viewed all these as a threat to their national security and thought of border fencing as a means to deal with the problems emerged out of the border. Following that it can be said that India gave importance to a closed border with its neighbor, Bangladesh. India's attempt to close border with fencing later contributed towards the emergence of irritants in the relation between both the neighbors. One such notable outcome/result of closed border is the problem of 'identity crisis.' Generally, the people living along the border line share lots of similarities with the other side of the border in terms of culture and these are found in the form of border –lingua franca, cultural affinities with the people living in the other side of the border etc. Because of the close proximity, the people residing along the borderline face the problem of identity crisis. It has been found that Indian

state views them through the eyes of suspicion, consider them as a threat to the national security of the state. As a result of that the people in the borderlands always live in a dilemmatic situation of citizen and non-citizen and remained isolated from the mainstream people. It needs to be mentioned that those people also lack the basic facilities like education, adequate health care, housing, drinking water facility, adequate transportation system and many more. All these make their lives vulnerable and prone to illegal activities taken place at the border sites.

An attempt has been made in this paper to provide the ground realities found in the borderland while doing research on border communities residing along India-Bangladesh border in Dhubri district of Assam. The name of the visited village is Phulkakata village. During the visit to Phulkakata Village, a char Chapor Area, under Birsing Jurua Development Block of Dhubri district by an Engine boat, lots of things have been revealed. In a sunny morning the journey was started to the aforesaid village. The only possible means to reach the destination was boat. Hence, an engine boat was booked for the purpose with the help of an official working in the Birshing Jurua Development Block. It was a journey from Dhubri New Ghat to Phulkakata village, across Brahmaputra. The journey was of about one and a half hour towards North. In the whole journey eyes were in search of so many things. After going for hours, when reached Phulkakata, it was already 12.30 pm. The boat reached its destination. Some people were coming towards us, later it was known from the boatman that they were school teachers working in the schools located there in the larger Phulkakata areas. They were returning to their home, they leave schools much early because they have to cross the Brahmaputra and in return journey time takes longer. The boatman said, it takes almost two hours and they need to reach Dhubri town before sun sets as it is very difficult to sail the boat in night hours. Then the boatman was interviewed and from him several issues have come to the light. The boatman who originally from Mutakhuwa Gaon, a bordering village under Birsing Jurua Development Block of Dhubri district expressed his views in this way:

...No doubt people are getting education...but these are of no importance, teachers come and go...no options also... They come from far Dhubri town to this place by

boat and how they will engage in classes for too long.... they have to go back.see... now it is going to be 1pm....and they are going backHe became silent and then again statedmost of the inhabitants of my village,Mutakhuwa, a bordering village are engaged with cultivation. We have lots of problems in the char areas....In terms of education these areas are totally backward.... Again the communication and transport system.What will be found in the char areas.... There is no facility of drinking water, health care facility. How will a patient go to hospital in Dhubri town... he/she has to be carried by boat. That is two hours long distance..... One day we four people carried a patient in our shoulder.....no option.... This is true that some people are getting some governmental facilities such as PMAY house, sanitary latrine, but some are notgetting yet. He again stated....

Our Mutakhuwa area was so big once upon a time..... but now it has become very small due to soil erosion. Hence most of them have left the village and gone to the Dhubri town.... What they will do.... after going to the town they are running small business like ration shop etc. Some are even engaged in activities like driving cars...no use/ of staying in the villages. But this area, Phulkakatavillag, is comparatively good....small amount of soil erosion.....hence people have been able to do cultivation and women can engage themselves in poultry.....but, yes there is the problem of flood that remains for almost two months every year.

Another interviewee from the same village stated:

For us, the transportation and communication remain the major problems.....there are instances of drowning of boats in Brahmaputra for blowing of heavy wind and death of large number of people several times...Moreover...here we have no doctor...If someone becomes ill, need to go to doctor, they need to book a boat personally to reachDhubri town.

Another inhabitant of the village stated:

We are facing lots of problems due to the presence of Border Security Forces at the Border. When some illegal activities are taken place at the borders, they suspect anyone who are not engaged in any way with that illegal activity... I work in

Aadhar Centre and My home is in Phulkakata Part I village but even if I want to come back home after work but I don't come....because I have that fear for the BSF and it is the problem of education.....they do not understand our language....they speak Hindi and our people cannot make them understand about the truth....so misunderstanding arises. In our border areas we have problems and problems... But what the best thing here is that the co-operation and friendliness among the villagers... people can even tell you who has married to whom and even the name of their parents. Apart from this, wherever you go you will get problem... the problem of transportation, health, education, electricity, poor roads and many more.²⁵

The above interaction clearly indicates a gloomy picture of the border areas. The people, in fact, live with the concept of “problems.” Their problems and many other factors together make them isolated from the mainstream people. No doubt, some of the inhabitants of those border areas have been benefited by the facilities provided by the government. But the ground reality speaks that those have not been equally distributed among the people residing along border line. It also shows the apathy of government towards those people. Again, the presence of Border Security Forces at the border is though justified from the national security purposes but sometime it also brings lots of problems to the people.

India-Bangladesh Border through Open Border Paradigm

If India–Bangladesh border is viewed from the “Open Border” paradigm then one will find both advantages and disadvantages associated with it. Though illegal trade across border is considered as a threat to the national security, it is also an opportunity or a means of livelihood for the people living along the border side of India-Bangladesh border. Scholars working on India-Bangladesh border have come out with their own interpretations. In relation to the above discussion, the views put forward by different border scholars can be noted. Mohammad Jalal Uddin Sikder and Barun Kumar Sarkar on the basis of their work on India-Bangladesh border have brought the possibilities of informal trade at the borders to the light. In their article, “Livelihoods and informal trade at the Bangladesh Border,”²⁶ both have tried to express the fact that the people of international border areas believe cross

border informal trade as a process to maintain a sustainable livelihood. In that article the writers have made an attempt to analyze the nature and impact of informal trade between India and Bangladesh. According to the writers, cross border informal trade proves to be economically beneficial for most people involved in it, however, sometimes it is also considered as risky due to the possibility of being caught by police or the border security forces of either side of the borders. However, formal cross-border trade bears significance. Pushpita Das in her article, "Status of India's Border Trade: Strategic and economic significance,"²⁷ has made an attempt to highlight the significance of border trade in general or India in particular, which lies at various levels. According to the writer, at the international level border trade is a way of projecting countries like India and its neighbors as mature political entities committed to regional peace. Secondly, border trade has significance at the bilateral level as a major confidence building measure between countries like India and China by reducing frictions and encouraging constructive engagements. Thirdly, border trade has significance at the local level as well. Opening of trade along border brings economic prosperity to the border residents. In this article the writer has also mentioned the usefulness of border trade. According to her, border trade forms a part of Border Area Development plan by providing an alternate means of livelihood to the border residents. Moreover, successful conduct of border trade helps in tackling different problems like smuggling of goods by providing legitimacy to the exchange of commodities. It is clear from the above discussion that border trade works as a means of facilitating economic prosperity of the people residing along the India-Bangladesh border. In other words, it can be said that land Border trades have been proved to be as very important from the view point of facilitating economic activities which can also enhance the local economy. It has been highlighted by some people that movement of goods and people along the land border have profound impact on the livelihood of the people residing along the border sides. Borders, moreover, are viewed as gate ways to access market of the neighboring countries and border trade is considered as an important vehicle for the Socio-economic development of the bordering territories. It is one of the reasons that Indian state also stressed on trade relation with its neighboring country Bangladesh and once it led to the signing of "A Treaty of Peace and Friendship"

on 19th March, 1972 which later on led the foundation of Indo-Bangladesh relation. In that treaty, provision was also made for both trade and investment between these two countries. It needs a special mention that after few days of signing this treaty, the first Indo-Bangladesh trade agreement was made between these two countries where provisions were also made for both formal trade and border trade. Article V of the Agreement provides both the countries to make mutually beneficial arrangements for the use of their different mode of transportation such as water ways, railways, and roadways for trade and commerce. Regarding Border trade, there was provision for border trade for the people living within the 1 Kilometer belt of border between West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. Lots of things get exchanged between these two countries. Bangladesh occupies a prominent place as one of India's trade partners. Lots of things flow across the land borders between the India and Bangladesh as a part of bilateral trade. It has been highlighted by many research works done on Indo-Bangladesh that the border between India and Bangladesh serves as a site for formal and informal structures of interactions and exchange and this has become possible as both the national governments want to encourage cross-border trade and promote economic corridors. In a research conducted at the Border sides of Meghalaya and Tripura sharing border with Bangladesh, it has been found that the two distinct groups of people, i.e, the Khasi High Landers and the Bengali farmers do exchange different goods in a common market, in Meghalaya -Bangladesh Border.²⁸ But the research has also revealed the fact that the Khasi Hills Markets are unofficial as their existence are officially unknown in Delhi but these markets are still working under the watchful eye of the state's agents in these sensitive spaces.²⁹

India-Bangladesh border through the paradigm of closed border

It needs to be mentioned that some of the border regions of Indo-Bangladesh border has been accused of being a center of insecurity. Paula Banerjee has also come out with the same realization. In her paper titled, "The Case of Indo-Bangladesh Border," she called the border regions as the "epicenter of insecurity." Lots of illegal activities take place at some of the border regions of Indo-Bangladesh border. Before going to discuss all those illegal activities taken place at the border, the circumstances or

the factors that have contributed to this need a special mention. This allegation has been made that it is the lack of political vision and will of governments in both countries to take necessary steps to secure the future stability of the region.³⁰ It has also been stated that in South-Asia, governments are more concerned with national security and give less importance /shows little desire to cope up with the serious sources of insecurities.³¹ It is lack of proper strategies on the part of governments which has led to increasing insecurities in the region. As regard to the problem of illegal migration in the region, this view has also been found that it is the inability of Bangladesh to provide adequate opportunities to the people for livelihood that make them bound to cross the border for a better livelihood.³² Moreover, it has also been stated that unlike Indo-Pakistan border, India-Bangladesh border does not get much importance by their respective governments. Another research work on Indo-Bangladesh border organized by Calcutta Research Group in collaboration with the International Committee of the Red-Cross brought it to the light that Indo-Bangladesh border remains neglected in terms of attention. This report has highlighted the fact that states most often forget that the borders are not merely lines but these are areas where people lead civilian lives, an area where people pursue economic activities.³³ The cross border-issues such as the illegal migration, illegal trade, smuggling of commodities, drug, human trafficking etc. have not been addressed by both the governments. It has been found that it is the lack of infrastructure, proper security and management policy for the borders which has been contributing to the increased insecurities at the borderlands. Regarding illegal migration, it can be said that illegal migration from across India's border especially from Bangladesh since independence of India is posing a serious threat to India's national security as well as its integrity. Regarding migration it can be said that there are some pull and push factors which have contributed towards the large-scale influx from Bangladesh to India. There has been lots of push and pull factors which has led to migration. The push factors include political upheavals, religious persecution, demographic pressures, environmental crisis etc: and the pull factors are the availability of land, employment opportunity, education etc: which contribute towards large scale of migration to India. Though border denotes a territorial limit between two countries, still borders are not homogenous in nature. Some portions

of borderlands are used as modes of economic and cultural exchange, while some parts of the border represent high areas of tension and illegal activities. Keeping that into view, therefore, it has been said that to tackle such problems it is necessary for the states to deal with concept like 'Smart Border.' No doubt, Indian government has taken different initiatives for proper border management, though border management with lots of different implications on the diverse people of both the countries appears to be a difficult task. Keeping the national security into account, the Indian government also talked of Border fence to tackle the illegal activities, to prevent the infiltration of migrants into Indian land as well as to check the flow of insurgents and illegal trade. But such move of government of India is not out of criticism. India's attempt to construct fences at the borders has been considered by the media in Bangladesh as a hostile move from the part of Indian state. Moreover, there were instances of shooting at infiltrates from Bangladesh who were trying to cross border illegally by Indian Border Security Forces. Such incidents have contributed towards creating anti-Indian sentiments inside Bangladesh.³⁴ Moreover, the fence represents as a step in attempting a permanent closure of the border against the potential porosity and fluidity of border lives. There is no doubt that most part of the India-Bangladesh border has been fenced with the sole purpose of maintaining national security. But this fenced border has created lots of problems to the large group of people, specially residing along the border line. Fenced border has curtailed their right to free movement across borders. They have come under the 'territorial trap' of nation state. As a result of that, one hand their right to free movement across border has been curtailed and on the other hand, some of them have lost their livelihood, cross-border family relationships and many more leading to an identity crisis. Moreover, due to the close proximity and affinities with the people of other side of the border, the Indian citizens residing along the border line suffer from identity crisis or face trauma for being considered with suspicious eyes by the mainstream people. Here the story of people of Jhaskal, a bordering village of Indo- Bangladesh border can be noted. After interacting with some of the inhabitants of the village it was known that they suffer from "Identity Crisis" because of their facial and linguistic similarities with the people of other side of the border. Hence, inhabitants of the village stated that people of Sadiya, Jorhat

and even Guwahati consider them as illegal migrants.³⁵ According to him, they do not feel good for being suspected as illegal migrant. The irony is that even if they are the son of the soil but in their own land, they are made foreigners. Another inhabitant of another bordering village named 'Ramraikuthi' also expressed the similar expression that they are being suspected as foreigners. The old man continued..... "*I refuse to talk to you... because, before also some people came. During that time there was no fencing. Some people were cultivating. Suddenly we were asked to stand up and then they clicked our photos. Then they declared that people from Bangladesh are cultivating in the lands of India. It is our land... but we were made foreigners,... hence I have that fear and I refuse to talk to you. Though we are living in our own land, still we are not considered as the citizen of India and as a result, we are denied of not only the basic necessities but also some other facilities which are being enjoyed by the mainstream people.*"³⁶

This is true that the issue of illegal migration seriously has been working as an irritant in the relation between both the countries and has been the reason behind the occurrence of different violent conflicts between the natives and the Bengali Muslims. The violent conflicts between the two ethnic groups of Assam,i.e., theBodos and the Bengali Muslim that took place in July 2012 is the best example of it.³⁷ There are reports of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh having entered the country without valid travel documents. Though it is not possible to figure out the accurate data of such illegal entrants living in different parts of the country, still then Union Minister of State for home Kiren Rijiju in a written reply to a question posed by Rajya Sabha MP Jharna Das Baidya statedthat as per available input, there were around20million illegal migrants from Bangladesh staying in India.³⁸ However, the government of Bangladesh refused such claims.

As far as India-Bangladesh border fence is concerned, it needs to be mentioned that India began the construction of border fence, 150 yards from the zero point. The notable thing is that the border fence was constructed in such a way that it left substantial areas of Indian farmland, villages, and families living close to the border outside of the border fence. It has been found that from its construction the fenced border has been disrupting the lives of citizens residing

near the border. Here the views put forward by Anoop Prakash and Shailaja Menon regarding the Indo –Bangladesh border fence may be noted. According to them, the mainstream discourse of security has excluded these people residing along the border and these people are bearing the costs of fencing³⁹ and the reason pointed out by these writers is the unnatural division of people. It needs to be mentioned that there is absence of understanding relating to the ground level conditions of the residents along the border line. Following that it can be said that there are huge numbers of problems associated with closed fenced border though constructed keeping the national security into account.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is very clear that in 21st century India-Bangladesh border bears a special significance. Neither India-Bangladesh border can be claimed as an open border nor Closed border in totality. With regard to India-Bangladesh border, a middle way can be suggested. Because border has its own significance at the local level. Opening of trade along border brings economic prosperity to the border residents as land border trades have been proved to be as very important for economic development. However, it can be said that both the states can think of other modes of transportation for trade and commerce. When India-Bangladesh is talked of, the issue of illegal migration occupies the minds of people as it is closely associated with the occurrence of Assam Movement which later on led to the signing of Assam Accord etc. In 21st century, there is the need for every country in the world to work cooperatively with each-other in different matters. Following that it can be said that there is a need for both India and Bangladesh to work cooperatively in different matters keeping the larger interest of the South Asian region into account. The both states should work on peaceful co-relation. Both states can think of the system of work permit. Then the question of 'illegality' will be reduced to a great extent. The ground reality speaks that people living along the Indian side of Indo-Bangladesh border do face problems even if they have identity card, in terms of entering into the land situated outside of border fencing. What needs to be done is some amount of flexibility in those systems. However, recent progress between the states in terms of trade and in other matters is a good sign

and it clearly indicates that both the states have come forward to work together on different matters. No doubt for Indian state the border works as a symbol of state sovereignty but at the same time it is felt that the rigidity that is placed with the border has become lessened. As both the states have expressed their desire to encourage cross-border trade and promote economic corridors. The international trade centre situated at Sonahat, Lakhimari Village under Golakganj development block of Dhubri district is contributing towards this goal. This trade centre is one of the best examples that contribute towards local economic prosperity. Again the illegal crossing of people has to be equally given importance and for that both the states ought to work on proper border management.

Endnotes

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