

Partition's Amnesia: Recovering the Long History of Khasi and Jaintia Decolonization Story

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Abstract

One of the major events in the history of India which continue to excite popular imagination and academic curiosity is the partition of India which was neither a simple cartographic realignment over territories nor an uncritical redistribution of political power and authority over demarcated territorial units. Over the years the experiences of communities across partitioned lands have asserted that partition was not just a part of history but a lived reality of contemporary times. Ongoing struggles of the Khasi and Jaintia communities with border demarcations across their homelands and cartographic manoeuvres over Khasi-Jaintia lands is one such area where partition narratives and experiences are critical to understand the historical experiences of the community over time. The main thrust of the paper is to examine the process and politics of boundary and border making in Khasi and Jaintia lives and its impact in the form of border demarcation, fencing, migration of people and community relations.

In Lieu of an Introduction

When India was partitioned in 1947, the Khasi and Jaintia people found themselves forcefully trans-national, severed from their homes and hearth, kinsmen and their cultivable lands. This paper seeks to understand the Khasi and Jaintia narratives of partition experiences and histories, recognizing the long engagement of these communities with borders and boundary making between India and Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) and their experience of deprivation and anxiety over a space that they have traditionally cohabited from the pre-colonial to the contemporary times. Therefore, about twenty years ago, when the Government of India decided to conduct a joint Indo-Bangla Border Survey commencing from 8th December, 2004, it was only natural that the Federal Council of War-Mihngi and War Jaintia (FCWMWJ)² submitted a memorandum to the then Home Minister, Government

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² It is an Federation of Ri-War Mihngi local *Dorbar*, Pynursla, Ri War Mihngi Development Council, Dawki, Federation of Five Border States, Mawsynram, the Federation of 25 Khasi States, Ka Dorbar Ki Nongsynshar Ka Ri Hynriewtrep, the Federation of Khasi Jaintia and Garo People (FKJGP) and the Hynniewtrep National Youth Front.

of India, asserting inter alia that in view of the Government of India decision to undertake a joint survey, the leaders of these local organizations had “resolved to make physical verification of the Main Pillars of Indo-Bangla border, hold meetings, conduct awareness campaign among people and their Dorbars in the Indo-Bangla Areas starting from the 6th December, 2004.”³ This was only a reminder of the fact that despite the passage of six and half decades since partition, the boundary demarcation and border imbroglio was far from any resolution. In northeast India, partition was not a simple realignment of cartographic contours but an intensely social and political event that metamorphosed the life of the communities who fell on the ‘wrong’ side of the boundaries

Partition’s Denial and Deprivation

When the colonial power decided to transfer power, they decided to partition the Indian subcontinent into two parts- India and Pakistan. It was decided that in the event of the partition of Punjab and Bengal, the district of Sylhet would be put up for a referendum to decide whether the district would remain in India as part of Assam or be amalgamated with East Pakistan. It was this process that brought the Khasi and Jaintia within the vortex of Partition politics as Sylhet shared a boundary with both the Khasi and Jaintia homelands. While the Khasis inhabited the tract “of mountainous country extending from Laour, the northwest extremity of Sylhet, to the Eastern boundaries of Cutchar”,⁴ the “Jaintia Kingdom included the Jaintia Hills and a plains country to the south of these hills extending as far as the Surma river.”⁵ But when the Viceroy, in the process of his June 3rd address announced the colonial government’s decision to bring Sylhet within the consideration for partition, he completely ignored the fluid multi-cultural social character of Sylhet and asserted that only the Hindus and Muslims of the district would participate in the referendum, overlooking the presence of the indigenous communities in their shared homelands.

While the results of the referendum ensured that Sylhet would join Pakistan, the claims of the other communities who were cohabiting with the Hindus and Muslims in the district, especially the tribal communities was completely ignored. While the issue of suffering of the tea tribes and their deprivation in the voting process is much highlighted by the Congress and Hindu Mahasabha leaders in 1947 and is now well known, the deprivation of the other tribal communities like the Khasi and Jaintias have remained ‘hidden from history’ as they were not included in the referendum politics as participants or showed no interest to assert their claims to participate in the political contest of the referendum. When the focus shifted to the Boundary Commission headed by Sir Cyril Radcliffe to complete the process of partition and boundary demarcation, the Khasi-Jaintias agitated before it but to no avail. It

³ Memorandum of the Federal Council of War-Mihngi and War Jaintia to Shri Shivraj Patil, Home Minister, Government of India, dated 2nd December, 2004.

⁴ Board of Revenue Papers, File No.24, 1787, Assam State Archives.

⁵ S. K. Dutta’s Introduction to Jaintia Buranji, DHAS, 1937, p. ix.

is interesting to note that when a press release was issued by the Bengal Boundary Commission in the Amrita Bazar Patrika dated 23rd July, 1947, stating that ‘all parties and organizations desired to make representations before the commission should submit 6 copies of their memoranda by 12noon of the 2nd August at the latest’,⁶ the Dewan of Cherra State David Roy pointed out in his Memo that the Khasi State Cherra would have to take necessary steps “if this Commission will also deal with the boundary with the Khasi States, and Bholaganj and Cherra State in particular.”⁷ Though a fact-finding committee was set up by the Assam Government with Shri Kamini Kumar Sen, M.L.A. as chairman, to assist the Khasi case, the Khasi-Jaintia leaders and traditional chiefs could not take advantage of the situation.⁸ Even though the Jaintia and Khasi pointed out that on the ground, “beyond Dawki River (south from the Bridge) there are some Khasi villages called Nongsohetc near Jafflong Tea Estate where the Khasi and Jaintias are living for centuries – these Khasis came from some villages (Sohkha, Darrang, Nonngtalangetc. of the Jowai Sub-Division and also from Umsiem and Umkrem villages of the Khyrim state. For generations those Khasi and Jaintias who live there have their own private lands where rice, betelnuts, panleaf and oranges are cultivated,”⁹ such claims fell on deaf ears with the Boundary Commission. Therefore, post-partition history in northeast India began by denying the Khasi-Jaintia their partitioned reality. Oblivious of the situation on the ground, the Boundary Commission headed by Sir Cyril Radcliffe concluded in their report on the Sylhet partition that partition of Sylhet was,

*... limited to the districts of Sylhet and Cachar, since of the other districts of Assam that can be said to adjoin Sylhet neither the Garo hills nor the Khasi and Jaintia hills nor the Lushai hills have anything approaching a Muslim majority of population in respect of which a claim could be made.*¹⁰

Partition perpetuated the uncertainty in Khasi Jaintia lives even on the eve of partition coming into effect as the Radcliffe Award was based on outdated survey maps. The Political officer of the Khasi States, Major R.A. M. Major, in a letter to the Advisor to the Governor of Assam pointed out that,

I have the honour to inform you that though the boundary of the Khasi states and Sylhet and Khasi States and Kamrup have been notified, they have never been demarcated. The notifications are in many cases vague quoting such

⁶ Boundary Commission, (K&J Hills and Sylhet) Political Department, File No.3, 1947, Meghalaya State Archives, Shillong.

⁷ Boundary Commission, (K&J Hills and Sylhet) Political Department, File No.3, 1947, Meghalaya State Archives, Shillong.

⁸ Boundary Commission, K&J Hills, and Sylhet Pakistan, File No. XII, No.3 of 1947, Meghalaya State Archives, Shillong.

⁹ Memorandum of A. B. Diengdoh in Boundary Commission File No.37 of 1947, Assam State Archives, Guwahati.

¹⁰ Report of the Bengal Boundary Commission (Sylhet district), Fl. No 44-PR/47, Ministry of States, National Archives of India.

*boundaries as the foot of the hill, where the hill gradually merges into the plains it is impossible to say where the foot is. I have repeatedly pointed out the necessity for demarcation the boundary by pillars as there are constant quarrels between the Khasis and plainsmen. The failure to demarcate a boundary now becomes important with Sylhet going to Pakistan and will be a source of still more friction with plainsmen who are always the aggressors to the disadvantage of the Khasis.*¹¹

But despite these official documentary exchanges, the border demarcations remained fragmentary and incomplete as the boundaries were drawn by brute force without taking the Khasi chiefs into confidence and without visiting or verifying the situation on the ground. Though the Government of India was able to complete the accession of the twenty-five Khasi States into the Indian Union by 1948, the last being the Syiem of Nongstoin, a chiefdom located on the India-Pakistan border, who signed it on the 19th of March, 1948,¹² the demarcation of boundaries were hardly resolved as there was “a misunderstanding by the Pakistan Government of the boundary between Pakistan and Indian Dominion in which the Pakistan Government claims parts of Khyrim, Cherra and Shella States territories on the southern slopes of the Khasi states adjoining Sylhet District.”¹³ The imposition of the border also had long lasting effects on the people especially where certain areas along the border were being disputed between India and Pakistan. Though partition had been effected, the demarcations had not been completed as disputed territories were put up for joint surveys of the boundary by the representatives of the Indian Dominion and Pakistan Government.¹⁴ Although the Radcliffe Line claimed to be precise and detailed on paper, people had little idea of its actual delineations. For instance, the Pyrduwah (also known as Padua) in the Khasi-Jaintia hills district, which adjoins the Sylhet district about 6.5 km was left un-demarcated. It was well into 1954, seven years after partition of India, the Proceedings of the Joint Enquiry at Tamabil in connection with the boundary dispute dated 31.08.54 noted that,

*“... the Deputy Directors of Survey East Bengal and Assam jointly inspected the disputed boundary area near Tamabil. They are of opinion that the boundary can be provisionally demarcated with the help of the available cadastral land marks. In order to achieve this a joint traverse party will commence work from 19.09.54. They expect to complete the provisional demarcation of the boundary in dispute over a length of about one mile on either side of the Tamabil gate by about the 3rd of October, 1954.”*¹⁵

¹¹ Boundary Commission, K&J Hills, and Sylhet Pakistan, File No. XII, No.3 of 1947, Meghalaya State Archives, Shillong.

¹² Webster Davis Jyrwa, ‘The Khasi States After British Rule’ I & II, The Shillong Times, dated 28th And 29th May, 1997.

¹³ Boundary Commission, (K&J Hills and Sylhet) Political Department, File No.3, 1947, Meghalaya State Archives, Shillong.

¹⁴ General administration Report for the year 1947-48, File No. 15(7) -P(S)49. National Archives of India, New Delhi.

¹⁵ Tribal Areas Development Department, File No. SD/33/54 Assam State Archives.

While such deadlines were missed many a times, this was not the only border dispute between India and Pakistan affecting both the Khasi and Jaintia people. While the officials wrestled with the border disputes, the hardships of ordinary people only increased leaps and bounds. A Member of the K&J Autonomous District Council in a letter to the Chief Minister pointed out that,

*“a Myntri of the Nongstoin Syiemship within my constituency ... referred to the trouble being experienced by the border people due to delay in surveying the demarcation of the boundary between India and Pakistan. ... a vast tract of the low land which formerly belonged to and cultivated by people of this District is being forcibly taken possession of by the Pakistanis and the local people are thereby afraid and deprived of cultivating there. The Pakistanis are reported to have removed the Boundary Pillars and encroached into our territories...”*¹⁶

Though mostly unacknowledged in official reports, partition adversely affected the Khasi-Jaintia lives in more ways than just uncertainties over boundary demarcation. While boundary demarcation disputes continued to fester well into the twenty-first century, the impact of partition was more profound on the life, livelihood and culture of the Khasi and Jaintia people. The links connecting the Khasis and Jaintias to Sylhet were permanently disrupted. At the stroke of a pen these people became trans-border communities, split into Indians and Pakistanis depending on their residence. The traditional inter-community linkages, involving life, livelihood, and life world of the communities in the area which had remained strong across the hills and plains with tribes depending on their trade with the plains for ages ¹⁷ was irreversibly disrupted.

Loss of Land, Livelihood and Life

Centuries old prosperous border-trade based economy was killed by closing the borders and erection of check-posts. 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 bordering Sylhet which was, after 1947, a part of East Pakistan. The boundary of the new state of East Pakistan partitioned the lands inhabited by the Khasi and the Jaintia 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.”¹⁸ Partition and the amalgamation of Sylhet with East Pakistan caused “a virtual economic blockade

¹⁶ Tribal Areas Development Department, File No. SD/33/54 Assam State Archives.

¹⁷ General administration Report for the year 1947-48, File No. 15(7) -P(S)49. National Archives of India, New Delhi.

¹⁸ Statement of the then Chief Minister of Meghalaya Donkumar Roy in the Assembly in (2008, May 6) Oneindia News, www.oneindia.com/2008/05/06/border-fencing-with-bangladesh-in-meghalaya-sector-stalled-1210068341.html accessed on 03.05.017.

of the Khasi hills.”¹⁹ The Administrative Report for the Khasi states pointed out,

*the troubles that inevitably followed on the borders after partition resulted in their being unable either to export their produce to the normal centres of trade or to obtain their staple diet of rice from Sylhet.*²⁰

Nari Rustomji who was the Advisor to the Governor of Assam on Tribal Affairs clearly mentioned in his memoir that:

*In Partition days, the main market for the produce of the Khasi Hills was in the District of Sylhet skirting their Southern border. With Partition, Pakistan embarked on a virtual economic blockade of the Khasi Hills. Movement of goods between the Khasi hills and Sylhet was discouraged..... The object of the exercise was no doubt to put pressure on the Khasis and create among them a feeling that they would be better off in Pakistan. The hill people on the extreme southern borders of the Khasi hills were driven to a state of near panic...*²¹

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 being brought to the brink of starvation.²² A poignant picture of the situation is brought out by a letter sent by Shri H. Nongrem, M.D.C. to the Deputy Commissioner, United K.&J. Hills District which pointed out that

*“I am sending herewith lot of applications from the people of Langrin Syiemship, complaining of their starvation and shortage of food in their localities, I beg to point out that Langrin is in the most interior areas of the District in the border of Pakistan, and moreover, there is no communication... That no rice is available from Pakistan...”*²³

Political changes had serious effects on the supply of rice. Rice imports from Sylhet to the villages on the southern foothills ceased altogether and a small quantity that

¹⁹Nari K. Rustomji (1971),*Enchanted Frontiers: Sikkim, Bhutan and India's North Eastern Borderlands*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, p 110-111.

²⁰General administration Report for the year 1947-48, File No. 15(7) -P(S)49. National Archives of India, New Delhi.

²¹Nari Rustomji,(1971)*Enchanted Frontiers*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, ,p. 110.

²²O.L. Snaitang (1997) *Memoirs of Life and Political Writings of the Hon'ble Rev. J.J.M. Nichols Roy*, Vol.1, Shillong, Shrolenson Marbaniang, p 170.

²³Tribal Areas Development, File No. SD/4/56 Assam State Archives.

trickles through the border shot up to exorbitant rates.²⁴The affected in the Khasi Hills district amounted to about 80,000 people and about 16,000 households. This resulted in large scale migration of people from these border areas to new settlements selected for their relocation in the Ri-Bhoi region of present day Meghalaya.²⁵While 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.²⁶

A major concern for the Khasi and Jaintia people living in the border areas was their loss of land. As most people found their cultivable lands located within East Pakistan, they were regularly confronted with incursions and theft of their produce by the Pakistani nationals. Though the Khasi and Jaintia people had title deeds indicating their ownership of land located in territories which had become East Pakistan, the Pakistani cultivators were cultivating these lands after the boundaries were demarcated and the transfer affected. A petition submitted by ULobsing of Lakhat Bazar Khyrim Syiemship in a memorial submitted to the Minister In-Charge of Tribal Areas Department dated 21st September, 1961 pointed out that,

That your petitioner peacefully owned and possessed one plot of Paddy field at Lakhat Bazar since generation without any disturbance by anybody. The Land is about 8 acres in area.

That on the recent resettlement of boundaries between India and Pakistan the said land fell in Pakistan.

That during the resurvey of boundaries by the two sides- India and Pakistan your petitioner had been assured that even though any plot of land which used to be in his occupation should now fall to Pakistan yet his request to the property would not be disturbed but that he should cultivate as usual and should pay the usual land revenue to Pakistan when rent is demanded.

That before your petitioner could take steps in matter and immediately on the refixing of boundary stones, one Pakistani who is known to our people as Mor Ali of Noagaon (just below Lakhat Bazar) took possession of the said land of your petitioner by ploughing the same under protection of Pakistani Armed Forces against the protest of your petitioner....²⁷

²⁴General administration Report for the year 1947-48, File No. 15(7) -P(S)49. National Archives of India, New Delhi.

²⁵*Ibid* p 175.

²⁶O.L. Snaitang (1997) *Memoirs of Life and Political Writings of the Hon'ble Rev. J.J.M. Nichols Roy*, Vol.1, Shillong, Shrolenson Marbaniang, p 170.

²⁷File No. TAD/GA/95/61, General Administration Branch, Assam State Archives, Guwahati.

Though the Minister, in his note to the Secretary of the Department observed that,

*... It is not understood how a Pakistani is cultivating the land now. There will be other cases in which the lands belonging to our people will fall in Pakistan after the boundary has been finally demarcated and the transfer affected. The Deputy Commissioner may be asked to prepare a list of persons likely to be affected after final demarcation and transfer...*²⁸

there were indeed many people who had similar predicament. Presenting an account of his tour of the border areas, Shri Maham Singh, the minister observed,

*When I visited Bholaganj, a complaint was made to me by the villagers of Bholaganj, Naya Bosti, Nalpara, Chakla, Dharam Bosti that no action has uptil now been taken on the petition submitted by them on 9.12.61 regarding the loss of paddy fields due to the recent demarcation of boundary between India and Pakistan. The paddy of the Indian Nationals was also forcibly reaped by the Pak Nationals. The area of the land which has fallen into Pakistan now will be about 100 Bighas and they have forcibly reaped the paddy for about 30 Bighas of the land which was cultivated by the Indian Nationals and the loss of paddy would be about 300 maunds.*²⁹

There were also petitions from Khasis from the Indo-Pakistan border areas calling upon the state government to give them compensation for the lands that had been included in Pakistan. U Ram Tangsong hailing from Darrang Village, at Dawki P.O. pointed out that,

*According to the present demarcation of Indo-Pak. boundary, my land will fall in Pakistan territory when the transfer of land be made to Pakistan as a result of the of the present demarcation. The site of my land is at a place called Mawbang near Khad-umkrem, Khyrim Syiemship.S.Dowki and the area is about 5 acres approximately more or less. The approximate number of Betelnut trees (grown up) 3000 trees and the young ones about 2000 Nos. The area falls within our own private lands. If the land is going to be transferred to Pakistan, I request that reasonable compensation be made to me to prevent me from the big loss and to enable me to get a substitute land for the same as I cannot become a Pakistani nationalist.*³⁰

But this loss of land brought the Khasi and Jaintia people to the brink of starvation. Ka Shingai Tynsong from Darrang informed the undersecretary, Department of Tribal Affairs that her land,

²⁸File No. TAD/GA/95/61, General Administration Branch, Assam State Archives,Guwahati.

²⁹File No. TAD/GA/95/61, General Administration Branch, Assam State Archives,Guwahati.

³⁰File No. TAD/GA/95/61, General Administration Branch, Assam State Archives,Guwahati.

“measuring more or less 305 Bighas has been included in Pakistan territory thereby causing misery and starvation to me on day that Pakistan obstructs me from utilizing my land. I have also all the necessary documents on this matter of ownership. In addition to the above I also beg to state that I have allowed 23 other persons to cultivate more than 150 bighas of land with paddy, oranges, betelnuts, etc. and all these people will also suffer the same fate. ... My land in question is full of plantation of various kinds and estimated loss will amount to crores of rupees when calculated the value of plantations and the land.

The greatest impact of partition on the community was however through the violent disruption of the lives of indigenous communities who shared the border with the new Islamic state of Pakistan and who found themselves split between India and Pakistan. The new border became part of routine border disputes in the subsequent years. For example, on 25th February, 1950 the CID, Sub Inspector Shillong, B. Mawlong, stated that at Bholaganj, Shella that most of the Muslim shopkeepers of Bholaganj Bazaar fled to Pakistan the night before, taking with them their respective valuables and movable properties as they were robbed by the Hindus. Under such circumstances he requested the government to take possession of those houses which were once occupied by the Muslims. On the other hand, there were reports that there were also incidents of Hindus in East Pakistan being forced to convert to Islam and their properties was also pillaged by them. As a result most of them left East Pakistan to come to India.³¹

Apart from the destroying daily economic activities of the border people, the issue of national identity became one of the main anxieties at the borders. Construction of borders with defined boundary lines made the borders the zone of maximum securitization and assertion of national identity. Often such security concerns would translate into cases of harassment by state representatives at the border. Allegations of East Pakistani encroachers into India and vice-versa were common. Perhaps the most extensive impact of partition on work in the borderland had to do with agricultural work. With partition the people's access to the agricultural lands came to an end. Cultivable agricultural lands along the border were neglected for many years because of the border disputes. Numerous cultivators found that they had become separated from their most valuable source of income- land. Land owners found that the borders ran between their homes and their fields and secondly inhabitants of the borderland might decide to migrate across the border thereby becoming separated from their fields. Working the land on the other side of the border continued to be a common practice but there were several cases of threat, intimidations and kidnapping forcing many of the people to give up their lands or to move across the border to keep them. The Deputy Commissioner, Khasi and Jaintia Hills reported from the Balat sector that four Indian nationals who went to their orange and betel nut plantations were arrested by the East Pakistan Rangers on 28th December, 1961.³²

³¹ File No. C.164/50, 1950, Home Confidential, Assam State Archives.

³² File No. 62/61, Political 'B' Department Assam Secretariat, Assam State Archives.

Partition introduced the ‘foreigners’ dimension into politics in North East India with the introduction of passport system in 1952. Though there was no restriction of people from East Pakistan to Assam in the initial years after independence, gradually the provincial governments and the Government of India began to discourage migration of people from East Pakistan to India by 1950. The situation became critical as the initial trickle of people wanting to migrate to India from East Pakistan became a large scale flow 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. As there was no improvement in the situation on the ground and many displaced “most of the refugees ... from the bordering district of Sylhet”³³ preferred to settle down in Assam including the hill areas. Along with the plains of Assam, the hill areas also took on the brunt of the settlement and rehabilitation of the displaced. The Census of 1951 revealed that as many as 14,509 persons moved into the hill areas.³⁴ Gradually the numbers rose and even the Khasi and the Jaintia joined the train in view of the atrocities, violence and trespass by the East Pakistan Rangers becoming random in the Khasi and Jaintia inhabited areas since 1950 onwards, persisting well into the 1960s. A memorandum submitted by the people of Dawki in 1959 pointed out that

*as a result of this heavy firing by the Pak forces such a panic was created among the public of Dawki, that they did not think it wise to stay there with their families and children in such an uncertain condition and they took shelter in safer zones... among 80% of the civil population who are Khasis...*³⁵

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.”³⁶

In Lieu of a Conclusion

Over years, the unresolved boundary question in north east India and the continuous acrimony over the legality of migration across the created state-nation boundaries has become a pointer to the assertion that partition is not an event but a process which is far from its closure. Though the impact of partition, 1947 persists on the lives of the land and the people of India, there are few attempts to negotiate with it. However, it is sad that political expediency and short-term strategies often, contributed to ‘memoside’ and resulted in the loss of thousand testimonies, through the death of witness to the immediate years of decolonization and partition. However, for the Khasi Jaintia partition is not the story of the past. The loss of territory and

³³The Census of India, Vol XII, 1951, Ibid, p.358.

³⁴The Census of India, Vol.XII, 1951, Ibid

³⁵Revenue Depaartment, File No. 20/59. Assam State Archives.

³⁶The Census of 1951, Vol.XII, Ibid, p. 3.

fertile cultivable fields to Pakistan post boundary demarcation and the metamorphic transformation of Khasi-Jaintia life was not just politics but a tragedy in Khasi community and Family lives. A petition submitted by ULobsing of Lakhat Bazar Khyrim Syiemship in a memorial submitted to the Minister In-Charge of Tribal Areas Department dated 21st September, 1961 pointed out that,

*That before your petitioner could take steps in matter and immediately on the refixing of boundary stones, one Pakistani who is known to our people as Mor Ali of Noagaon (just below Lakhat Bazar) took possession of the said land of your petitioner by ploughing the same under protection of Pakistani Armed Forces against the protest of your petitioner....*³⁷

Ka Shingai Tynsong from Darrang informed the Under Secretary, Department of Tribal Affairs that her land,

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Though some attempts have been made for an academic engagement with this loss in recent years, these have been far from adequate and lack a comprehensive character. The Memorandum of the Federal Council of War-Mihngi and War Jaintia pointed out that,

*... the Radcliffe Award and the subsequent Central and State Governments have totally ignored the boundary issues raised by our people since 1947, 1950 and 1970 onwards... the present demarcation line between India and Bangladesh is not correct as they were not done in consultation and in accordance with the treaties signed between indigenous chiefs, Rulers, Chieftains, Clan Heads, Village Heads of the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo People and accepted by the Government of India during 1947.*³⁹

Probably an examination of this history could help scholars to understand the factors that contributed to the Khasi opposition to the Land Boundary Agreement with Bangladesh since 2011. NGOs, Traditional Chiefs and land owners of the Indo-Bangla border of Meghalaya became vociferous in its opposition to the agreement. G.S. Kharshanlor, the spokesperson of the CCIB pointed out that “the total land under adverse possession is 599.7 acres. If 240 acres come to Meghalaya and 41.7

³⁷ File No. TAD/GA/95/61, General Administration Branch, Assam State Archives, Guwahati.

³⁸ File No. TAD/GA/95/61, General Administration Branch, Assam State Archives, Guwahati.

³⁹ Memorandum of the Federal Council of War-Mihngi and War Jaintia to Shri Shivraj Patil, Home Minister, Government of India, dated 2nd December, 2004

to Bangladesh, what about the remaining 278 acres of land?" This was a persistent question posed by the CCIB to the Government of India since 2011 when the first concrete steps were taken to bring the border demarcation question to a close by the Manmohan Singh Government.⁴⁰ When the proposal for border fencing came, the voices of opposition grew louder. Kmen Myrchiang, the Secretary of CCIB pointed out that "till today we did not have the permanent boundary pillars and we cannot identify the real zero line."⁴¹ This position apparently only reinforced an apprehension voiced in a memorandum submitted by Shri S. Kongwang, one of the Sirdars of Darrang in 1962, which pointed out,

*"Originally the boundary is the natural Pyian River but now the boundary runs a distance of average 5 furlongs from the bank of the river; in some places the boundary runs at a distance of about a mile from the river; and between the river and the pillar; we have a number of gardens and paddy fields which may be valued at several lakh of rupees not to speak of the price of the land now tagged to Pakistan..."*⁴²

Despite passage of time and recent changes in approaches to historical studies, the Khasi and Jaintia stories of everyday experiences relating to partition of India have remained outside mainstream partition discourse, even though spatial location determined the process of possessions and socializations. Though political geographies have changed and East Pakistan gave way to Bangladesh after 1971, the lives of the Khasi and the Jaintias as minority communities have remained as vulnerable as it was since 1947. The recent attempts to overcome the hiatus between the nation and the popular in historical discourse, in real terms, a study of the Khasi- Jaintia grassroots narrative would only strengthen the claim that the gap has widened over the years as most of the partition narratives fail to engage with the reality of partition as an ongoing process. The recent destruction of the bust of U Tirot Singh, a Khasi Chief at the Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre, Dhaka, in the wake of the recent student uprising against the Bangladesh government and the anxiety of the indigenous community across the border over their lives and property of their kinsmen⁴³ is a grim reminder of the Khasi and Jaintia partitioned reality. This paper about the Khasi-Jaintia case is only a preliminary attempt to recover the Khasi and Jaintia story into the history of India's partition and correct a historical imbalance.

⁴⁰The Telegraph, December 3, 2014.

⁴¹*Northeast News*, December, 3, 2018.

⁴²File No. TAD/GA/95/61, General Administration Branch, Assam State Archives, Guwahati

⁴³The Shillong Times, August 7th 2004.