

Politics at the Borders: State Policies and Subject Practices

Abstract:

The proposed paper will be an analysis of evolving border related practices, policies and laws of the Indian state, especially since 1980s, referring mostly to north-eastern and eastern border regions of the Indian state. In doing so, the paper would try and comment on how these evolving 'bordering' techniques are regulating/managing migration, creating new conditions for movement of people with adoption of newer surveillance techniques and information gathering systems? The present cluster of bordering techniques of the Indian state range from demarcation and fencing, to augmentation of military and para-military forces, to installation of what are being called custom stations and check-posts, and major investment and infrastructural projects, all of which are coming up as new installations along the borders, dotting the landscape of the frontier-regions and re-fashioning patterns of migration flows in these areas where, for long, flows of people and goods were relatively outside state surveillance. In the proposed paper I would like to flag and discuss:

- i). the diversity of some of the emerging bordering techniques such as continuation of traditional fencing projects for regulating migration flows and the repressive structures that it imposes on migrant-subjects, attempting to cross state prescribed borders as part of their existential survival struggles (there is increasing death and detention of migrants in the hand of BSF and BDR, border-patrolling forces of India and Bangladesh respectively), changes in citizenship laws of the Indian state which since 1980s has introduced new categories of migrants and its association with illegality, reversing earlier provisions where migration was a criterion for passage into citizenship, to more recent techniques of installing Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) and Land Custom Stations (LCSs) which are supposed to house immigration and custom services, as well as security forces, along with warehouses, within single institutional complexes. This implies that custom stations and storage facilities for transportation of goods would also be detention posts.
- ii). how these new techniques are leading to further infiltration of the state into border-regions, how they are transforming the spatial landscape of the frontiers, the transit routes, and what implications do they have for migratory movements? Some of these new infrastructures are disguised as attempts to facilitate what in the official discourse are being called opening up of 'soft' borders and trans-national 'corridors'. But these, in practice, are aimed at regulating and

controlling lives of the subjects in border regions ever more strictly, trying to bring under state gaze movements which are extra-legal and forced by economic circumstances; circumstances which are also, in turn, mostly creation of the state. Thus the paper would try and bring into discussion what implications these bordering techniques have for forced migration and, what conditions do they impose upon everyday cross-border mobilities and for various categories of subjects that the state creates, namely, refugees and illegal migrants.

Submitted by Shreya Ghosh, for 'Eleventh Orientation Course on Forced Migration Studies', by Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group, 2013.