



## CONTEMPORARY LADAKH **PARTITION AND ECONOMY OF A BORDER VILLAGE - TURTUK**

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In India, the reflection on the composition and the characteristics of village life is mentioned in ancient texts and later epics. The British, for administrative and revenue purposes, set up several commissions to investigate the deteriorating agrarian situation. In 1909, an ethnographic survey of India was attempted as a part of the 1901 census. In 1916, Gilbert Slater carried out village-based surveys with a focus on economic issues.

By the 1930s the ethnographic tradition in the study of small scale pre-literate people had already found firm ground with the work of social scientists such as A.R.Radcliffe-Brown and Bronislaw Malinowski. After independence, the study of village communities became a major academic concern to understand

village economy, polity and the culture at large. The idea of extension of the village into wider society and vice versa was central to many village studies carried out in the 1940s and 1950s by scholars like Milton Singer, Mckim Marriott and Redfield. Since the 1950s various studies representing the dynamic aspects of village social life in India was seriously carried out by scholars like M.N.Srinivas, F.G.Bailey, Andre Beteille, I.P.Desai and Kathleen Gough.

Thus, the village studies outlined above largely relates to normal and stable societies unexposed to political upheavals that societies located in the border regions of the country experience. Perhaps the rationale behind the dearth of research is that borders are generally contested in many areas, and the problems faced by people residing near the national and international borders have not been brought into the academic discourse sufficiently.

More so Donnan and Wilson describe, 'many scholars, however, when tracing the evolution and present conditions of

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*Views expressed are author's own.*



national boundaries, have concentrated on the formal arrangements between states, which often do not take into account the needs, desires and other realities of the people who live at those borders, as well as the cultural significance of the borders to people in more distant metropolises.'

It is time states rethink of not just the physical boundary, but also make sense of the border people whose existence play key role in the strengthening or weakening of the nation-state.

Scholars have sought answers to the paradox that, on the one hand, we are witnessing the declining importance and greater porosity of borders under the impact of globalization, transgression and the internationalization of economies, while on the other hand, the growing conflict situation especially between India and Pakistan led to the strengthening of national and international borders.

Over the past many years, the growing interests in border studies among scholars have centrally engaged the lives of trans-border people, borders which exclusively remain rigid and impermeable have been least studied and adopted within a wide range of disciplines. Also in the contemporary era, the borderland studies have been focused more on the growing permeability of borders while devaluing national borders. The globalization of culture, economics and politics have yet not reached many of the South Asian borders. So to understand border issues adequately interplaying between

borderland dwellers and the impermeable border is equally imperative to develop a broader theory on border.

In reference to the US-Mexico border, some scholars theorized that peaceful and stable border allows cross-border interaction. On the other hand, despite the border remaining peaceful and the population manageable for decades, especially in the Turtuk front, it does not bring about either cross-border trade or flow of people facilitating contact, communication and cooperation transcending political boundary. Thus, peaceful and stable border may not necessarily lead to the trans-border contact and communication.

Theorizing borders - classical border theory focuses on the physical elements of international borders as barriers to movement. Functionalists' view suggests that perception over conflict borders will change and borders will wither away as citizens cooperate across the sovereign limits. The human needs theory suggests that the economic interdependence between the two countries especially on the border lowers the chances of conflict. Realists, on the other hand, view economic interdependence as positively correlated with conflict since as commerce increases, so do the range of economic issues over which disputes can emerge (Walz, 1970).

## I

### AFTERMATH OF THE 1971 INDO-PAK WAR: RECLAIMING TURTUK AREA

Partition is a structure dividing a space into two parts. Any war followed by partition creates a new border, therefore new forms of self identification is being enforced by the host nation. In doing so, state gains the political control on the border, while leaving no scope for borderland dwellers, it decides who belonged, who was expelled and who opted out.

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Following the division British India, 1948 marked the merger of entire Baltistan including Turtuk area of Khapulu district under the administrative domain of Pakistan for nearly 23 years. Moreover, the focus in the 1971 Indo-Pak war was on East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, although the war was equally fought along the CFL/LOC on the North Western border of Ladakh with Pakistan.

Scholars on border studies believe that no border remains static forever, thus recurrent shift of the political border is very much evident in many international borders. In 1971 the Indian army launched military operation in Turtuk sector (then part of Pakistan) and advanced 25 kms into the enemy territory in just 14 days extending its domain to a cluster of four villages Dhothang, Tyakshi, Turtuk and Chalungkha covering an area of about 804 sq km. Reclaiming the occupied territories as its own previously lost to Pakistan, India insisted its claim over newly acquired 'liberated areas' of Indian side Baltistan.

For Heraclides (1991: 24) partition is "the formation of two or more states by mutual consent". Adding to that, partition also means slicing off the part of the spaces inhabited by people of the enemy countries either by mutual consent or by force. Therefore, the partition event of 1971 in the Turtuk area is a partition in itself by force, as the previously defined Cease-Fire Line between India and Pakistan was once again altered into a fresh Line of Control under the 1972 'Shimla Accord'.

*For thousands of years Turtuk borderland dwellers had benefited from several historical trade routes opened towards Nubra, Leh, Kargil, Srinagar, Simla, Manali, Yarkand (to China through Karakoram Pass) and Tibet. It has therefore in the past served as economic lifelines for them along with agriculture farming.*

On 3 December 1971, Indian army under the leadership of Major Rinchen captured the village Chulungkha (then in Pakistan) which was close to the Indian border at Kala Brakbo, but found not even a single civilian, for everyone had run away fearing that Indian troops would ill-treat them.

This population movement caused the loss of land, property and relatives left behind, which reluctantly fell into India. Those villagers who migrated and settled down in the Manthal areas near Skardo in Pakistan had severely degraded their dignity and are even today treated as 'Mohajirs' (the refugees. While narrating this landmark incident of December 1971,

Mohammad recalls, 'we heard the news that Indian army had already crossed the last Indo-Pak border at Kala Brakbo and captured Chulungkha and Kangzi Thang popularly known as CP Thang. Hearing that our elders immediately convened a meeting ending up with the decision, come what may, we shall not leave our land, property and village.'

On 13/14 December 1971, Indian troops advanced to Turtuk in Pakistan they encircled the wing headquarters and the village was found absolutely dead and silent. Mohammad narrates, 'we were afraid of Indian army, so we took our women, children and older people in the adjoining Nullah/gorge. They were looking for Pakistani army and searched every nook and corner but found nothing suspicious.' In his most rhetoric speech

Rinchen said, 'we are here to help you in all respects. Do not fear of us, your women and children are like our mothers and sisters and I shall take the responsibilities for their safety.' With those compassionate words we gained confidence in what he said.

The book, 'A Legend in his Own Time', a memoir of late Colonel Chewang Rinchen reflects that at one occasion after a great deal of persuasion, perhaps under fear, thousands of old and young people of Turtuk got down from Nullahs/ gorge carrying white flags and shouting 'Hindustan Zindabad'. On 16th of December Major Rinchen was informed by his soldiers that they have now succeeded in capturing Tyakshi village. On 17 December 1971 both India and Pakistan declared Cease-Fire on the border. Thus, Gorkha Ridge became the last border point in the western sector of Ladakh region at the Turtuk-Frano border.

'In some cases, husbands and relations had been left behind on the Pakistan side. They had gone to Skardo and other places on business and many of them had been taken prisoner by the Pakistani soldiers while they were withdrawing' (Verma, V. 1998). Mohammad Ali, a resident of Dhothang village, recalls: 'as his messengers Major Rinchen sent my father Roza Ali along with another villager to Pakistan to held immediate flag meeting with 'Paki High Commander', but they did not return'. He further narrates that, 'While reaching Pakistan they were interrogated about the behaviors of Indian army. They replied

Indian soldiers do not harm us; instead they take care of us very well. Hearing this two were suspected as spy of Indian army and jailed. My aggrieved mother attempted several times to cross the border to take us with them, but failed. Until we realized that we have become an integral part of India, we kept looking ourselves across the border in hope to be reunited'.

On the question of divided families, even today, Turtuk borderland dwellers continue to represent the unfinished business of the partition. In this way, the partition has left a deep psychological impact on borderland people. Partition ultimately is a political act by state which potentially reduced the status of newly acquired population from the majority to minority creating new categories of inclusion and exclusion in terms of citizenship, identity, and nationality.

After the ceasefire in 1971, immediate welfare measures taken by the Indian army helped to fulfill the basic economic necessities of the newly acquired population, the greater interest of the Indian state was to win the confidence and goodwill of the people to secure its border.

'Fair price shops were opened for rations to be sold at subsidized rates. Co-operatives were set up for clothing, kerosene and other necessary items. Medical doctor medical staffs were posted at the hospital. Local people, though less qualified, were appointed as teachers in the primary schools. A Naib Tahsildar and a Police Inspector were posted to attend the problems of revenue and law and order. Permission was given to the local people to visit Leh, Srinagar and other places. Special funds were allotted by the Army for repair and maintenance of the mosques in that area' (Verma, V.1998).

For nearly six years after partition armies random air droppings of necessary items on Chalungkha Post kept the borderland dwellers' hope against the Indian state

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alive. However, once the border pacified there was a gradual decline in the 'goodwill' gesture which the army showed in the aftermath of war and partition.

## II BORDER ECONOMY & TURTUK

In the past, relevance of national borders for economic interaction remained limited in many borderlands. Exchange of goods through trade transcending the political borders in the past was the most common source of income after agriculture. For thousands of years Turtuk borderland dwellers had benefited from several historical trade routes opened towards Nubra, Leh, Kargil, Srinagar, Simla, Manali, Yarkand (to China through Karakoram Pass) and Tibet. It has therefore in the past served as economic lifelines for them along with agriculture farming.

However, trade operations, on which the prosperity of Ladakh in general and border people in particular largely depended, have come to a sudden halt when border was sealed which took away one of the economic alternatives of the people. Subsequently, with the closure of the border, state realized the strategic significance of the Turtuk area located south of point NJ9842. So when the border was marked army was deployed who needed labour to do the most dangerous work carrying heavy arms, ammunitions and food to the posts as high as 14,000 feet.

The creation of new border, forcefully restricted the local trade and economy, yet it ironically paved other alternative to improve the economic situation of the borderland people. Thus, 'porting' and 'ponies' as two local economies became their most lucrative occupation earning up to rupees 35,000 annually for an average family. Some like Mohammad Ali who runs 11 ponies makes a handsome return upto rupees 5 lac in a season that last from May until November.

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After 1971, for nearly two decades, most of the village youths got themselves engaged in pony services in order to make easy money. However, this hampers their education in the long run. Looking from an individual economic interest some fear losing this source if the border opens, but for majority, border acts as a barrier to various other communications.

Similarly, like the US-Mexico border, today in the era of globalization, when the question of borderland dwellers' livelihood is dependent upon the flexibility of border, Turtuk borderland dwellers recognize border more in terms of economic gain than its loss. Needless to say, they themselves are a little ambiguous of advantages and disadvantages of the border opening and border maintaining.

'While the people in both Indian and Pakistani Punjab enjoy cross-border cultural and commercial links, the people of Gilgit-Baltistan and Ladakh are denied similar interchanges in the name of Kashmir issue. To date, the Line of Control remains closed disrupting trade along Kargil-Skardo and Astore-Srinagar roads. This has hurt livelihoods of the natives; obstructed the development of local cultures and languages, and refused the right of contact to thousands of divided family members' (Hasnan,S.S 2010).

In the case of many border villages in Jammu and Kashmir, landmines have a devastating impact on border people

which resulted in displacement from the original place. However, its impact on the Turtuk borderland dwellers is not of displacement, but on their economy.

Animals and cattle in this part of the border fetch huge income for them, the unorganised laying of landmines by army without taking people into consideration have rendered the loss of several thousand cattle. Several acres of cultivable land near the border have been kept barren and fallow hence it becomes a field of forbidden zone for the villagers of the border areas. Every other day there is news of animal casualties in the village. Stray dogs are very helpful for securities to check the movement around the border; while on the other hand, they have killed hundreds of goats and sheep in the adjoining Nulha/gorge. However, the extent of damage over the years has not been reported and therefore no compensation sought.

### OPERATION SADHBHAVNA'

In the late 1980s, until the war broke out in 1999, borderland dwellers claim that civil administration was absent for nearly two decades thus it created mistrust between people and the government. Therefore, post 1999 mistrust scenario in Turtuk border persuaded Lt Gen Arjun Ray, the then Commander of 14 Corps to initiate 'Operation Sadhbhavna' to reinstate the lost civil-military relationship. Thus, OS undertook numerous projects ranging from building and renovating schools; establishing vocational and computer training centres; development of

infrastructure, women empowerment, poultry farms, village training centres, bridges, roads, telephone connections, to providing free medical services and arrangement of daily bus services. This could be seen as an appeasement policy of the state, as Parma argues, 'we have to redefine security not only in terms of military power, but also in terms of economic role it plays due to its extensive spillover effects on other vital issues of nation-state.'

In many Indian borders the crisis in civil-military relation is witnessed and military are often viewed as alien occupiers. In Turtuk area, building the trust between civil and military especially after the event in 1999, the state initiated border recruitment drives raising additional army for Ladakh Scouts from interior border. Thus, the average income remitted from out migration (in Ladakh Scouts Army) in most of the families goes upto rupees 10,000 monthly.

Also prior to 1971, all their land revenue records were maintained in the revenue office Skardu (Pakistan), so after partition they lost their land ownership. Consequently, in the absence of legal records, the army confiscated a good chunk of their lands without paying any compensation. Hence, some families lost an average of 8.13 acres of land to army. Adding to that, the growth of population and the scarcity of land have increased their economic burden.

Their complaints against army's land confiscation were terminated every time by the government on the pretext that they possess no land records. However, despite the less availability of cultivable land, their being located at a much lower altitude around 3,000m helps to grow great variety of crops, such as wheat and peaches in particular.

Unlike other parts of Ladakh, Turtuk being a lower and warmer part raised two crops in a season allowing seven months at least for cropping. They produce wheat, barley, buckwheat, beans, pulses,

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spinach, peas and mustard oil for self consumption. They also raise dzo (a hybrid of cow and yak), dzomo, goats and sheep for wool, meat and milk.

Fruit cultivation is yet another potential income earner in these border villages, in the absence of a market only few families engage in this business. Horticulture plantation such as walnuts, apricots and little bit of apples constitutes one of their major livelihood income options. Those who live largely on them have to travel a long distance covering 96km to Diskit, Nubra and further 118km to Leh for the sale of their product. Around 30-50 thousand is being earned each year from horticulture sector by each household involved in this business. It is interesting to note that there is also available a Tsarma apricot juice factory in Turtuk that pitted, pressed and packed apricots into the most delicious juice. It is available in village shops, and properly tested through the horticulture department in Leh before it is brought to the market.

However, there are various other means available for these border villages such as 'Chhorbat Cooperative Society' through which they have vegetable marketing contact with the Army at different posts on the border regularly. And the vegetables they produce are found distinct in size and taste which brings good economic returns. Depending on the space available for vegetable cultivation their income varies from a minimum of 15,000 to 100,000 annually for every single family. Besides, the fruit crops are so prolific that one could see even the animals eating the fallen mulberries.

In early times, respondents say, Turtuk was the cultural heartland of Chhorbat block (in Baltistan in Pakistan) and its craftsman, artisans and musicians were very popular. Tracing his heritage in the craft back to his ancestors a master sculptor Abdul Karim Khali in Turtuk has carved in high relief a crouching snow leopard stalking an ibex, against a backdrop of rugged peaks and crags. He also made varieties of pots, and a stone made pressure

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cooker which has high demand in the area. Moreover, a section of borderland unskilled labourers also work for 'Border Road Organization' raising 5,000 as their regular monthly salaries. A limited number of borderland families along with agriculture farming also engage in poultry and fishery business.

Tourism as an evolving institution has the potential to raise the economic and cultural need of the people living on the borderland. Recently, the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, has released an order extending the 'Inner Line Permit' for tourists up to the border village Tyakshi. However, in the name of security, army does not allow tourism in Tyakshi, which limits the possibilities of increasing local economy.

Limited tourism benefits only few who could build guest houses, tourist camps and have the business in the tourism agency. Though it mainly brings in economic benefits, the older generation see the growth of this industry as a threat to their conservative culture. Those who are on the advantageous side are quite optimistic and see economic opportunities as a base to fulfill cultural needs. Ironically, they remain in touch with their culture, but more so, they are substituting culture as a tool for economic benefits.

## CONCLUSION

The economic situation of the border villages depends greatly upon its political border. Border has very strong implications upon the economic life of the Turtuk borderland dwellers.

Although borderland economy also depends on agriculture, horticulture, artisans and livestock particularly the pony work, it was however noted that ponies, vegetables and fruit businesses out shine agriculture in terms of economic return. The soil and the topography are very conducive for the favourable production, but the absence of a good market and scarcity of land obstructs economic opportunity of the locals. On the other hand, it has been universally understood, being a 'nationalist' means 'country first', but in reality poverty stricken borderland dwellers are not visibly aware of the notion of nation-state, but a priority for them is to have the basic economic needs rather than the political obligations toward the state. Probably that was the reason when part of the country (Pakistan) was invaded by Indian army through its 'Military Operation',

Turtuk borderland dwellers as a citizen of Pakistan even compromised their nation-states in the wake of sharp economic disparities. This shows, unless the equal developments trickle down the borderland area, the security of the nation cannot be ensured when the poverty stricken borderland people see themselves alienated by the centre of political power. Some others opine that the opening of the 'Turtuk-Khaplu' route would address the much awaited issue of divided families and also revive trade which would ultimately help in the growth of village economy.

