

Predicament of a Partitioned Homeland: Historicizing the long history of boundary demarcations of the Khasi and Jaintia

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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. Cartographic realignment over Khasi-Jaintia lands is one such area where partition narratives and experiences are critical to understand the historical experiences of the community in contemporary times. The main thrust of the paper is to examine the process and politics of boundary and border making in Khasi and Jaintia lives, their negotiations with an almost unexplored prehistory and an oppressive present beset with border fencing, migration of people and community relations.

Keywords: Khasi, Jaintia, Borders, Partition and Fencing.

Introduction: Some Preliminary Concerns

When Urvashi Butalia pointed out that, “I began to realize that partition was not, even in my family, a closed chapter of history,”¹ she probably did not imagine that this statement could be proverbial not only to capture her situation or her but also for many other residents living in many other partitioned lands of North-East India. Partition in this frontier region of the Indian state is not just history but a live story where and the resistance of communities against border demarcations and barbed wire fences across international borders and recurrent debates on migration keep the partition story alive till today. Here partition was not a simple realignment of cartographic contours but an intensely personal and political event that metamorphosed the life of the people who fell on the ‘wrong’ side of the borders as location

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