

Chapter-5

Analyzing narratives from the field

- Power and control
- Ethnic identity as shaped by narratives
- Shifting identities and shifting spaces
- Boundaries and changing meaning in memories
- Reappearance and disappearance of borders

Chapter 5: Analyzing narratives from the field

The universality of narratives has helped understand the experiences and way of life in a particular set up, system and society. Social beings and their societies can never be detached from narratives. Collecting individual and collective border stories as opined by Prokkola is a way to understand people's perception of borders and how "different types of barriers or interactive functions of the border" are understood at the local level and how they materialize in daily practices (Prokkola, 2009).

As discussed in earlier chapter, it is in the narratives and discourses where people's perspectives are modified based on present experiences and activities. People have always been in contact with each other and their society in political, social and cultural realm through narratives. Barthes (2006, 237) says that in the infinite variety of forms in narratives, narratives is present at all times, in all places, in all societies; indeed, narrative starts with the very history of mankind; there is not, there has never been anywhere, any people without narratives.

In similar vein, Hyvärinen (2007, 447) gives three distinct usage of narratives as being a factual resource, narratives as texts with a particular form and as a storytelling based on context. In border narratives, these three entities help expose the understandings of borders and boundaries where interpretations become the key tool. The variety of forms in the narratives as expressed by Barthes (2006) help people sketch and shape border as a social condition interpreting collective memories and everyday life experience. As such, life in the borders makes sense of experience that constructs and communicates meaning and even a sense of identity.

The narratives collected from Likabali suggest borders to be a text in the form of storytelling. The narratives project borders in Likabali area to be a tension artificially 'created'. In the words of Schler (2003, 52) spaces are not fixed, and the mapping of places as they are made and remade provides us with important insights into relationships of power operating in bounded locations and changing over time. This has been evident in the case of Likabali where the territorial power and control is seen directing the people living along the borders to follow certain norms.

In the case of Banderdewa, it is more of an adjustment to suit the commercial needs of the two states, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. According to Elwin, trades along the

border of Arunachal and Assam were a method to create camaraderie. The boundary drawn across the two states became rigid after the Britishers took possession of the undivided Assam. Elwin (2005, 2) writes that the Ahom kings had adopted the conciliation policy towards the tribes to contain the tribal people in their own hills and forests throughout the period of their rule. This has been observed by scholars like Bezbaruah (2010), Barpujari (2003), and Phukon (1996) as mentioned in Chapter 3.

Sharma, (2017) writes,

During pre-colonial times, the foothills as fluid boundaries served as critical sites of hills-plains interaction under the aegis of the medieval state formation in the Assam valley. However, the colonial regime stifled this system of interaction by turning the foothills into hard boundaries and an instrument for controlling the hills. Such a measure understandably created deep asymmetries between the existing social landscape and the emerging politico-administrative arrangement. (Sharma, 2017, 3)

The emerging politico-administrative units in the form of frontier tracts such as North East Frontier Tracts, and later, full-fledged states Assam and Arunachal Pradesh of the present day have been experiencing interstate boundary disputes. Chaube (1975, 199) in citing Barth writes, “In territorial society, ethnic categories are under the constant pressure of political power. Ethnic distinctions through ascriptive alliances do persist despite changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories”. The narratives of the people have more to do with the sense of ‘belongingness’ along with the process of ‘othering’ giving impetus to ethnic identity. The narratives speak volumes about how borders become a shifting space, at times appearing and disappearing. It is this bordering process and practices of borderness that borders have come out as a marker of a particular cultural space.

Narratives collected from the field sites give socio-cultural perspective of borders where produced meanings shape the ‘us’ and ‘them’ identities. Taking note of Passi’s (1998, 81) take on boundaries as being carried in the narratives, this chapter deals with how narratives become a part of shared memories and collective identities creating a discourse that continues for generation shaping the social and cultural practice of everyday life of the people.

The border areas taken for the study inclines towards the definition of border as a divider, a marker of two different spaces in present day. However, this very understanding is also being challenged with the changing roles of borders and the meanings in different contexts in the narratives. In citing, Carli et al, 2002; Wastl-Walter et al., 2002; van der Velde and van Houtum, 2003; Sidaway, 2005, Newman (2006, 152) share that borders come to life at the level of the narrative, anecdote and communication through everyday experience of individuals. The everyday experience of individuals belonging to different strata in the society, administration, state, and community are symbolic to the roles of boundaries.

This chapter introduces the narratives collected from the field in Likabali and Banderdewa through in-depth interviews and discussions. The narratives explain the nature of Assam-Arunachal border and give a wide perspective on how borders and boundaries are being understood and the role it plays in the construction of identities. The themes developed from the research participants' narratives are presented in four parts. The first part '**Power and Control**', deals with borders as frontiers, as markers of power and control of the administrative officials, the political leaders and the respective state governments. The second part '**Ethnic identity as shaped by narratives**', reflects on how identities are shaped by border narratives and vice versa. It looks into the narratives of the people along the border areas who identify themselves based on territorialisation as well as their social practices in the border areas. This segment also discusses the shifting of identities and spaces in the context of the field site. The third part '**Boundaries and changing meaning**', focuses on changing roles of borders over time. It speaks of the experiences of the people about life in the other side of the border and also how territoriality has seeped deep into the meanings of boundaries. The fourth part; '**Reappearance and disappearance of borders**', is a collection of narratives that tells about borders being a subject of occasional contestations.

5.1 Power and control

Narratives from the field accentuated the boundedness of state borders. This also indicates that territoriality and borders tend to be markers of power and control in the border areas. A state as a power-regulator has used borders to set control over the people living along the borders. (Gohain, 2007, 3281) shares, "Colonial powers all over the

world left a legacy of unending confusion and mayhem, not only by arbitrarily determining boundaries from the sole point of view of their administrative and military advantage, regardless of the history, needs and sentiments of the local population, but insisting on precise scientific demarcation of such borders.” In the case of Assam-Arunachal border, the administrative units that were created have in all might been exercising power on the demarcation of state borders.

Houtum (2011, 51) shares that border makers practice the process of border making, and bordering, by setting controls. This notion of the borders is reflected in the narratives of the public representatives and the administrations of both the states. Control signifies limitations on mobility, border crossings and prohibition on setting up any infrastructures ‘illegally’. Restrictions on geographical spaces such as borders are set by administrations and state. Controlled mobility gives a disgruntle picture to a society or community that has the history of practising open border crossings.

Henrikson in citing Gottmann (2011, 85) shares, “The record of history demonstrates that political limits in geographic space have been and remain a major source of tension and conflict.” Similar is the nature of borders for the administration in the interstate Assam-Arunachal border areas. Certain limits are set to cordon off an area that the administration believes to be a territorial limit to avoid “probable” conflicts (Gottmann, 2011, 85). The controls on mobility are a forced manifestation of exclusion and inclusion. The people living in the interstate border areas are victims of such break-up. Newman (2011, 36) says, once created borders become transformed into reality a default situation which impacts upon daily life patterns and social mores, determine the parameters of exclusion and inclusion, and creates the categories through which social and spatial compartmentalisation is perpetuated.

Tongam Rina, a journalist from Arunachal Pradesh writes, “The British found us but as India gained freedom, we became part of it and since then have been involved in avoidable wars with our own.” (The Arunachal Times) There is weight in the statement if we look back at how the state reorganisation initiated by the Union of India after independence laid its plan for the North East Frontier. The state reorganisation did bring some communities in one-fold and gave them a state to be called theirs but with this the North East India got fragmented in all socio-cultural aspects. The states have forever

been defined in terms of how an administration works in a society and on its people. It is however impractical to say that the North East Frontier region was caught with the idea of nation-state. They have lived free and wild in the jungles, hills and plains they call home. The concept of state-making acting as a coercive force appeared to be of less importance to the people of the North-East Frontier region pre-independence, as they had adept to a community based and village based lifestyle.

To substantiate the view above, an excerpt from a letter written by the Government of India in 1908 explains “The policy of aloofness is fore doomed to failure and that apart from the urgent need of preventing interference with the development of trade, the fact that over half a century of proximity to civilisation has failed in any way to redeem the tribes from their native savagery is in itself a condemnation of the policy of non-interference” (Reid, 1942, 213).

This shows that the hills had little to do with the extent of control set by British administration; as such, there were continued raids on the plains. The British officials protected the plains from plundering tactics of the hills by laying down the ‘Inner line’ and ‘Outer Line’. This account of the hills and plains’ relation with the British officials is found in the political tour diaries of the British officials.

Sikdar’s explanation can be taken which notes,

For the smooth operation of capitalism it was necessary to administratively systematise relations with the tribes. The fact that few tribes from the bordering regions of Arunachal Pradesh created a serious problem of internal security through predatory raids called for effective measures. The immediate concern was, therefore, to dislodge the hill tribes from the foothills as the land was required for settlement of cultivators and for plan. (Sikdar, 1982, 22)

The administration back then juxtaposed several policies with the living styles of the people of both hills and plains. The Britishers did not want to be disturbed by the hill tribes in their dealings with Assam for resources like tea plantation, coal, oil and animal rearing; as such, they served reserved forest area notification which miffed the tribal population. The Union of India, while trying to be very tactful in dealing with the North East Frontier, failed to address some of the core issues related to the reserve forest areas

which has been over decades claimed by people from both the states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The British policy as such with regards to the hill people corroded their internal system of authority and exposed them to territorial power (Chaube, 2012, xiii).

Taking the present case of Likabali, rights over reserved forests are being contested along with other rights of cultivating and building structures in lands they called their 'own'. The Subansiri Reserve Forest and Jiadhol Reserve Forest is claimed by the state of Arunachal Pradesh to be theirs. Similarly, the district administration of Assam claims the Subansiri Reserved Forests to be in the territory of Assam. Nongbri (1999, 3) shares, "Post-colonial period the notion of rights over contested issue between the local communities of its temporal powers and self-appointed the state took upon itself the right to make land and forest. History, however, reveals that forest policies, present and past, is revenue conservancy of trees for their own sake."

The public representatives from the state of Arunachal have resented the declaration of the area in the borders as 'Reserved forest' stating that it was inhabited by the hill tribes before the declaration of 1927. Deputy Commissioner Dhemaji, Ajit Kr Bordoloi (State of Assam, 1989) responded to the Supreme Court of India that the encroachment in Dhemaji initially began in the Subansiri Reserve Forest, in Dhemaji district of Assam which is in the interstate border. However, the illegal encroachments have now extended to revenue circles as well. The conflicts in the inter-state border areas also erupt from the reserve forests when there is any illegal encroachment. The reserve forests areas are encroached by people both sides of the borders. The district administrations have much to do with border issues as such are also respondents in the judicial battle.

The issue with the forest reserve declaration appears to be an old one right from the colonial days. It can be understood from Captain H St P Maxwell report on the expedition in the hills of Balipara Frontier Tract. He writes,

The demarcation of the boundary and the gazetting of the forests as forest reserves, at once precluded them from following their usual pursuits as regards this tract of the country and for the purpose of hunting the most valuable preserves lie in the foot of the hills. Whatever the grievance may be worth, it is certain, I think that in the savage mind a grievance did exist, and an experience of

hill tribes teaches me that a “land” grievance is the most deeply rooted of all grievances and is next to impossible to smooth”. (Reid, 1942, 269)

“Land grievance” of the hill tribes as mentioned by Maxwell is also a matter of concern for people in the present day. They communicate extremely high sentiments over their ‘ancestral land’. The present state administrations are working based on the notification. The Subansiri Reserve Forest and Jiadhol Reserve Forest was notified in 1927 in the Bengal gazette which included large parts of the traditionally inherited land of the Adis erstwhile the Abhors.

Claims and counter claims over the geographical demarcation of boundaries are evident in the narratives of the state powers and the representatives of the area. The Assam administration challenging the claim, states that the area claimed by the people of Arunachal is baseless stating that the reserved forest area was transferred to the state of Assam during the state reorganisation. The state of Assam replying to the claims of Arunachal Pradesh reported to the Local Commission that “There is nothing on record to show any such claims/objections which were received and persons/organisations/institution etc. The very fact of creation of these reserve forest signifies and irrefutably confirms that there was no human habitation in the said areas” (LCR, 2014, 22). While people from the Arunachal side of the border claimed to have their settlement there.

The two halves of the borders and boundaries are in clear opposition and the administrative arrangement precisely mounts over it. Similar, is the case of the Behali Reserve Forest which is encroached upon by the people from both the states. It is observed that infrastructural development in the disputed areas has always experienced resistance. There is a fear among the people that the new fences and establishments along the borders could be a way to assert either of the state’s claims over the territory. It is because of these assertions by both the parties, the interstate border areas are often found with poor road connectivity lacking proper public services. The then Environment and Forest Minister of Assam Rockybul Hussain (2014) had very clearly given statement to the media stating that, “Though the Behali Reserve Forest is inside the Assam border, Arunachal Pradesh is doing some activities and implementing some schemes there. As a

result, people living in the area have an impression that the locality belongs to Arunachal Pradesh” (Business Standard).

This view is not exclusive to the state legislatures of Assam. It is also evident among the permanent bureaucracy of non-politicians, like the administrative officers. In saying so, the Papum Pare (district) administration of Arunachal Pradesh along the similar lines alleged the Assam Forest Department officials for setting up a beat office at Rashaso under Taraso circle in Papum Pare district. The statements made by the people in the helm of affair project borders to be dissociative. In the narratives border dichotomies function as a divide. In some cases, it has been seen as a connection as well, where the administrative officer and the state treat borders as a place connecting the two states in the form of trade fairs organised in the disputed areas.

Discussing with an administrative officer from Likabali (2012) about boundary demarcation another aspect of borders came up,

Proper demarcation should be there because the boundary starts mattering when the right for claim starts. In such situation when the case is beyond our jurisdiction we know we are not supposed to handle that part of the area. Our controls get limited and we have better idea of the dos and don'ts on part of the administration.¹

This definitely reflects the role of boundaries and borders as generating surveillance on control over the movement and land ownership. Many a times patrolling from both the states in the celebration ground and markets of the area happens. In the words of Behdad (2002, 224), “The border patrol may not be successful in keeping all of the “undesirable” out, but it has been instrumental in establishing a pattern of social control and a generalised mode of surveillance at least in the border region.”

This view is also endorsed by the officials working along the borders. Circle Officer, from Dhemaji district, Assam says,

Boundary demarcation is important for administration. It is impossible to work in conflict areas without knowing the extent of our controls. The demarcation also sets our area of duty and based on which we can act accordingly.²

Guards at the check post in Likabali are of the opinion that to keep peace and tranquillity in the conflict area, the administrative officials from both the sides should practise 'status quo'. They should have clear idea about what they should do rather than what they are expected to do. In all its sense, it is but difficult to achieve an absolute separation of state (politics) and administration. The latter is expected to work under the directives of the state. This politics–administration dichotomy blends well with the border dichotomies where borders are treated as imaginary line dividing two sides of the same pole; Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

Figure 1. Check post at Likabali, Arunachal Pradesh



Circle Officer Likabali (2016) in tune with the check post guards also agreed that the states should maintain status quo. To cross beyond the check post, people from Assam and other states have to provide Inner Line Permit (ILP). The inner line regulation was introduced the British era.

In a personal interview he shares,

As and when problem arises, administrations from both states are expected to maintain status quo. It helps ease the tension before it escalates. This maintenance is usually achieved on close coordination with the counter parts. Civil society organisations offer a great deal of help in sobering the situation.³

Status quo here refers to the agreement made between the heads of the two states. In 1976 a high level meeting of the chief ministers of the states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh agreed on maintenance of status quo in the disputed area. Chief Ministers of both the states agreed on continuing the customary border trade under proper regulation (1976, January 11). The panchayat representatives of both the states are of the view that there is no such defined area that both the heads of the state have mentioned for maintaining status quo. There is no defined area where the status quo must be maintained, they voiced.

A senior public of Likabali in a personal interview expresses,

The administrations are saying maintain status quo. First tell us where is the defined status quo areas as asked by the chief ministers. Our people in their lands carry out cultivation and the police personnel stop them from doing it. Whereas, they have been tilling the same land since their forefather days. Now tell me what is status quo?⁴

This brings us close to what Passi (2012, 1) in citing, Georg Simmel said, “By virtue of the fact that we have boundaries everywhere and always, so accordingly we are boundaries.” In the case of the informant above, the land where he does cultivation is itself a boundary for him. He would not go to other’s land to cultivate crops or till lands. In his daily practise, he becomes a boundary in himself and sets his limitations accordingly. While the communities look at themselves and their practices as the real markers of the border, the administration does not comply with this view of people, claiming to understand boundaries better than they do. For the administration, it is the directives prescribed in words in the form of government notifications or acts which matter the most.

Chief Minister of Assam, SC Sinha (1976, January 11) urged the administrative officials to orient their attitudes towards helpful and constructive solution of problems and to focus above all on understanding the human dimension of the population involved. This was welcomed by the then Chief Minister of Arunachal, PK Thungon. However, there have been allegations levelled against the administration for their harsh attitude and rudeness in dealing with border issues. The administration in the border areas have always been seen with suspicion for their ‘unruly’ acts. Likabali, in the foothills of West

Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh, has been in limelight for being the zone of conflict. The people of the area have posed the question of who is more indigenous to the place and the administrations tend to act as the judge in the matter.

In an effort to justify their roles as administrative officer, Assistant Deputy Commissioner, Dhemaji (district), Assam in a personal interview shares,

There are two distinct issues that we need to understand – the ‘status quo area’ and the ‘disputed area’. In the status quo area, no infrastructure should be built and no permanent and new buildings should come up. Some parts of the area of Assam which are being cultivated by Arunachalee should not be disturbed by Assam in order to maintain status quo. The disputed area is basically the area claimed by both the states.⁵

The officer’s statement ‘*parts of the area of Assam...cultivated by Arunachalee*’ is an endorsement of his belief that the land though cultivated by people from Arunachal actually belongs to Assam. One can thus perceive a patronizing attitude in the statement. On the contrary, an informant from Likabali (Arunachal) in a personal interview states,

Violation of the status-quo is mostly from the side of the Assam administration. The Assam administration along with the Assam police encourages the people of Assam to encroach land of Arunachal. The administration somehow supports their people. As people get the backing from the administration, they continue to encroach upon the lands without fear. This is a bitter truth!⁶

Quite clearly, the administration on both sides of the border has failed to appreciate the true nature of the problem. In fact, the administration of both the sides have failed to deal with the “dispute” and only helped to further widen the chasm between people of the two states.

It is pertinent to mention here that an area is referred to as ‘disputed’ when it is claimed by both the state governments and no permanent infrastructures are built by either side. It is the inter-state boundary demarcated by the Survey of India, which is a case under judicial consideration of the Supreme Court of India and is not to be decided by the states for now.

Another term that is frequently heard in the discourse on borders is 'status-quo'. It is the area that has been used for cultivation by people from both sides of the states for years. In spite of the claims made by both the states, the administration generally (officially) encourages both the sides to maintain status-quo. The philosophy behind this is that since allowing the violation of the official line could lead to an escalation of tension, people are exhorted to maintain the line as is. Interestingly, in the narratives of the administrative officials one often hears about acts of violation of status-quo committed by the other side. Thus, there is a continuous shifting of blame.

The people living in the borders can actually see through this. The borderlanders do not shy away from expressing the truth about the divisive role of the state-administrations of both the sides. Giving clarification on the stained role of the administration in the inter-state boundary dispute, informant from Likabali, in a personal interview shares,

It is not that the problem has arisen because of the administration. The problem of course starts unexpectedly. Even when two people from different sides of the border fight in the market, it becomes a border issue. Most of the times such petty incidents get a lot of undue attention. This is what they call 'spicing up' a story in the media.⁷

Quite understandably, the communities on both the sides are particularly upset with the way in which the situation has been handled by the administration of the neighbouring state. There is public ire against the administration of both Assam and Arunachal. This is what William Graham Sumner identified as the 'in group' feeling. All said and done, the people from both the states share a greater sense of affinity with their state administration in comparison to the other. While the communities are influenced by these biases, the administrations from both the states very often add fuel to fire. However, in the popular narratives of the bureaucracy in regard to diffusing tension in the borders, 'cordial relation' and 'coordination' are the watch words.

There is cordial relation between the two states. For instance, recently when the Prime Minister came for inauguration of the bridge here in Assam, cultural troupes from both the states were seen performing. Even in trade fairs we see people from both the states participating, making the celebrations really special.

Dispute cannot be solved at the level of the common masses. The administration has to intervene. Though there is dispute they continue to live their lives.⁸

This, on the other hand, reflects the powerful role of the administration in undermining the public as incapable of solving their problems independently. Such an opinion is not accepted by the people living in the borders.

Dispute can be resolved if the state governments do not interfere. It can be sorted out mutually. It is because the state government claims the areas as their own that people from other parts of the state (mostly immigrants) try to settle in the area.⁹

Informing about how issues are blown out of proportion with the help of an example an informant says,

Some minor incidents in the border area should not be seen as indicative of the entire state or region. Disputes do not continue forever. People react very sharply to incidents in the border areas. The media has to be blamed for it. They project the disputed areas as a war zone. Meet the people here, they are not always fighting with each other.¹⁰

Probably so much attention is being given to the inter-state border dispute that even the political leaders during general elections declare that “efforts will be made to resolve border dispute” in their election manifestos. The administrative officials from Arunachal Pradesh share that the border areas are filled with landless people from in and around Brahmaputra basins of Assam. They claimed that during natural calamities like floods, people from the river basins of Assam migrate to the foothills of Arunachal Pradesh. The border areas as such become a cauldron of mix population.

In the words of Chaube,

No native category is permanent since every historical situation is subject to the process of change. Part of the ethnic complexity of the region must be traced in the ethno cultural factors. Migrations from different directions from the pre-historic period have completely confused the racial picture. (Chaube, 1975, 193)

Assam government evicts people from Arunachal living along the foothills to make space for the landless people to settle in the area. The population explosion is also because of illegal migrants from Bangladesh. Many non-natives of Assam looking for settlement find border areas suitable to settle.¹¹

The view as expressed by the official from Arunachal Pradesh has been slammed by the Assam administration, who believes that such outlook on the border dispute is narrow and baseless.

See, people have earmarked land for themselves. When the other party tries to build up unauthorized structures in one's land, people will be obviously enraged. ... It is not about forceful settlement.¹²

Once I directed the Arunachalee villagers to put up a sign board writing 'unauthorised people not allowed'. This irked the Assam people and they misunderstood it to as propaganda for land grabbing. There was series of meetings on it. The issue was however diffused with the help of Assam administration.¹³

The border issues have taken a sensitive and an emotional turn over the decades. The States Reorganisation Act of 1956 that reorganised the boundaries of the states in the country left a feeling of discontentment in North East India. Special administrative arrangement had to be made for North East Frontier Agency (present day Arunachal Pradesh). Under the Government of India Act 1919 it was first a "Backward Tract", under the GoI Act 1935 it became an "Excluded Area" and then became "Tribal Area of Assam" in the provision of the Sixth Schedule.

Constitution of India decides the fate of the hills and plains. But sadly, the Sixth Schedule that was introduced to address the issues of the tribals was an invention of the British in order to deal with us... Divide and rule and make us economically weak.¹⁴

...right after independence, when arrangements were made to create states in the country, it was during that time that major chunk of the areas which were earlier under NEFA in 1914 notification were given back as "transferred areas" to

Assam. The bone of contention is the change of the directives in the notification.¹⁵

Stressing on abiding by the notifications, rule of law and order of the Supreme Court of India talks about the present-day crisis the informant says,

Language also matters a lot in reading out any sort of administrative orders. Arunachal Pradesh is inclined towards Hindi and Assam uses Assamese as means to communicate. When there is any sort of issue in the border areas, people get emotional instead of understanding that there could be a possible miscommunication. People from Assam are less inclined to settle in Arunachal Pradesh. Arunachal is a protected area and it does not have the kind of market Assam has.¹⁶

Why would any community be interested in merging with another? It can happen for a day or two over some celebration but a permanent merger with another community is difficult.¹⁷

Boundaries, as such, are markers of one's limit for the community. The dispute of the present day is because neither the centre nor the states have been able to exactly define where the boundary is. The boundaries keep changing based on needs and natural circumstances. During natural calamities people residing along the borders look for greener pastures and try to settle in 'no man's land'. When a particular community tries to settle in the land which was not previously owned by anyone, it becomes an issue in itself and then arise new claimants of the land. Administrative officers from both the states accept that there should be visible marks between two states and that the boundary demarcation issue must be solved amicably. This they believe will help delineate border controls in risk assessment and their own enforcement strategies on the people. Back in the year 1979, a High Powered Tripartite Committee (HPTC) was constituted. The committee comprised of representatives from Union Government, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh for taking the boundary demarcation task.

On the way state administrations are supposed to function and act, former Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru wrote;

The whole problem of dealing with tribal areas has to be thought out again by us. Generally, speaking, I think we should interfere as little as possible with the tribal ways of life. The British government pursued a wise policy in this respect, from a governmental point of view. Our outlook is completely different. But, if other consideration did not prevail, I would have advised our going slowly in establishing our administration in these areas. I do not think we need talk about extending the benefits of welfare state. I have grave doubts myself as to how far we benefit these people by the apparatus of administration that we may set up there, and opinions may well differ as to what a welfare state is. These people presumably are more or less happy, and it is quite possible that our attempts to improve their lot might lead to greater unhappiness for them. (Sharma and Sharma, 2006, 97)

The informant from Assam shares,

The strategy to diffuse border dispute for the two states are done in coordination. We call upon the Chief Secretary of Arunachal Pradesh, Deputy Commissioners of the districts, Gaon Burahs, Panchayat representatives and prepare a team to solve the dispute amicably.¹⁸

Another informant adds,

When there is boundary dispute the first thing we do is see if the rules are violated. Then we give report to the deputy commissioner of the district. There will be talks between the deputy commissioners of both the states. After the official correspondence between the two, the report will be given to the magistrate and the magistrate directs the officer in-charge of the police station to deal with the situation.¹⁹

What is not convincing in the measures taken by the administration of the two states is that, the set norm that they comply with it is itself shaky. They are talking about violation of the rules, in that they mean the violation of the status quo agreement of 1976. When the status quo agreement is itself under the scanner of the public and is

constantly being challenged by them that cannot be of any assistance. Time and again people have asked to locate the status quo area.

Inhabitant of Likabali area voices,

The administration uses the status quo agreement whimsically. Wherever it comes handy for them, they will use it to claim lands or carry out eviction drives.²⁰

Historians like Bezbaruah (2010, 7) also writes, “The Assam Frontier Tract Regulation of 1880 enabled Government of Assam to appoint political officers to look after any tract inhabited or frequented by barbarous, or semi civilised tribes adjoining or within the borders of any of the districts included within the territories under the administration of the chief commissioner of Assam.” Such regulations then and till date continue to empower officers in recommending boundaries for the states.

An administrative officer from Dhemaji opines,

The main issue arises when someone tries to go to the jungles to cut trees and there is a rightful owner of the jungle. The clash between the two parties becomes a border dispute. When some individual having a plot of cultivable land in a certain area tries to go beyond the existing area, the border comes into play. Dispute also occurs over the ownership of the water bodies along the border areas. It is difficult to understand who has the authority over the area. These are the kinds of issues that we have to deal with.²¹

A senior citizen of Likabali area in a personal interview asks a very pertinent question on the existence of the people in the area,

Where do we go? Where will our people go if our areas by some “notification” are taken away from us? Article (3) of the constitution of India says area reorganisation must be bilateral. But it was not done. Our people were not taken into confidence. Bordoloi passed away in 1950 and the notification of boundary demarcation came out in 1951. We should have been given the chance to represent ourselves as well. Based on some table survey, the faith of the hills and plains were decided.²²

In the case of Assam, it is said that the state has a consistent policy and approach in dealing with the inter-state border dispute unlike Arunachal Pradesh which has no fixed approach. This view can be further explained in what a youth leader from Likabali has to say,

Assam is consistent in her approach in dealing with border issues and they are good at it. They appear to have a written doctrine. They have a consistent policy on boundary matters. We are suffering because of inconsistency. Government officers and state governments are weak. They are least bothered about the people in border areas. The executive body does not feel responsible towards the people.²³

This illustrates the administration's strategy in securing state's land and resource. While it appears to be so, there are "rumours" about the approaches of the administration from Assam. In the popular narratives of the people from Arunachal Pradesh, it is assumed that the Assam officials try to occupy more land and carry out illegal eviction to get promotions in their job. There is a hidden land grabbing policy of the state of Assam that is counted in promoting the officials posted in border areas.

On being told about such stories in Arunachal, official from Assam responded in a personal interview saying,

I don't understand where people get such ideas from. It is difficult to eliminate such thoughts. We should conduct awareness programmes and social activities in the border areas including both administrations of the state and the people of the area. This will bring the public out of the notion of administration as the wrong doers.²⁴

In the case of Banderdewa, which is also a place along the interstate boundary of Assam and Arunachal, the nature of boundary is not as rigid as in the case of Likabali and Behali-Taraso. Banderdewa is a commercial zone more of a space for co-existence. In the outskirts of Banderdewa there are issues of land encroachment. The nature of the dispute in Banderdewa is however not very volatile. People from Banderdewa think boundaries are created to set up control mechanisms and limitations. The National Highway 52-A along Banderdewa is a metaphor for writing and rewriting the text of everyday life of

people, a metaphor that is alive in their narratives and discourses, where one side of the highway belongs to Assam and the other side to Arunachal. It is symbolical of cultural association as well as dissociation. Cross-cultural contact is evident in Banderdewa. Boundary is all about adjustments and co-existence in the context of Banderdewa.

The administrations in the Banderdewa area are keen to ensure that the business establishments do not come in the “right of way” of the national highway. Any such cases if and when found are jointly dealt by the administration from both sides. The public leaders from the Arunachal side of the border areas believe that the Assam administration under the disguise and cover of the Reserved Forest notification and the status-quo agreement carries out their ‘land grabbing’ policy. This view is not limited to the Assam part but also applies to the Arunachal administration as claimed by some youth organisations of Assam. The administration tends to display their power and control more during trade fairs and festival celebrations. Their parades constantly remind the people of the border areas of being under surveillance.

People from both the states are of the opinion that the enforcement strategies used by the administration often go unreported. While people from Arunachal claim that the Assam administration uses local people to evict them, the same is in the case of people from Assam who are afraid that the Arunachal administration might evict them and their establishments might be demolished. In public forum, the administrations of both the states project cordial relation.

Some of the cases show resistance from the people against the administration. In 1988, the Assam police obstructed the construction of a power house of the Power and Electricity department, science laboratory of Government Higher Secondary School Likabali and establishment of Arunachal Steel and Traders Firm on the ground that creation of such infrastructure is against the spirit of status-quo agreement of 1979.

In 1980 when the Assam Public Works department carried out a repairing work along the Aalo-Likabali BRTF road from Assam Police Battalion to Zero Point approximately 850 metres was stopped by public and administration of Arunachal. In 1998, the deputy commissioner and the superintendent of police, North Lakhimpur along with SDO and SDPO Dhemaji accompanied by two trucks and one bus filled with Assam police battalion arrived at Likabali and captured the Mopin (festival of Galo tribe of Arunachal

Pradesh) ground and the adjoining areas. The people of Likabali filed a petition in the Honorable High Court, Guwahati. The court vide civil rule no 2012 in the year 1996 gave verdict in favour of the people of Likabali, permitting celebration of the festival in the Likabali Mopin ground. However, this was said to be violated by the Assam administration and police and as such the court directed to maintain status quo. Presently, the same ground is the Police Training Centre of Assam. In 1997, the Assam Police battalion removed “Arunachal Pradesh” from the signboard of M/S Zirido printing press Likabali, Arunachal Pradesh and replaced it with “Assam”. This act asserts the tendency of the administration to stamp their authority over the people.

In 1999, public of Pale village area along the Assam-Arunachal border protested the foundation stone laid by Chief Minister of Assam for establishment of a Central School. Many such cases have been reported where the administration exhibited power, much to the chagrin of the common masses. The narratives from the field sites put in the picture of top-down forces displayed by the administration in the bordering process.

5.2 Ethnic identity as shaped by narratives

Highlighting the connecting link of identity and territory, Newman and Paasi (1998) share that the relationship between identity and territory has been well demonstrated and that it is becoming more complex. Similar is the case with the Assam-Arunachal borders, wherein boundaries of all kind: social, political, cultural and economic – allocates identity to the people living along the borders. Kolossav (2011, 177) shares that as a rule, the longer a political boundary exists, the more closely it is incorporated into national and ethnic identity frameworks, and the better adapted it is to new realities of the changing dynamics of the border regions. The ‘deterritorialization’ of the state leads to the creation of multi-layered and mixed identities, especially in border regions (ibid).

The construction of identities traverses from the perspectives of people within and outside a community. Groups and individuals expose themselves to the understanding that they belong to a certain whole and not the others they call ‘them’. In this, identities are marked by perceptions in the narratives of the people. Passi (2012, 1) uses Simmel’s statement that ‘people are boundaries’ to fall in line with scholars who noted how people become borders (Balibar, 1998) or how human bodies are key sites of borders in the current, biometrically managed world (Amoore, 2006).

Borders and people appear like two sides of the same pole and in between the space is where identities are shaped and constructed. It is evident from the field sites that borders manage the social practices and discourse constructing and communicating meaning and constructing identity. In social theory and the politics of identity, Colhoun pointed out that identity politics is not a new phenomenon and that, it is, ancient. Boundaries develop a life of their own in the narratives of social, cultural and ethnic groupings in areas like Likabali and Banderdewa.

Fredrik Barth's concept of 'boundary' corroborates the process involved in the construction of identities. It is not just the physical boundary in the borders that people relate to; rather it is how boundaries emerge from ethnic groups making them distinct from one another. Prokkola (2009, 22) also stressed on border performances and narratives in the construction of self, stating that state borders and identities share a relation. What is socially significant is that identities in borders are created; it originates from lived experiences and shared narratives. The very usage of 'border' in the narratives of the people of Arunachal and Assam signify that boundary of ethnic groups along with historical, political basis is mounted on a socio-cultural base as well. The two states have numerous tribes and communities; identities in the inter-state borders as such appear to be multicultural and multilingual. The theme that has been developed from the narratives looks at the Arunachalee and Assamese identities holistically as being shaped in the narratives. Paasi (2013, 13) in citing Mach (1993), Jenkins (2004) also share that collective identity is not generated naturally but is 'socially constructed', it is still produced by the social construction of borders themselves.

Varied perspectives on boundaries and borders have been gathered from the field site, one of them being the hills and plains identity. The construction of these identities dates back to the colonial days when the Inner Line boundary was demarcated by the British administration. The foot hills are occupied by a mixed population, and the hill portions is completely inhabited by the tribes. The plains portion of the areas was separately administered from the hills. A distinct approach in dealing with the two has left the present-day Arunachal and Assam wondering about fault lines in the demarcation. The area was in many ways unripe for regular administration then. However, prior to such demarcation in the form of Inner Line Regulation Act, a resident of Likabali has something worth sharing.

Before the hills and plains divide, people in the borders could go anywhere. People have started becoming assertive after the whole exercise of state-reorganisation. Of course, there were traditional boundaries then, like rivers and agricultural lands. But people of that generation did go to the “other side” and contacted people from that side.²⁵

This indicates that borders are porous entities open to contacts. Barth’s (1969, 10) view on identity as emerging when there is interaction between social groups can be considered here. People from Arunachal know that they have their own indigenous identity to maintain because they cannot fit into cultural markers of the Assamese people. Life in both sides of the border areas goes parallel. However, the two sides are in constant contact in their day to day life in markets, schools, religious establishments and festival celebrations and other social practices.

During the Ahom era, there were no strict demarcations between the hills and the plains. Our forefathers would supply ivory to the people of Assam. People from the hills also received an elephant from Thailand from the Ahom Raja during that time.²⁶

Initially hill people would purchase salt and clothes from Tibet. After Britishers came, they got to know that salt was also available in the plains of Dibrugarh and Likabali. Then they started getting salts from Assam plains in exchange of palm leaves and bamboos from the hills.²⁷

This gives an idea about how people live in tandem with the knowledge of being an outsider in other’s place to suit their needs. An individual here seems to identify oneself as being defined by the other. The whole idea of ‘belongingness’ and ‘othering’ can be considered here. The hill tribes apparently said to be coming down from the hills to the plains barter goods and in the process experience this reproduction of identity “coming from the hills”. Barth (ibid) says that “A group maintains its identity only when the members of the group interact with others.” It is obvious that the feeling of ‘us’ and ‘them’ comes to an individual while in social contact with the others.

Jawaharlal Nehru, writing about the people of the North East Frontier region says,

In dealing with these tribes in the NEFA we meet great variety of them. They differ from each other in many ways, some being more primitive than others. On the whole, the tribes in the NEFA are more primitive than those of the autonomous districts of Assam. In large areas of the NEFA there has been 'no administration and their contacts with the outside world have been very limited, if at all. For various reasons, we have been spreading out our administration over this area and thus rather suddenly, we have brought these tribes face to face with some aspects of the outside world. They have come in contact with our officers, the men of the Assam Rifles and to a small extent some shopkeepers and the like. (Sharma & Sharma, 2006, 101)

As expressed by Nehru, the people from both the sides came in contact and with it the question of "Who am I?" became pervasive. Ethnic identity in the Assam-Arunachal border is based on us-them and how difference is marked in terms of where a person lives and where he/she belongs to and who they are.

SK Chaube argued,

Ethnic distinctions do not depend on the absence of social interaction and acceptance, but are quite to the contrary often the very foundations on which embracing social systems are based. The socio-cultural aspirations of each ethnic group, are, on the other hand, perennially moulded and reviewed according to the circumstances proximal to the conditions of its existence. This is how inter-ethnic conflicts within a political system seek to be resolved and new fields of collaboration and conflict are discovered. (Chaube, 1975, 199)

Asserting an identity of a 'free' citizen informant from Likabali says,

Even when Britishers were taking away parts of India, NEFA was free, unexplored and unconquered. I don't understand how we were under the British control. This is ridiculous.²⁸

Another informant shares,

We do not have the habit of migration. We are not going to other sides any way. But in the case of Assam they have the history of migration and immigration which also shows their adjustment level.²⁹

Both the informants succinctly communicate the notion of a tribal identity as “natural”, “untamed” and conforms to the ‘in-group’ feeling. This contributes to identities linked with people’s ethnic and linguistic ties as well. Language and accent in which a person speaks gives them their distinct identity. The common Assamese language of the Assam is also spoken by Arunachal people and that the people from Assam have the pronunciation of certain words like that of Arunachal people and most of the time different.

I cannot go beyond my community and I very well know where I belong to and where my roots are. There is no way that I would go beyond my set boundaries and comfort zone to go to an alien place.³⁰

Another informant from Assam shares,

I don’t find this border issue to be disturbing us. I visit the temple (Malinithan) and offer my prayers. Because I am from Dhemaji does not mean I can’t come to this side of the country. My stay here is not permanent nor an end to a visit.³¹

Pangeng and Riba are very clear about where their roots belong to. Even in presenting their perceptions about boundaries, the duo asserted their identity by excluding themselves from the others. A permanent distinction is maintained between those that legally belong to these territories and those that do not.

An informant from Likabali says,

We have our own set of practices, and they (people from Assam) have their own. We are very distinct in the way we live and deal with everyday situations. It is our lifestyle and culture that makes us different from them. We co-exist, we are same yet very different. We share same history with people from the other side of the border and even in that we have always maintained our identity as people belonging to the hills.³²

Informant from Dhemaji, Assam expresses similar view in a personal interview,

You will very well identify an Arunachalee from his/her lifestyle. The Arunachalee people are very straightforward; but, I feel the transition from old days to present days for them may not have been smooth.³³

People in the border areas base their identities on cultural differences. The border here acts as an associative as well as dissociative agent; while associating people with one community, it dissociates them from the other. Narah hints in her statement that she believes that the people from Arunachal are not completely “civilised”. She talks about the transition from tradition to modernity in a patronizing tone.

This subjective view has been recorded by Captain GA Nevill, a British official who also writes,

Small and scattered villages inhabited by the hill tribes are very hard to control. They are much disliked by the Assamese villagers on account of their custom of keeping large quantities of pigs and also because of their pilfering habits. (Excluded Areas record, 1925, December 3)

This insight reflects the unaccommodating nature of the British towards the highlanders. Thanks to the British, generally, such an attitude has been adopted by people from the plains. There is a long tradition of British ethnographers giving vent to their feeling of cultural superiority vis-à-vis the highlanders. John Butler, author of *A Sketch of Assam* during his first visit to Assam in 1837 described Assam as ‘a wild, uncivilized, foreign land’ and he suggests that ‘to those accustomed only to the comforts of civilized life, or to the traveller who is indifferent to the beauties of scenery, the monotony, silence and loneliness of the vast forests of Assam will prevent few features of attraction’ (Butler, 1847, vi).

Barth (1969), who was the first to discuss the relationship between collective ethnic identity and boundaries, argued that the continuity of ethnic unit depends on the maintenance of a boundary in the continuing dichotomization between members and outsiders. This fits well in the context of the present notion about the tribals of the hills.

An informant from Arunachal side of the border seemingly having good exposure to the manner in which the tribals were/are looked at shares,

If the tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh are considered “savage”, “barbaric” and “wild” because of their living pattern and plundering in the plains for survival. In that case, the Britishers should also be considered “barbaric”, “savage” and “wild”. What interest did they have in coming to the hills and imposing control

over the tribals and decide punishment for not conforming to their directives? They are more barbaric because they have violated the hill territories and lands. Boundary is just a demarcation by the government. It is an official violation of the relationship the hill people shared with the Assamese people. There is no proper demarcation of any boundary, only an assumption of a boundary. Living examples are never considered and both the state governments are just flying high on rhetoric.³⁴

Sharing the same view, an informant from Arunachal side of the border opines,

Boundary is imaginary. Even though it is something that is attempted to be made visible by the state authorities, life in the border continues to exist. The whole of North-East India is in the grip of interstate boundary division. This is the gift of the British officials who had introduced the concept of designating labels in society. The intention of the British officials' is doubtful. They have projected the hill tribes as being busy with annexation and plundering in the plain areas.³⁵

While sharing about boundary demarcation, people from both the states constantly mention about land and resources. Land as such cannot be omitted in discussing about ethnic identity as being shaped by narratives. Land appears to be a measurement of their identity and an identity. People along the border based their identity in the socio-cultural practices which gives land primary importance. The role of economic factors cannot be ruled out in asserting their identity. Land and natural resources are integral to the people from the hills. Even in their festivals, mother earth and the land are offered prayers.

The areas cultivated by a person whether in Assam or Arunachal Pradesh is an ancestral property. To safe guard the ancestral if the people from Arunachal have to register in Assam, they can very well do. Nobody would want to give up their ancestral land.³⁶

An informant from Arunachal side of the border says,

Unlike us, the Assamese people do not have emotional attachment with lands and natural resources because they are mostly migrants. Lands are important to us and we get sentimental about it because it is our ancestral property.³⁷

An informant from Duliajaan Assam in a personal interview says,

Though I am migrant from Bangladesh, my families migrated here before 1953 and we are very well part of Assamese society now. I exercise my franchise here in Arunachal Pradesh. I have an allotted land in Assam and that land is equally precious to me and my family. Even if people call us immigrants, the fact is we have been accepted long back by India. We came before 1953 and that is an important year as we were considered part of India and Assam.³⁸

In the case of Arunachal-Assam border, people of both the states have their own understanding of the stories of the border creation and different claims and assertions. In the case of Likabali the place that borders Assam and Arunachal, the narratives mostly consist of what the administration, the markers of the boundary have done to the place. Most of them are filled with anger against the administration and the committee that drafted the Arunachal- Assam border.

In Schendel's words (2006, iii) "...all attempts to elucidate the notion of personal identity (and by extension, group identity) independently of and in isolation from the notion of narrative are bound to fail". The collective memories of the people guide us through how boundary demarcations present the dichotomies of the self and other.

"Hills people have very little knowledge of cultivation in the plains. They would mainly do shifting cultivation. When they came down to plains, the idea of *pani kheti* (wet cultivation) attracted them. It was the artistic beauty of the wet cultivation that drove them to the plains to do the cultivation,"³⁹ shares an informant from Arunachal Pradesh.

There are narratives on trading between the hills and plains. The hillsmen would barter iron, cloth, pepper, ginger, Mishmi teeta, wax, ivory, musk, Tibetan swords, spears, rubber etc for red blanket, cloths (ordinary and silk), button, needles, cheap ornaments, knives, pipes glass beads, salt, utensils and agricultural implements from the plains (Sikdar 1982, 18). The hillsmen would make bamboo rafts for the plains to cross rivers. Wheatley and polyandry bag rafts were also made during that time. Hills people were appreciated for their masonry skills by the British officials and the people from the plains. The natives of Likabali area shares that products like tea, curry powder, turmeric, rum used in the expedition by the coolies and British officials would attract the hill tribes. Sikdar (ibid) writes, "The old trade routes' descending from the hills into the plains of Assam passed through dense forests, passes and rivers. Although there

were no fixed routes for the descent from the hills, trade in the plains was conducted through an organised market system at the duars.”

Land revenue system of the Assam government is another way of asserting claims over the land. The oldest denizen of the area, in late 60s living in Likabali since 1981 and his parents since 1964 in a personal interview shared that he is one of the few to have avoided taking *Patta*.⁴⁰

Esse (2016, 7) writes, “*Patta* is a kind of land possession certificate to be taken from the Assam administration if the land allegedly falls under Assam boundary. However, this *patta* when given to the land owner is given on a back date of the year 1979 a way to show that the land belongs to the Assam government.” The year is significant as it is the year when the heads of the states signed an agreement to maintain status quo.

Interestingly, some of the residents of Arunachal pay *patta* to Assam and have their electoral roll in Arunachal Pradesh. These residents are Arunachalee as well as people from Assam who have business establishments in Arunachal side of the border.

Rono Baido from Alikata in Assam works in Likabali with electoral roll, ration card, water bill registered with Arunachal Pradesh. There are many others like Baido who share that they have a mixed identity. When in Arunachal side of the border they consider themselves to be part of the state. When they are at Assam they are apparently bombarded with questions if they are not scared of working in Arunachal side and if they are mistreated by the locals.

Stories and images of this kind of relationships in border become the markers of identity apart from the cultural markers. In the everyday practices such as the market, ethnic identities are performed. In market sheds, the Arunachalee sellers and buyers and Assamese seller and buyer identify with each other as being an insider as well as outsider. There is a social contact in the market area people get aware of their identities when it is challenged by the non- members. Giving account of market relation of the people residing along the border areas, an informant from Arunachal side of the border shares,

My father was a political interpreter. He used to share his experiences of trade in the border areas. Our forefathers would collect tax from the plains people selling

goods in the market at places like Laikmekuri and Murkungselek (places along the borders). Even in the present day the market still exists in small scale and they have contact with each other though the tax collection has been evaded after independence.⁴¹

An informant from Assam side of the border shares,

We prefer to set up markets together so that potential buyers get the choice of other goods as well.” It was observed that the produce of the seller from Arunachal was different from the one from Assam. Identities are constantly being negotiated, in the forms of market produce, attires, language, accent and how the people express themselves to others. The elements, means and materials the people living along the borders would want to confine in the boundaries they draw reflect how identities differ.⁴²

It is observed that unlike in the Arunachal side of the border, where people majorly belong to a tribe called Galo, it is not the same case with the Assam side of the border. Assam side of the border has so many inhabitants who called themselves the “real” people of the area. It has a mixed community each distinct from the others within them. Santhals, Adivasi, Nepalese, Bodo, Bengali, Mishings and so on are settled along the border areas from the Assam side. The Assamese have felt their identity demographic change caused by the relentless Bengalis and tea garden labour from Middle some Nepalese, but mostly Bangla (Verghese, 2012, 267).

An informant from the Arunachal side of the border explains,

Immediate people living along the border have no problems with the people from Assam. Agriculture farming depends on migrant labours. People with vested interests mostly migrants from other parts of Assam are using the borders.⁴³

Informant from the Assam side of the border says,

See, we know who the owners of the land are. Everyone identifies their land there is no problem as such. We look different and behave differently and it is easy to tell ...⁴⁴

A denizen from Arunachal side of the border expresses,

Border dispute is exaggerated. We out here take it as a political issue. If we actually see, it does not affect our lives neither does it have any impact on the relation we share with the Assamese people. Given an instance that there is fight between two families over land, will it mean that we stop buying our household goods from the shop whose keeper is a Bengali from Assam?⁴⁵

However, in the narratives from the field site, it is certainly about “us” and “them”, where the existence of one paves way for the existence of the other. The identities that emerge in borders are not only from a particular discourse or practise but varied discourses that goes beyond community, ethnicity and language. Paasi (2013, 13) also shares that “The core of all codes of collective identity is formed by a distinction between ‘us’ and ‘others’ but also stress that these simple codes are connected by various discourses with other social and cultural distinctions such as sacred-profane, center-periphery, past-present-future, or inside-outside.” An identity stands unique when it is exposed to a world outside it. It is about self-ascription and ascription by others when there is contact showing difference. The Assamese and Arunachalee identity takes a leap from this explanation and are exposed to various other identities. The practise of exclusion and inclusion in the borders as evident in the interstate borders are seen functioning as markers of identity. It is the division that has constructed identities, making state border its markers.

There is also a very funny influence that takes place in borders despite their distinct identities. Local from the Assam side of the border narrates,

The Arunachalee have become fond of chewing betel-nut. Whenever an Arunachalee visits an Assamese, they are offered betel-nut as a traditional marker of hospitability. Now they have grown equally fond of it. And you see that people along the borders move around with red mouth. Red is the colour we get after chewing betel-nut with betel leaf and lime. It is so obvious that we influence each other.⁴⁶

The food habits, traditional attires, lifestyles are getting mixed in the border areas despite the assertion of identities in demanding certain rights over traditional lands,

water bodies and forests. Matrimonial relations also take place between the people of the two states. It is said that the Mishings are encouraged to marry tribals from Arunachal mostly because they are assumed to have enough lands to ensure a “good life” for them. Land has always been associated with power.

Nag (1998, 12) writes that in the pre-colonial times, tribals extended the area of their territory and asserted their sovereignty through raids. The area where they carried out the raids was considered by the tribals as their estate and the inhabitants of the region as their subjects. An extension of Nag’s statement is what a resident from the Arunachal side of the border has to say,

Plundering the plain areas as hill men was an assertion of their existence and ownership over the land. It was also a way to prove one’s existence. We can also say that it was in a way a search for social contacts with the outside world.⁴⁷

It can be said that people claiming to have ancestral lands in the border areas stress on their identities and presence more than those who have recently settled along the border areas. Though there are cultural differences in the border areas it can be ascertained that because cultures intermingle, people from both the states continued to sustain their relationships. There is a mutual boundary based cultural proximity. The logic of dividing interstate boundary as hills and plains is questionable. However, the narratives of ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘we’ and ‘the other’ explains the mutually exclusive oppositions that come out from the borders. Anderson’s (2001) view on border areas as being directly affected by the often seemingly arbitrary actions of two (or more) different states, not just their ‘own’ government, can be related to the narrative of a local from the Arunachal side of the border.

We work in our field and police officials from the other side come and interrogate us, asking about the activities. That gets to our nerves. Who would want to be asked all the time about what they are doing in their homes? Tell me!⁴⁸

This projects borders as the deciding factor in terms of classifying who should be in the ‘inside’ and who should be ‘outside’. Such classification becomes more rigid when people along the borders define themselves based on what others think. Because borders

are a social construct the narratives are also a construction and interpretation of life around them as being constantly under surveillance and some kind of ordering. Bordering, ordering, and collective identity-building, then, are now understood as processes (Albert et al. 2001, Paasi 2003).

A local from the Arunachal side of the border opines,

Assam is a developed and an equipped state. So, why not be part of Assam if our ancestral land is there. Some of our cultural habits are also same with that of Assam; we can adjust there. Leave us if you can't! We the stakeholders are not made party to the case that is subjudice in the Supreme Court of India. All the depositions are made by the government. We should be made party to the case. We are the living testimony of our existence here.⁴⁹

In their narratives people from Arunachal often refer to the 'posa system' to prove the existence and linkage of tribal people with the plains. Talking about the system of chieftainship, people tell how with the use of muscle power, the lands were owned in the olden days. They identify themselves as the owner of the land while dissociating the others as their subjects. Resistance in succumbing to the orders of administration from both sides is seen as maintenance of their identity. The habitual everyday practices and people's expression of attachments and detachments in the border areas explains the identity construction of 'insider' and 'outsider'. Christina Choi (2011, 507) in citing Joseph Nevins (2002) argues that the border is continually constructed through the building of not only walls and fences but also national identities and exclusivities. In other words, continual 'dividing practices' over the physical boundary serve to distinguish between those who belong and those who do not, and this process contributes to the construction of subjects and identities (Nevins 2002, 53).

The state of Assam constantly made it clear that boundary between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh must be defined as set out in constitution of India and laws /notification. The state of Assam has submitted that any attempt to redefine the boundaries based on nebulous and ambiguous reference to tradition, customary usages, historical records and other aspect is unacceptable to the state of Assam. While such references make no sense to the state of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh has constantly been referring to historical events and activities (LCR, 2014, 25).

The Arunachalee and Assamese identity came up in most of the narratives. People from the Assam side have prominently considered people in the Arunachal as a collective homogenous whole. However, the Arunachalee do not identify the others to be a collective whole as Assamese. They are very clear in categorising identities for the others. They have as such given the identities like ‘Assam migrants’ and ‘real Assamese’. By ‘Assam migrants’ they refer to their popular notion that migrants from other parts of Assam (particularly Bangladeshis) have been pushed to foothill deliberately by the state government of Assam. The ‘real Assamese’, according to the people of Arunachal, are the ones with whom they have co-existed for centuries.

Apart from the Assamese and Arunachalee identity, tribal and non-tribal identity is also used in popular discourse. Tribals are obviously the people from hills and non-tribals are the ones from the plains. It is pertinent to mention here that there are plain tribals as well in the boundary areas. Historically, plain tribals were called plain Daflas [Nyishi] and tribals were the hill Daflas [Nyishi]. Lakhimpur area had good numbers of plain Daflas residing in the district since post-colonial days.

Mackenzie (2007, 31) had also mentioned about such settlements; “The tribe of tagin Daflas living in the hills on the borders of East Darang and part of Lakhimpur have however this year placed themselves in an attitude of positive hostility to the government and perpetrated a raid which though directed against Dafla [Nyishi] colonist in the plains and not against the Assamese was far too serious to be overlooked.”

In some of the old narratives of the British officials, it is mentioned that hill-Daflas [Nyishi] and plains Daflas [Nyishi] did not share a good rapport with each other. In 1925 Captain GA Nevill in his administrative report wrote, “Halted at Laluk, spent the whole day seeing Daflas, a good number of hillmen came to see me. There are two new villages formed by the Plains Daflas just on the frontier Inner Line. ...the men will entice and hide Hill Daflas, especially women and slaves.” This act was the reason for the sore relation between the two tribes. Part of these tribes from Arunachal are now settled in Lakhimpur and Banderdewa side.

In present day, in places like Banderdewa, questions of cultural identity are conditioned by the market forces. Commercial interests run deep in the area and concerns for cultural identity have taken a back seat. The close and constant interaction between the people of

both the states in this part of the border area indicates that the boundary is of little consequence to them. They perceive it as something designed to control the few and protect from the other. For all practical purposes, the people on both sides have been coexisting more or less as a single entity. The communities here have assimilated into an open entity of acceptance. Their way of asserting their identities is through business; however, the cultural markers cannot be overlooked. Market space, sign boards, two sides of the highway, people's interpretation of the Banderdewa check gate¹, buyer-seller and so on are some ways of defending and extending their identities.

In the case of people living across the Assam-Arunachal boundary i.e. Banderdewa, people live on present narratives more than the aged old shared narratives of the post-colonial and colonial days. Although the people stay in their respective areas that were given on the basis of the 'Hills and Plains divide', the shared memories are mostly contemporary ones. The contemporary narratives deal with everyday interaction between the locals. The term 'local' is a wide notion, generalised view of identity for all the inhabitants in the area.

The National Highway 52-A along Banderdewa is metaphorical for writing and rewriting the text of everyday life of people living in their narratives and discourse.

A local from Assam side of the border who works in the Arunachal side of the border (Banderdewa) says,

Boundary is everywhere, house has boundary, this is my house-that is yours, boundaries give a particular space for oneself, there is a customer-seller boundary as well. It depends which boundary we prioritise. My identity is that I am Assamese, boundary doesn't create identity or maybe it does. My birth gave me the identity that I hold today in my certificates. Even if am in Arunachal my identity will always be Assamese. It's not boundary that created us, but rather we created boundary.⁵⁰

This gives an interesting dimension to the whole relation of borders and identities. It is exactly what some of the administrative officials have also expressed, that boundary is a man-made entity.

An administrative officer from Assam had also expressed the same,

Border is just an imaginary line. It is created by us. Boundaries are mobile here it can even shift an inch beyond and within.” People also admitted to the fact that boundary seamlessly appear lesser due to mobility in Banderdewa which brings them closer.⁵¹

A post graduate from Assam who sells electronics good along the interstate boundary says, “Boundary is also about security, it keeps us safe from ‘the others’, but the question is who are the others? And this is where boundary plays a role in being a demarcation.”⁵²

Wise and Velayutham’s (2013) concept of conviviality can be used to study the nature of boundary in Banderdewa. The notion of the sense of becoming and belonging is what the narratives from the area shares. More so because ‘boundary’ doesn’t matter much because the area is a commercial hub prompting people from both the side to rely on one another to further their business activities.

67-year-old local of Harmutty, Assam says,

Our market here (Assam-Arunachal boundary) survives on customers from Arunachal. We do not differentiate customers, as at the end of the day for us is to trade. When customers come from Bangalmara, Laluk and Arunachal, we are more delighted.⁵³

A resident of Banderdewa says, “Boundary is like, I am from here, you are from there. Once you cross the boundary you fall in an uncomfortable zone basically you don’t feel at home”.⁵⁴ The views expressed above on boundary is that of being a demarcation based on which the identification process of ‘in-group’ and the ‘others’ stands. This does not necessarily conform to the idea of a strain relation or some sort of discrimination meted out to each other in the border areas.

“In the ‘inside’ one has the power to live life at their will,”⁵⁵ a 23-year-old, a vegetable vendor shares.

Boundary has been there since ages, giving a sense of security among the people living alongside the border. It is created with an objective to safeguard one’s own space. It makes boundary all the more important.⁵⁶

Interestingly, the division is amongst the people living in the interiors of both the states of Assam and Arunachal but such is not the case in the boundary where a sense of belongingness and bonhomie is also present.

Circle Officer from Banderdewa opines,

Unlike the situation in Tarasso and Likabali, Banderdewa is peaceful. People are in close contact with each other through business practices, labour works and also festivities. In the recent eviction carried out in Assam side of the border many settlements of Arunachal and Assam were evicted. Structures and cultivation land that were in the Right of Way of National Highway were removed. There was no biasness in carrying out the eviction. The administration works in close coordination with the Assam counterpart.⁵⁷

A boundary of different kind appears in Banderdewa, when Assam side goes completely silent with bandhs; its counterpart Arunachal is lively with the usual activity and vice versa. The two sides/corners of the national highway are considered as the Arunachal and Assam side. When an agitation is carried out by Arunachal based organisations the Arunachal side of the highway has all the shutters down while the Assam side is active with open business establishments. These strikes and activities during the bandhs and strikes is shaped in the narratives as identifying people from Arunachal and Assam.

The difference between 'self' and 'other' from these boundaries gets partially blurred in Banderdewa. People residing in the area speak each other's language and food habits have certain influence. The religious inclination is strong and people follow their own religion not to be influenced by the others however. In Meinhof's words (2002) people often construct their identity narratives through wider collective identity discourses. As such borderland identity is dialogically constructed through different border themes like trade, insider and the outsider, shopkeeper-customers, Arunachal-Assam side of the border and so on.

Contrasting to the international borders which restrict movements, and cross boundary activities, the interstate boundaries are relatively open and there is 'co-existence' despite political and socio-cultural divisions. This suggests that the border is just an official barrier and sometimes the means of identification is in the mindscapes of border

inhabitants. Both people from the state benefits as such border is not contested much in Banderdewa.

Relatively, check posts in the foothills set up by the state government of Arunachal does a lot to mechanise movement. But in between the check post and the border area, people move freely unless asked to verify their identity with the issuance of 'Inner Line pass' which by default makes the individual an outsider to the place they are going to.

When people's interview stories and their multidimensionality are taken seriously, it becomes obvious that their borderland identities cannot be fully understood separately from their life experience and ambitions, or from the societal and material conditions. People cross borders and create social networks across the border and at the same time they are often aware that borders also create mental barriers and often identities of 'insider' and 'outsider'. As Newman (2011, 35) also says that borders are socially and politically constructed wherein someone creates them and, once created, manages them in such a way as to serve the interests of those same power elites.

Barth says that ethnic distance does not depend on an absence of mobility, contact and information but does entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation. The invisible distance in the ethnic groups of the two states in the borders as such entails this process of exclusion and inclusion, which gives them their distinct identities.

The social contact between persons of different cultures has been shaped in the narratives gathered from the field. Various entitlements are defined and acted upon accordingly by people who live in the borders. The fate of the two states was decided by a committee which happened to have gone for a table survey sort to demarcate boundaries for two states. "How can a 10-12 page of legal document decide our fate? The legal representatives in the proceedings write just two-three paragraphs. How does it help?"⁵⁸

The inter-state border issue is a subjudice matter in the court. While there are people from the area who are evidently depressed about how the state governments are 'playing' with their emotions there are other section of the people who are least bothered about the case. It can however be said that it is not about who creates boundaries but rather those who are impacted by the establishment of borders (Newman, 2011, 42). Public leaders and representatives seem interested in the case. The common people or the public

continue to live life along the border maintaining their distinct identities. The narratives also speak about migration altering the interaction and the making of locality in the border areas. However, the people from both the sides do endorse the fact that there should be a visible boundary demarcation to ease everyday tension along the borders. People's relation in borders and projection of their identities are based on face-to-face relations, mobility, and repetitive daily practices. The concepts of locality and local communities as such are marked by social interaction in these daily experiences. As such Schendel (2004, 3) writes, "Border merges with work on identity, ethnicity, citizenship and culture. The study of border cultures is necessary in order to shift the focus from state strategies and global economic change to the people living in the borderland."

The interstate borders of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh act as source, a social situation from which originates identities. The identities are distinct in the border areas due to persisting image and activities involved in retaining that picture. The way people of both the states see each other are driven by socio-cultural factors. Borders make a space for social interaction. Though it demarcates two states, the demarcation in itself ties the knot of the two states. In the words of Schendel (ibid) it is the perceptions, practices, identities and discourses of the borderlands that socially help reproduce and maintain distinct characters of the borders itself. The 'self' and 'other', 'here' and 'elsewhere', 'known' and the 'unknown' are undoubtedly the giving of boundary narratives.

5.2.1 Shifting identities and spaces

People's identities are territorially fixed but socio-culturally it goes beyond the general belief of how territories give certain identities. In Barth's explanation, ethnic boundaries channelize social life that entails complex organization of behaviour and social relations wherein identifying an individual as a member of certain group implies evaluation and judgement. Ethnic boundaries and territorial boundaries however get merged in the case of Assam-Arunachal interstate border. The identities are in a constant shifting mode. In the social spaces of everyday lives, people in the borders experience mix culture. The languages that are used also define how people in the borders are shifting identities. A customer from Arunachal in dealing with the seller from Assam would speak Assamese. On crossing the border, when a person from the plains enter the hills, the thought processing at that point of time is to blend with the hill culture for the time being. Some

elderly man of Kangku circle (Arunachal) in Likabali wears *Dhoti* due to the influence of his neighbours. Elderly men from Arunachal usually wear *Habe* (a small piece of cloth used to cover the private parts). The clothing strategies of the people in the borders show how identities keep shifting.

Houtum (2011, 56) writes that the bordering of worldview and identity potentially gives one ease, comfort and security. This may help to explain why in this age of globalization, shifting borders and migration, there is so much longing to nostalgia for the imagined loss of shared values and norms, and why there is so much emphasis on the control and protection of borders. Self-categorisation, and by the profession of the people in the border areas, spaces tend to shift. Business community and labour workers working in the Arunachal side of the border are exposed to a different zone and space. There is space within the space in this business and labour work relation. In the words of Schler (2003, 51), spaces as such are not fixed and gives insights into relationships of power operating in bounded locations and changing over time.

With diffused authority in the area, people tend to juggle with shifting spaces and identities. Harvey (ibid) claims that individuals and groups constantly invest spaces and identities with value and what he terms 'permanences', which ultimately organize and direct social life. The main base of the trade in present day based on which spaces are also shifting is characterized by multiethnic participation. People along the borders at times exploit their particular cultural practices and norms to survive in the sensitive area. The interstate borders in fact become a loose space for people to settle.

People of Arunachal living in the foothills have for centuries maintained a distinct identity of their own from the traditional Assamese subjects and are the same with the latter. Even in such maintenance identities and space shifted based on circumstances and situations. Borders can, therefore, be effectively used to produce and reproduce the limits of an imagined community of 'us' and 'them', friends and enemies (Newman, 2011, 18). A classic case to conform to the idea of shifting identities and spaces is found in one of the tour dairies of British official. In 1932, T E Furz political officer mentioned about hill tribe children enrolled in the schools of plains.

He writes,

In the state LP School, 10 Daflas and 2 Aka boys were admitted; one of the former left the school in the middle of the session but the others are still reading. The Aka boy read in the cold weather only. The Dafla boys are making very good progress and one of them actually gave a recitation in Assamese on the occasion of the last prize giving; the first time that a Dafla boy has given a public performance of this nature. (Furz, 1932-33)

However there have been cases after independence when people in Arunachal started objecting to Assamese medium that was used as medium of instruction in schools. In 1970 and 1971 the Adi students of Pasighat College held demonstrations demanding the replacement of Assamese. On the other hand, the Wanchos of Tirap held demonstration in favour of Assamese which was the *lingua franca* of NEFA. People of the Brahmaputra valley held the NEFA administration responsible for this cultural alienation (Chaube, 2012, 194).

This brings us to the understanding that the borders have a facilitating character that guide people to integrate into a homogeneous set up and an inclusive space. The border areas as such appear to constitute a multi-confessional social space where identities and spaces are intertwined. There is a mutual interplay between ‘us’ and ‘the other’ which is perceived, changed and created. Such is the case with the hotels found along the national highway of the inter-state Assam-Arunachal border. Most of the hotels are owned by people from Assam, but the menu is designed in a manner to meet the needs of people from Arunachal Pradesh. The menu includes special vegetables preferred by the people of Arunachal Pradesh. The food is served in a bell metal plate which is the tradition of the Assamese. The picture of the plate with varieties of food items indicates a culture-mix and shows how spaces are in continuous shifting mode. The owner of the hotels has a perceived notion about the food habits of the people from Arunachal Pradesh as such the serving platter is created in a way to suit their requirements. This is a process of social identity, where the ‘other’ defines the ‘other’. People from Arunachal Pradesh are seen conversing with the workers in Assamese. For a person, completely alien to the place, would not possibly be able to identify who’s who.

Figure 2. Outside view of the hotel along the Assam-Arunachal border, few kilometres from Harmutty/Banderdewa



Figure 3. Inside view of the hotel, people from Arunachal Pradesh relishing the servings



Figure 2 and 3 is a portrayal of peace and place along the border area. Looking at outside decor of the hotel one would assume a similar view inside. The aesthetic appeal is that of an Assamese culture while the activity inside is that of a mixed culture. Keeping in mind the food habits of the people from the other side of the border, the platter served is more of an Arunachalee *thali* (plate). All of the five visitors (as shown in the picture) to the hotel from Arunachal Pradesh, a cross-border preparation for coexistence. The general conception of Assam adopting that all the plains remain to them and hills for Arunachal Pradesh do not really show here. It quite does not appear borders to be taking a separatist turn. It indicates the accommodative nature of border at this very space and place where borders and boundaries are in constant shifting process.

5.3 Boundaries and changing meaning in memories

Experiences and social contacts in the borders give varied meanings to boundaries. The ‘imaginary’ inter-state boundaries seem mobile. The textures of borders have changed from the olden times to the present day. Regulations have marred the relationship between people living on the border. This view is expressed by the people living along the inter-state border areas. Elwin (2005, 3) shares, “When we look back over hundreds of years of constant conflict and compare it with the astonishing friendliness and every growing co-operation between the people of the Hills and Plains that we see today, we may well take pride in the achievement of India since independence.” There are accounts of boundaries that were once not as rigid as the present time. The colonial rule fortified boundaries with Inner Line Regulation limiting mobility and interaction between the people of the two states. In the political report of the Secretariat Administration of 1751-1882 it is mentioned that there was formerly much more intercourse between the tribesmen of Arunachal and the plainsmen from Assam than there is in the present day.

For the people living in the region, the meaning of the Assam-Arunachal border has constantly been changing. The border sometimes emerges as a hard entity in terms of purported territorial control and state ideologies. However, the same border is sometimes soft in the sense that there is greater social interaction amongst people. The people have questioned the imaginary boundaries.

In these lines, there is explanation in the writings of Elwin (2005, 3-4); “It would however be a mistake to assume that the entire history of NEFA was marked by hostility

and resentment. It is true that the tribes made many raids on the inoffensive plains. It is true that in a few cases people were carried off for human sacrifice and as slaves. It is also true that there were wide differences in culture, language and outlook between the hill people and others. At the same time, however, there has long been a tradition of trade and mutual friendliness between the tribes of the foothills and the people of the Brahmaputra valley.”

During pre-colonial times, the foothills were considered to be the boundaries. The people in the border areas in their narratives mentioned about the trade practices in the foothills. The boundary at that point of time according to them was the meeting centre for bartering goods. It was the meeting point for hills and the plains. In the post-colonial times, the texture of boundary changed. People from the hills were forbidden from coming down to the Plains. The administrative reports of the British officials however state that the restriction was to safeguard the plains from being attacked and plundered by the hills. This according to the people of the border areas who called themselves the aborigines (from Arunachal side) of the Likabali area has hardened the boundaries.

The boundaries over the time have taken a shape of being able to reject interferences. The rejections are done by the state powers guided by the Centre. Rights of any kind in the boundaries are sanctioned by the state and administrative units that have been in an ever emerging stage. The state boundaries from marking the separation of administrative units have also evolved from the state of separation to a state of interface. There are narratives that support such evolution of the boundaries.

J Hezlett office in charge commissioner in 1926 wrote “The Assamese are becoming increasingly addicted to the habit of employing Daflas [Nyishi] to clear land and I have little doubt that they would be glad to retain them as labourers if they could. The ordinary Dafla regards the local Assamese with contempt and would not be willing to work as his servant.”

Assamese people believe that having lots of betel nut trees is a sign of prosperity. Interestingly, the Arunachalee people they would grow betel nut tree along the fences of their houses ideating prosperity. The betel nut will however be taken by the Assamese people. Basically, it is just to show their status.⁵⁹

This shows that the interface between the two states is also in their beliefs. Belief is an assimilation process. In believing someone else's belief, the person is assimilating with the other. In inter-state borders, belief system acts as a means to connect and also subscribe too. Choices one makes based regarding the belief system also tells something about that person.

Mackenzie (2007, 4) also had stated that "Hill tribes who had remained turbulent for a long time generally be trusted to behave properly so long as their *posa* is paid and they are not unduly interfered with, by the Forest Regulation." The *Posa* system was established to appease the Hill tribes. However, some narratives reveal that the foothills were fluid boundaries. It also suggested that there was some kind of gift-exchange relationship with the Plains.

There were lots of ivory found in the hills area. In fact, our forefathers would make an extension for washing utensils with ivory pillars. The Ahom Rajas were fond of ivories. Our forefathers would go down to the plains and give ivories to them. Even on their return to hills, they got elephants from Thailand as gift.⁶⁰

This seemingly indicates cordial relationship which contradicts the textual narratives of the British administration. Contemporary narratives talk about how borders carry a generalised definition.

The inter-state border life has been made an issue, in real it never was as projected. West Siang (district in Arunachal Pradesh where Likabali is located) does not even fall in excluded and partially excluded area. What is excluded and partially excluded! As if our people knew about it!⁶¹

The state administrators had also said that individual fights often take the shape of border dispute. The involvement of security personnel and administrative force to diffuse the fight only helps to escalate tension. "There is no direct fight between the people. It is the government bodies that project their antics. If there are no policemen involved issues can be mutually solved"⁶², shares an informant from the Assam side of the border.

Boundaries as instrument of controlling the people on part of the administration is established in one of the informant's statement, "1972 saw the influx of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh to Assam, high rate of population growth. To ease this

problem, the Assam government through the administration would push the population towards the areas thinly inhabited by the Arunachalee people. In the process, they forcibly occupied the Arunachalee lands and distributed it among the landless people of Assam.”⁶³

Boundaries have created a no man’s land and this land becomes home for many migrants from the Assam sides, as expressed by the people of Arunachal. From being a demarcation, the boundaries are seen as opportunities for settlement of the ‘homeless’ people. Very often, this has multiplied problems. The age-old bond between communities living on either side of the border has been unsettled by the newly settled migrants. Thus, many narratives express concern about problems of immigration in Assam.

At times boundaries have been re-narrated as new sites of Assam-Arunachal solidarity.

People from both the states are well aware of the owners of a particular land. Land being an important aspect of a person’s socio-cultural background one would never invade that space. Practising agricultural work for years in a land becomes a question of rights. Neighbours getting evicted from their place is never a good news.⁶⁴

There is a popular story about a family from Assam adopting a child from Arunachal who they found on the river bank of Subansiri during the great earthquake of 1950. One of the lucky survivors of the 1950 earthquake was Tado Nyictor of Ishi Naka village of the Adi tribe. He was rescued by Benuram Pegu from Dhemaji, who found him in the river bank of Subansiri and adopted him. Tado later bore the adopted name and title Tado Pegu, son of Benuram Pegu. In September 9, 1950, the story of the earthquake was covered. The headline read, “Over 800 dead or missing in the Subansiri floods entire hill tumbles down” (Amrita Bazar Patrika). It further informed about a clan of hill tribes being completely wiped out. “...a clan of plain Miris known as Gassi, Miris (who are now known as Galos of the Durpai village of Likabali subdivision) has been entirely wiped out with only 17 survivors.” It is intriguing that in a crisis situation, people irrespective of which side of the border they belong to exhibits solidarity and compassion for the ‘other’.

In the words of Schendel,

These kinds of social memories suggest varieties of forms through which we are shaped by the past conscious and unconscious, public and private, material and communicative, consensual and challenged. This approach we argue, enables us to identify ways in which past and present are intertwined without rectifying a mystical group's mind and without including absolutely everything in the enterprise. (Schendel, 2004, 112)

Boundaries in addition give chances for assimilation. One Senmik Dini, originally from Arunachal Pradesh, had his ancestral land in the Assam side of the border. He settled in the Assam side of the border and is now the Anchal Samiti Member of Lama Pale village in Dimow, Dhemaji district in Assam. Narratives from the field also project how boundaries have left the area divided. "Our forefathers would go to Dhemaji (in Assam) to buy jaggery and salt and sell bamboo threads. They would also barter raw cotton, rock salt, iron, spices, orange etc in exchange for rice, dry fish, silk etc from the plain", Inni Dabi shares in a personal interview.

Elwin (2005, 4) supports the basic understanding of a coherent space. He writes, "The people are surprisingly business-like. Although it is only recently that they have learnt the use of money, they have developed an elaborate system of barter and they look on most things in a hard headed, almost commercial way." It is facilitating as it opens cross-border exchange of goods, services, flow of stories, cultural displays and so on. It becomes stressing because there are certain limits these boundaries set on the people of both the states in terms of movement and settlement.

During festivals and weekly markets, the place is filled with people from both the states. Sometimes it is even difficult to make out who our people are and who the others unless there are distinct cultural differences like dress and all. Well, the kinds of produces sold also at times help identify people from Assam side. Cross border cultural links came into view every time people from both sides of the borders come together to enjoy festivals.⁶⁵

The roles of boundaries keep changing from being used as state strategies to prospects for business to being a centre of cross-cultural activity. Cultural elements are negotiated

in a manner that it signifies membership with the 'insider' and 'outsider' of the communities. The boundaries then become a process of assimilation.

Johri writes,

It is established beyond doubt that the tribal people of NEFA, historically, had social contacts with the Assamese, and their segregation was affected by the Inner Line Regulations of 1873. At the same time it does not mean, and it is impossible to conceive that under such geographical and climatic conditions as exist in the Northern and Eastern Tracts of NEFA, the culture of tribal groups developed uniformly. (Johri, 2005, 23)

As mentioned earlier, the regulations have changed the course of the social contact. The concept of borders and boundaries in the form of regulation and geographical set up came much later after the British took over the region. This does not imply that there were no boundaries as such. There were boundaries in terms of community settings belonging and being part of a group. People going from one community to the other were not something of permanent sort. Mackenzie (2007, 32) in tracing the kind of settlements in the hills also wrote, "The tribes have no unity of organisation; every village is separate, and if one is hostile, the next may be friendly."

Much has been spoken about raids from the hill's side. Yet, again the boundaries at that point of time were in places where the raids were carried out. "Our forefathers would take taxes from the Plains. Who do we take taxes from and why? This is why we believe that the extent of the boundaries is till the place where the taxes were collected,"⁶⁶ shares an informant from the Arunachal side of the border. Administrative officials for Assam, however, do not quite conform to this idea and instead reiterates that "Purported incidents of 'Raid' cannot be construed as indicative of any form of political authority or influence."⁶⁷

The state of Assam has also viewed in the similar manner stating that "Extraneous matter like historical aspects should not be taken into consideration" (LCR). In the local commission report, the state of Assam mentioned that any reference to the past occupation, historical control, mythological homeland for re-drawing boundaries is fraught with uncertainties and practical difficulties. It is in this sense; boundaries are

being produced and reproduced in meanings associated to the life of the people in the border areas.

Boundaries that evoke strong sentiments of belongingness bring geographical space to contestation. There is an intrinsic understanding of differences in the form of forceful conducts of census, land survey, enrolment in electoral roll registration of lands by both the states.

There is a village named Dipa Lire known as Loglung village in Assam; it was the place where the national flag was hosted first time in the undivided Assam time when India got its independence. Narratives from the Arunachal side suggest that the area was under massive threat of natural disaster. Inhabitants (of Arunachal) left the place but did not completely abandon the area, which later had settlement of people from Assam. This particular place does not have boundary demarcation as such. It has a mix settlement and people have accommodated themselves with the shape and size of the village. Boundary in this sense acts as a place of cultural homogeneity while being distinct. Assam calls the people in the area from Arunachal side as late immigrants after 1972.

Another story of co-existence in the boundaries appeared in the narratives. In the year 1923, one Nondesor Doley had come to Pale village in Likabali to take refuge for a night. Doley sought permission from the village council head Gekom Dini for some land and permission to settle in the village. Dini accepted in order to have good neighbours in the dense forests. The descendent of Dini, Hengo Dini who is now serving as vice principal of Dimow College, Assam shares.

It can be ascertained that boundaries then and now have evolved and in the memories people tend to share more about the contact. In sharing about the interaction and meeting the others, they are in a way affirming to the idea of self. People are often curious what possibly could be on the other side of their zone. In finding answers to this, these boundaries that are considered to be as zonal of conflict become metaphor for interface. The inhabitants of the area look at boundary as something that provides them with history and memories. Paasi also suggested that, “The construction of the meanings of communities and their boundaries occurs through narratives: ‘stories’ that provide people with common experiences, history and memories, and thereby bind these people together” (Paasi, 1998,75).

There are in fact cultural boundaries practised in the form of mother tongue, religion and food habits. The difference between self and other comes from these boundaries as well. However even these boundaries have become blurred in Banderdewa, as people residing in the area speaks each other's language and food habits are also similar.

5.4 Reappearance and disappearance of borders

Bezbaruah (2010, 10) looks into some of the events of 1870s in which the hill tribes would initiate several raids into the plains in order to settle disputes arising from enticing hill-women or slaves by the plains Daflas [Nyishi]. As such the general policy of defining inner lines was set in motion to avert such acts. In the old records of British administration, the paths between the hills and plains had to be blocked in order to give effect to such a policy.

The narratives suggest two key aspects of reappearance and disappearance of boundaries. Boundary issue surfaces when there is a conflict like situation in the border area. Back in 1922, Captain GA Nevill who was the political officer of Balipara Frontier tract wrote to the Under Secretary to Government of Assam about an incident that took place in the border.

A hill Duffla [Nyishi] an old man named Tador of the Holi Khel went into Kayah's shop (up-country merchants doing business in Assam are called Kayah by the local people) at Duluhat accompanied by his two young sons, one a boy of about 14 and the other about 12. The old Duffla wished to buy salt and gave the Kayah a rupee for which he was given a seer of salt. The Kayah weighed it several times each time giving a little more until at last the amount weighed two seers. The old Duffla complained that two seers was much too little for one rupee and put out his hand to take more salt from the bag. The Kayah than hit the Duffla over the hands with the weights. The elder son a boy named Noka when he saw his father hit gave all the salt back and asked for the rupee. The Kayah than slapped the boy and seized him by the beads which all Dufflas wear around their neck. The old man called out don't break the beads and ran to his son's assistance when another Kayah came in with a stick and struck him over the head inflicting a superficial wound on the head, not at all serious. Seeing this

younger son fired an arrow at the Kayah striking him on the buttock, the arrow just penetrated the skin. The Kayah then ran away. The Duffla traders and son went into the hills. It was reported that Tador was dying, this is quite untrue. The Kayahs were certainly to be blamed for the affair as he was cheating the Daflas in giving short weights also he assaulted them. (Administrative report, 1922)

When this story reached the hills, many expressed feeling of vengeance and there were rumours that the family of Tador would attack the Kayah shopkeeper. The movement as usual were restricted, but this time the Plainsmen were asked not to be anywhere around the boundaries which might invite problems. The environment in which the boundary disputes thrive is as such sensitive. Single cases are judged by a wide lens of suspicion that of a communal war sort. There are many individual cases of the present day testified by the state administrations that takes the form of border dispute.

In 1988, the Likabali Mopin Ground claimed to be in Arunachal territory where the inhabitants of Likabali area organised Mopin (major festival of Galo tribe) was taken away by 13th Assam Police Battalion. All the infrastructures in the festival ground were demolished and the battalion erected a sign board written '13th AP Bn'. Series of survey were carried out in the festival ground area by the AP Bn personnel and land management official from Assam. The ground was also used to organise fairs and national celebration day by the people of Likabali area. The same year during Mopin celebration in the ground, the police battalion erected tents and bunkers in the ground obstructing the celebration. In the following year, when the people were planning for the celebration of Republic Day, a letter vide no LA/13/1318/88-89 dated 24/01/89 from the Deputy Commissioner North Lakhimpur (Assam) granting permission for the celebration miffed the public. The public objected to such letters and questioned as to why should the administration grant them the permission to celebrate their own festival in their own land.

While informing about these incidents, informants⁶⁸ from the Arunachal side of the border expressed how people's sentiments were hurt and they thought it was a blow to their pride. As such the matter was taken to the High Court Guwahati wherein the people of the area won the case as they were allowed to celebrate their festival in the ground.

“This happiness did not last for too long. As the area was eventually taken by the battalion and we no more have that area to be called ours,” expressed a person⁶⁹ in a personal interview. Events of this character project hard boundaries and how it becomes a matter of pride with people juggling hard to fix it. There are independent cases of people belonging to Assam going missing, committing suicide and drowning. These independent cases in suspicion are indirectly related to border dispute creating a wave of chaos. It becomes even more unfortunate if the dead bodies found are the natives of Assam.

In 2010, dead body of one Pusssa Kuruha was found floating over Komo river in Arunachal. Komkar Dini native of Likabali saw the dead body and informed to the police station. Kuruha was working as labour who looked after cows of one Amnath Kanal of Dimow village (in Assam-Arunachal border) and on the fatal day had gone to the Arunachal side for grazing. He drowned while taking bath in Komo River. The investigation by the police declared it was an accident and no foul play was reported. However, the case was linked to the boundary-dispute between the states with people blaming the Arunachalee for having committed the crime.

Boundary reappears as conflict situation even when there are accidents in the highway. If vehicles from Arunachal hit any car or person belonging to Assam it becomes a severe case often leading to road blocks and setting ablaze cars having registration from Arunachal vice versa. In such cases, it has also been difficult for the police department of both the states to investigate incidents occurring at the interstate boundaries. In 2010, one Kongi Nada Head village council of Champak Chojo village (Arunachal) informed about a person named Jau Gogoi who had committed suicide near Nada’s paddy field in the interstate boundary. The case was reported to the nearest police station in Assam but they initially refused to take any action. When the Arunachal police received information about the incident site they discovered that the Officer in Charge of Gogamukh Police Station (Assam) had taken up the case stating that the case falls under their jurisdiction.

It is observed that the places of occurrence of such cases are given priority by the police department. Taking up the case declaring it to fall under their jurisdiction is a way of asserting claim over the disputed land. A person from Assam working in Arunachal on condition of anonymity in a personal interview claims,

There are many suicides of people from Assam hanging themselves in the jungles of Arunachal located just in the interstate boundary. It is unfortunate that it happens in the Arunachal side. If we see, who would want to give trouble to their families? So maybe they chose to do it far from their families.⁷⁰

A story was doing the roundabout in social media recently (June 2017) where one Anang Tadar had posted;

Figure 4. Facebook post in a social group Voice of Arunachal



In the narration, Tadar had mentioned how group of people from the Assam side attacked the man from Arunachal 'without knowing the reason'. In bits and pieces of cases like these, people tend to project 'us' and 'them' divide as the main role of borders. Earlier a similar story dated back to colonial days show the same nature as to how borders appear in the form of conflict.

"We, the Adi people (Galo) of Arunachal Pradesh were earlier known as Abor clan in 1918 live here till today. Our ancestors lived in villages; Koyomtaktak now under the RCC bridge over Subansiri River at Sauldhua Ghat in Assam, Senguri, Tarasampor, Chinaka and Dirpaitali village which is on the left bank side of the Subansiri river since the British days. But now the names have changed," Tani Ngomle, Tari Nake, Tapu Daknya, Takom Nake expressed in statement given to the Judicial Magistrate of Kangku circle in Likabali. They also informed about one Nobokanto Nyiktor whose family had converted from Nyiktor clan to Pegu clan of Assam who now lives in Mohri camp village in Assam.

Renaming of villages and shifting of fences from one edge to the other has also been a subject over which there is continuing disagreement. Border thefts also tend to accelerate such disagreement. People along the borders often complain about cattle, edible plants and construction materials being looted and the neighbours across the fence are blamed for such acts. This is a two-way case i.e. it happens in both Arunachal and Assam side of the border.

Every time there is a score to be settled between two parties, it becomes an inter-state boundary issue. Unlike imaginary borders that the people talk about, in all these conflicts borders and boundaries reappear as a rigid demarcation. However, there are occasions when these very boundaries tend to disappear. During trade fairs and festivities the "disputed area" becomes a space for reconciliation. One such trade fair is the famous Malini Mela organised along the Assam-Arunachal border in Likabali. The name of the fair takes after the temple Malinithan situated next to the Mela ground. The Mela by its nature appears to be symbolic of 'togetherness' as well as 'division'. The latter however loses its gravity with much activities of the former taking the lead.

The Malinithan temple's existence was known before 1400 century, even before Ahom Kingdome entered North East. The natives of Arunachal Pradesh

discovered the temple during one of their hunting expedition. The NEFA government came to know about it and started the Mela to highlight the importance of the temple.⁷¹

Esse (2016, 5) writes that the area in which the fair is organised is reportedly the zone of conflict for the organisers and the administration. The Malini Mela ground is reportedly a disputed area. In 2012, administration from both sides tussled to organise the Mela. The incident took an ugly turn when the Assam administration demolished the multipurpose stage of the Malini Mela, which was erected by the people of Arunachal Pradesh. The demolition was done for not obtaining permission from Assam Deputy Commissioner (Esse, *ibid*). However, the people continue to celebrate the fair till date.

A constable from the Police department Likabali in a personal interview shares,

In the year 2012 Dhemaji, Assam DC sent a letter to the organising committee of the Mela that they should take permission from Dhemaji DC. It was the first time such order came to the notice of the organising committee. The multipurpose building and committee stall situated in the Mela ground was demolished for not following the order.⁷²

The letter is a display of power and control. While the administrations were of the view that borders are important for controlling in order to maintain peace, other sections were interviewed view borders as place for cultural exchanges with events like the Mela.

The Mela is organised with an objective to promote the practise of cultural exchange. This will in turn bring peace between the two states. Apart from preaching brotherhood and integrity it can also help business community from both sides of the state to flourish. Business communities from both sides of the states can come under one fold⁷³.

The Mela had more than hundred stalls ranging from consumer commodities such as cloths, kitchen appliances to food and other games and stationary stalls. Most of the stall keepers in the Mela were from Assam. As such the business community has a different standpoint on the Malini Mela issue.

At home we worry if people across the border will accept us or not. But when we are in this side of the border in the Mela, we don't think about not being

accepted. We feel part of the festival and enjoy and share similar experience of valuing each other's culture. I came here five times. Everyone comes and be a part in it. This area should be only for Mela.⁷⁴

The views ascertain the possibility that borders and boundaries during celebration diminishes to an extent. The fairs in the border areas appear to strengthen and cultivate a bond. The interactivity nature of the Malini Mela provides an opportunity for dialogue which otherwise is a rare practise. The kind of products demonstrated by people from respective sides attracts people from other side, which in turn paves way for a cordial relationship. It is not just an exhibition of products but also an exhibition of the age-old trade relation the two states had shared. During such times borders seem open and movements free.

Figure 5. View of Malini Mela ground taken from Malinithan temple.



Figure 6. View of Malinithan temple



Malini Mela ground is located in the foothills on the plain's side. Malinithan temple is on the hill top. The place faces opposite each other.

I don't find this border issue to be disturbing us. It is a man-made issue to suit their own needs. This is my second visit to the temple and everything looks fine to me though we read in papers about the problems but when we come here, we experience a sense of belonging. Just because states have border, it does mean we lock ourselves in home and not go anywhere outside the state. I find borders to be inviting, it makes us curious about life on the other side. When a person looks at the huge mountains, there is always a curiosity thinking what probably may be on the other side of the mountain. In saying so, I feel that sometimes we take things too seriously even when it is not and give way to self made insecurities.⁷⁵

A visitor from Assam expresses, "I like this place. I feel good to see people together despite cultural differences, if that is what people say."⁷⁶ This signifies that in the fair border issues aren't much experience and instead is a link for an accord. "This Mela should continue. It is good for us the believers. Our belief in the piousness of this Mela gives us very less space to be tensed about the border difference."⁷⁷ The cultural and

religious value of the Mela and Malinithan blurs the inclusion and exclusion divide at that point of time.

Figure 7. Traditional photo shoot stall inside the fair



In the picture we see Bodo women adorning the traditional attire of the Galo tribe of Arunachal. It is observed that during such celebration and gathering the social contact is assimilating in nature. The textures associated with boundary as being conflict in roles aren't visible in events like this. "Customers are mostly from Assam. They are fond of our traditional attire. Many families from Assam clicked picture putting on the traditional attire",⁷⁸ shares owner of the stall who is from Arunachal.

The Mela and Malini temple for many is a platform for cross cultural exchange and a centre for national integration. The historical and religious value of the sacred relics of the temple makes it a connecting link with the mainstream India. The people from both the state share the memories of celebration and their visit to the Mela. The 'insider' and 'outsider' though manifested as visitors and organisers during the Mela blurs the boundary dispute during the fair.

Figure 8. Jewellery stall put up by people from Assam



In the picture women from Arunachal Pradesh in traditional wrap around skirt are found bargaining for the accessories.

We want the Mela to be here (border). We get customers from both the side. During the Mela the range of customer we get is huge. There isn't any problem for us, we like it. Apart from business we get to meet people and see everyone happy and smiling on their visit to the Mela.⁷⁹

Everyday lives along the border change when the Mela takes place. The visitors of the Mela expressed that in their territory (Assam) they fear alienation from the 'other' (Arunachalees), but on visiting the Mela there is no feeling of being alienated as everyone enjoys the accord of the Mela.

The narratives pull together from the field site testifies the coexistence of the people during the fair. The fair is considered as a space to meet and greet people from both the states. The fair sees business community coming from Assam without carrying the baggage of borders and boundaries. However, boundaries are seen in the form of material construct with various stalls put up in the Mela area by the natives and the non

natives. The kinds of products sold in the stalls are markers of material boundaries. The Assam business community that sells jewellerys are different from that of the Arunachal business community.

Figure 9. Local woman selling traditional beads



Figure 10. Person from Assam selling handicrafts



Figure 11. Activities organised by people from Assam



People both from Assam and Arunachal look at the fair as a long legacy that needs to continue without any disturbances from the administration. They deemed it not to be just the legacy of the Malini temple and fair but a legacy of attending the fair and offering prayers in the temple for generations together. Few called the temple to be the heart of the fair and fair to be the blood that keeps the essence of the Malinithan temple alive, thus diminishing the existence of boundary across the Assam-Arunachal border. In the case of Malini Mela, people in their narratives said the boundary alongside the Assam and Arunachal border does not become a default situation impacting the daily life patterns during the Mela time. There is a changed ‘meaning-making’ of the nature of boundary and it changes for people from both Assam and Arunachal leaving aside the administration. In the case of Malini Mela it is the meaning making of the boundaries and borders in Likabali. People attach varied meanings to the kind of boundary that existed before the fair and during the fair where boundary does not hold significance. Borders and boundaries being dynamic in nature are read from varied perspective. The

business exchange in the Mela can be looked at as a common ground to ease tensions from border dispute. For Assam, due to its plain topography it is easy business unlike the hilly areas where bringing staffs from the hilly area becomes difficult.

An informant⁸⁰ from Jonai said he never felt like an outsider during the Mela and has been visiting the Mela since his childhood. Narayan Chetri, also from Jonai, said, “Since our childhood this Mela have attracted us. It is symbolic to brotherhood. The administration should not demolish or create problems in the Mela. It is for everyone. It is like a school where students are not differentiated based on the community they come from.”

The study comes close to the understanding that the more borders are open the more people come together. When people share a common experience, memories tend to be shared. The connecting links between the two states are the fairs and weekly markets that happen in the boundary area. Inhabitants of Likabali were of similar view that the Mela has a festival and religious value to bring people together. People tend to value each other during the Mela. Inhabitants from the Assam side are of view that fairs are far better than committee meetings.

We have seen so many committee meetings to resolve boundary tension over the past many years. We don't think it had as much as impact like the Mela has. Just walk around (inside the fair) and tell me where is the fight? Administration and some groups with vested interest are to be blamed.⁸¹

A visitor from Dhemaji in a personal interview also said,

I come every year. People worship their gods for peace. They come here seeking peace through offering prayers in the temple. Destroying the Mela is like preventing self from getting peace. We should not disrupt the belied system of any society. Having borders is a state government decision. Executing the administrative duty is the work of the administration. Living life the way a society has been living is the right of the people. The problem is everything is getting mixed in the borders.⁸²

The religious belief makes the Mela marker of peace. According to the popular narratives, the fair does not threaten to invade their space, rather they are of view that it

gives the opportunity to co-exist. The people from Arunachal Pradesh said that the locals of the Assam do not support their own administration on Malini Mela issue. They said that if Assam administration gets full support from the locals of Assam the celebration will be destroyed. “We are getting support from the locals of Assam for conducting the Mela, that’s why the administration are not acting strongly against us,”⁸³ expresses the organising secretary of the Mela in a personal interview.

Another fair Dhemaji Utsav organised every year on the banks of the Jiadhal River see people from both the states participating. However, this year people of Likabali and Kangku administrative circles in West Siang district protested the change of venue for the festival claiming that it has been moved from the earlier location to the river bank that touches the foothills of Kangku circle. West Siang DC Pige Ligu, taking cognizance of the matter on being reported by SDO Likabali, wrote to the chief secretary to discuss the matter with the Assam government.

In Banderdewa borders appear only when there is feud along the national highway. However due to intense commercial establishment all through the highway in the area, people are economically inclined which has in a way blurred the existence of rigid boundaries. In the case of Banderdewa, the mobility factor is mostly commercial and socio-economic which brings cross-cultural contact and interaction. The idea of a threat from outside appear insignificant to the people of Banderdewa, which is evident from the way the locals have been coexisting for decades. However, there is seemingly an assertion of the border belonging to both the states. The shops along the border indicates which side of the border belong to Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The left side of the National Highway-415 while coming from Narayanpur Assam is the territory of the Arunachal Pradesh and the right side is of Assam. The sign boards indicate that Banderdewa belong to both the states.

Figure 12. Signboard of a shop on the Assam side of the border



Figure 13. Signboard of a shop on the Arunachal side of the border



The pictures in figure 12 and 13 show that Banderdewa is claimed by both the states. In figure 12 it shows that the right side of the highway belongs to the Lakhimpur district of Assam. Figure 13 shows that the left side belongs to Papum Pare district of Arunachal Pradesh.

Borders and boundaries tend to produce and reproduce meaning from the material condition apart from the social condition. In the cultural and social discourses meanings attributed to the interstate boundaries suggest that it fluctuates; on occasion, it appears and disappears. In the daily life practise of the people in Banderdewa on one hand appears to be of coexistence and on the other hand that of territorial assertion. It can be said that boundary and border give social meaning to physical elements. Banderdewa has come out as a cross border network manifesting boundaries in a mixed form of socio-economic practices and discourses.

Collectively on the long boundary contention, there have been efforts to solve the boundary issues through series of joint meetings involving the chief minister of the two

states, nothing much have changed. The years 1976, 1979, 1980, 1984, 1985, 1998, 2000 witnessed series of meetings.

There should be interactive programmes, cross-cultural programmes of big scale in the borders. Some sense of brotherhood needs to be inculcated in the people. Administration should allow the people in the border areas to solve any kind of issues mutually or locally in their presence.⁸⁴

In similar vein, an informant from Arunachal side of the border says,

Instead of deciding who is the guilty and using bias tactics, we should be allowed to deal with our issues with dialogue. Because the administrations back the people without knowing the complete story, people (later dwellers) with ill intention creates issues.⁸⁵

It is noted that the concept of borders as being a source of tension and dispute is in its role as 'barriers'. On the other hand, borders as being a point of contact depends on the role it plays as that of a 'bridge' for social interaction. When there are less social contacts misunderstanding takes a toll over the bonhomie shared between the people of the two states. People tend to identify who the locals and non-locals are in cases of conflicts. Such identification process is not carried out when they co-exist. While it might not be all correct to say that there are no differences when people co-exist. There are differences based on cultural identity. However, this does not make people go witch-hunting in search of the villain.

Work Cited

- Anderson, J. (2001). Towards a theory of borders: States, political economy and democracy, *Annales, Series Historia et Sociologia*, 11, 2: 219-232
- Barth, F. (1969). *Ethnic groups and boundaries*. Universitetforlaget, Norway.
- Behdad, A. (2002). National Identity and immigration: American polity, nativism and the “alien”. In Boyi, EM. editor. *Beyond dichotomies: histories, identities, cultures, and the challenge of globalization*. 201- 225.
- Bezbaruah, R. (2010). *The Pursuit of Colonial Interests in India’s North East*. EBH Publishers, Guwahati.
- Chaube, S.K. (2012). *Hill Politics in Northeast India*. Orient Blackswan Private Limited, New Delhi, third edition.
- Choi, C. (2011). Everyday Practices of Bordering and the Threatened Bodies of Undocumented North Korean Border-Crossers. *The Ashgate Research Companion to Border Studies*, 507-527.
- Esse, D. (2016). *Assam-Arunachal Border: Analysing Shared Memories in Narratives from Malini Mela*. North Asian International Research Journal of Social Science & Humanities. Vol 2.
- Elwin, V. (2005). The North-East Frontier Agency. In Sharma, SK. Sharma, U. editors. *The Discovery of North East India*. Mittal Publication, New Delhi.
- Kolossov, V. (2005). Border Studies: Changing perspectives and theoretical approaches. *Geopolitics*, 10, 4: 606-632.
- Reid, R. (1942). *History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam*. The Assam Government Press. Shillong.
- Scott, J.C. (2009). *The Art of Not Being Governed*. Yale University Press. New Haven & London.

- Schendel, W.V. (2005). *The Bengal Borderland*. Anthem Press, London.
- Schleier, L. (2003). Ambiguous spaces: the struggle over African identities and urban communities in colonial Douala. *Journal of African History*, 44, 52-72.
- Sharma, S.K. and Sharma, U. (2006). *Documents on North-East India*. Mittal Publications, New Delhi.
- Nag, S. (1998). *India and North East India*. Regency Publications, New Delhi.
- Newman, D. (2011). Contemporary Research Agendas in Border Studies: An Overview. *The Ashgate Research Companion to Border Studies*, 33-48.
- Newman, D. and Paasi A. (1998). Fences and neighbours in the postmodern world: boundary narratives in political geography. *Progress in Human Geography*, first edition, volume 22, 186-207.
- Paasi, A. (1998). Boundaries as social process: Territoriality in the world of flows. *Geopolitics*, 3, 1: 69-88.
- Paasi, A. (2013). Borders and border-crossings. *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Cultural Geography*.
- Paasi, A. (1998). Boundaries as social process: Territoriality in the world of flows. *Geopolitics*, 3, 1: 69-88.
- Prokkola, E K. (2009). Unfixing borderland identity: Border performances and narratives in the construction of self. *Journal of Borderland Studies*, 24, 3: 21-38.
- Reid, R. (1942). *History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam from 1883-1941*, Assam government Press.
- Sharma, C. (2017). *Political Economy of the Conflicts along the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh Foothill Border*. Action Aid (funded under European Commission (EC) Project entitled, "Conflict Mitigation through Creation of Regional Hub for Natural Resources in North East India").

- Houtum, H.V. (2011). The Mask of the Border. *The Ashgate Research Companion to Border Studies*, 49-61.
- Henrikson, A.K. (2011) Border Regions as Neighbourhoods. *The Ashgate Research Companion to Border Studies*, 85-102.
- Hyvärinen, M. (2007). Analyzing Narratives and Story Telling. In Alsutari, P. Bickman, L and Brannen, J. editord. *The Sage Handbook of Social Research Methods*. 447- 460.
- Paasi, A. (1998). Boundaries as social process: Territoriality in the world of flows. *Geopolitics*, 3, 1: 69-88.
- Wise, A. Velayutham, S. (2013). *Conviviality in everyday multiculturalism: Some brief comparisons between Singapore and Sydney*. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*.
- (LCR) Local Commission Report of June 2014
- Furz, TE. General Administration Report of Balipara Frontier Tract, 1932-1933.
- Excluded Areas Record-1925. Political department, Assam Secretariat.
- Chief Minister and Home minister, Assam and Chief Minister and member of the council of minister, Arunachal Pradesh. (1976, January 11). Review of Border Demarcation.

End Notes

¹ Marngam Taki, Circle Officer, Likabali. Personal communication, April 16, 2014.

² Komal Debnath, Circle Officer, Dhemaji. Personal communication, May 29, 2017.

³ Topek Kakki, Circle Officer, Likabali. Personal communication, May 30, 2017.

-
- ⁴ Tagi Zirido, Senior citizen, Likabali. Personal communication, April 17, 2014.
- ⁵ Utpal Bora, Assistant Deputy Commissioner, Dhemaji. Personal communication, May 30, 2017.
- ⁶ Tai Kai, Sub Inspector, Likabali. Personal communication, June 3, 2017.
- ⁷ Topek Kakki, Circle Officer, Likabali. Personal communication, May 30, 2017.
- ⁸ Utpal Bora, Assistant Deputy Commissioner, Dhemaji. Personal communication, May 30, 2017.
- ⁹ Topek Kakki, Circle Officer, Likabali. Personal communication, May 30, 2017.
- ¹⁰ Utpal Bora, Assistant Deputy Commissioner, Dhemaji. Personal communication, May 30, 2017.
- ¹¹ Gobom Karlo, police personnel, Likabali. Personal communication, April 16, 2014.
- ¹² Arundhati Narah Mipun, Circle Officer, Sisibargaon. Personal communication, May 29, 2017.
- ¹³ Topek Kakki, Circle Officer, Likabali. Personal communication, May 30, 2017.
- ¹⁴ Kipa Raja, Circle Officer, Taraso. Personal communication, August 5, 2016.
- ¹⁵ Ibid
- ¹⁶ Utpal Bora, Assistant Deputy Commissioner, Dhemaji. Personal communication, May 30, 2017.
- ¹⁷ Marngam Taki, Circle Officer, Likabali. Personal communication, April 16, 2014.
- ¹⁸ Komal Debnath, Circle Officer, Dhemaji. Personal communication, May 29 2017.
- ¹⁹ Tai Kai, Sub Inspector, Likabali. Personal communication, June 3, 2017.
- ²⁰ Sengo Taipodia, Likabali. Personal communication, October 21, 2016.
- ²¹ Utpal Bora, Assistant Deputy Commissioner, Dhemaji. Personal communication, May 30, 2017.
- ²² Sengo Taipodia, Likabali. Personal communication, October 21, 2016.
- ²³ Marge Karlo, Likabali. Personal communication, October 22, 2016.

-
- ²⁴ Utpal Bora, Assistant Deputy Commissioner, Dhemaji. Personal communication 2017.
- ²⁵ Doi Riram, Likabali. Personal communication 2014.
- ²⁶ Marge Karlo, Likabali. Personal communication, April 18, 2017.
- ²⁷ Dimong Padung, Ruksin. Personal communication, September 22, 2015.
- ²⁸ Eken Taipodia, Likabali. Personal communication, April 17, 2017.
- ²⁹ Marge Karlo, Likabali. Personal communication, April 18, 2017.
- ³⁰ Doye Riba, Likabali. Personal communication , April 17, 2014.
- ³¹ Protima Pangeng, Dhemaji. Personal communication, April 17, 2014.
- ³² Dr. Bomjar Bam, Likabali. Personal communication, April 19, 2017.
- ³³ Kavita Narah, Jonai. Personal communication, April 17, 2014.
- ³⁴ Kai Ngulom, Likabali. Personal communication, April 17, 2014.
- ³⁵ Mikjom Tasso, Kangku circle. Personal communication, September 23, 2015.
- ³⁶ Sengo Taipodia, Likabali. Personal communication, April 16, 2016.
- ³⁷ Dajo Ngomle, Likabali. Personal communication, April 16, 2014.
- ³⁸ Subroto Chakraborty, Banderdewa, Personal communication, February 21, 2014.
- ³⁹ Dimong Padung, Ruksin. Personal communication, September 22, 2015.
- ⁴⁰ Tagi Zirdo, Likabali. Personal communication, April 17, 2014.
- ⁴¹ Topek Kakki, Circle Officer, Likabali. Personal communication, May 30, 2017.
- ⁴² Rani Deori, Alikata. Personal communication , April 17, 2014.
- ⁴³ Mikjom Tasso, Kangku. Personal communication, September 23, 2016.
- ⁴⁴ Ranjit Pradhan, MES-Assam. Personal communication, September 23, 2016.
- ⁴⁵ Doi Riram, Likabali. Personal communication, April 16, 2014.
- ⁴⁶ Narayan Chetri, Jonai. Personal communication, April 16, 2014.
- ⁴⁷ Dajo Ngomle, Likabali. Personal communication, April 16, 2014.

-
- ⁴⁸ Doi Riram, Likabali. Personal communication, April 16, 2014.
- ⁴⁹ Sengo Taipodia, Likabali. Personal communication, April 16, 2016.
- ⁵⁰ Shankar Saikia, Banderdewa. Personal communication, February 22, 2014.
- ⁵¹ Komal Debnath, Circle Officer, Dhemaji. Personal communication, May 29, 2017.
- ⁵² Pankaj Borah, Banderdewa. Personal communication, February 22, 2014.
- ⁵³ Sheetal Biswas, Harmutty. Personal communication, February 23, 2014.
- ⁵⁴ Sanjib Saikia, Banderdewa. Personal communication, February 22, 2014.
- ⁵⁵ Pranjal Das, Banderdewa. Personal communication, February 22, 2014.
- ⁵⁶ Sanjib Saikia, Banderdewa. Personal communication, February 22, 2014.
- ⁵⁷ Pama Bagang, Circle Officer, Banderdewa. Personal communication, May 29, 2017.
- ⁵⁸ Marge Karlo, Likabali. Personal communication, April 18, 2017.
- ⁵⁹ Mimar Koyu, Nari-Koyu. Personal communication, September 24, 2016.
- ⁶⁰ Marge Karlo, Likabali. Personal communication, April 18, 2017.
- ⁶¹ Eken Taipodia, Likabali. Personal communication, April 18, 2017.
- ⁶² Jetesor Doley, Dhemaji. Personal communication, April 16, 2014.
- ⁶³ Marge Karlo, Likabali. Personal communication, April 18, 2017.
- ⁶⁴ Dr. Bomjar Bam, Likabali. Personal communication, April 18, 2017.
- ⁶⁵ Yapung Kotin, Liru. Personal communication, September 24, 2016.
- ⁶⁶ Sengo Taipodia, Likabali. Personal communication, April 16, 2016.
- ⁶⁷ Utpal Bora, Assistant Deputy Commissioner, Dhemaji. Personal communication, May 30, 2017.
- ⁶⁸ Sengo Taipodia and Marge Karlo, Likabali. Personal communication, April 16, 2016, April 18, 2017.
- ⁶⁹ Marge Karlo, Likabali. Personal communication, April 18, 2017.
- ⁷⁰ On condition of anonymity. Personal communication, September 23, 2016.

-
- ⁷¹ Tagi Zirdo, Likabali. Personal communication, April 17, 2014.
- ⁷² Taling Koje, Likabali. Personal communication, April 17, 2014.
- ⁷³ Chimo Taipodia, Likabali. Personal communication, April 17, 2014
- ⁷⁴ Bilal Ali, Sisibargaon. Personal communication, April 17, 2014.
- ⁷⁵ Protima Pangeng, Dhemaji. Personal communication, April 16, 2014.
- ⁷⁶ Kavita Narah, Dhemaji. Personal communication, April 16, 2014.
- ⁷⁷ Jamabhi Hajong, Dorong. Personal communication, April, 16, 2014.
- ⁷⁸ Tede Zirdo, Likabali. Personal communication, April 17, 2017.
- ⁷⁹ Ziaul Haque, Dorong. Personal communication, April 16, 2014.
- ⁸⁰ Vijay Kumar Shah, Dhemaji. Personal communication , April 16, 2014.
- ⁸¹ Nar Bahadur Limbu, Dhemaji. Personal communication, April 16, 2014.
- ⁸² Kamal Thapa, Dhemaji. Personal communication, April 16, 2014.
- ⁸³ Senbom Taipodia, Likabali. Personal communication, April 16, 2014.
- ⁸⁴ Utpal Bora, Assistant Deputy Commissioner, Dhemaji. Personal communication, May 30, 2017.
- ⁸⁵ Senbom Taipodia, Likabali. Personal communication, April 16, 2014.