



# Overlapping Administration, Map Making and Postcolonial Displacement: The Case of Assam – Mizoram Border Skirmishes

N. William Singh

Department of Sociology, Pachhunga University College, Aizawl, INDIA

**Abstract:** Assam faces border skirmishes with its neighboring states. Claims and counter claims by communities at the borderland are everyday affairs of Assam and its neighboring Northeast states. The genesis of border skirmish goes back to 1933 Inner line notification and repeated redrawing of Inner line during 1875-1933. 1875 Inner line was the first imaginary border on the map of erstwhile Eastern Bengal Frontier. The line served as border between the hills and plains of Assam. The line also served as jurisdiction limits and administration limits for colonial administrative divisions between the hills and plains of Assam. Border skirmishes have not been resolved due to Assam's firm stand on colonial documents of 1933 Inner line as the official border. This paper analyzes the ongoing border skirmishes between Assam and Mizoram. Various sources are utilized, from Archival papers to make sense of the present to review of Official Border Study Reports. Fieldwork narratives and case study of families at the borderlands between Assam and Mizoram are undertaken. It helps in analyzing different narratives of the ongoing border skirmishes. Overlapping territorial claims by both communities, overlapping administration zones, non-demarcation of borderlands during 1971 Northeast States Reorganisation Act and overlooking of border demarcation during the 1986 Mizo Peace Accord ignite today's border skirmishes on annual and seasonal basis. Till today, no consensus on border issues. Hence, borderland issues have not been solved. Lastly, the paper suggests how border skirmishes can be resolved.

**Key words:** Border, Borderlands, Assam-Mizoram Border skirmishes, Inner Line, 1971 Northeast State Reorganization Act.

The map of Assam has been changing since 1826, and underwent massive changes during post independent India. British India introduced administration in the plains of Assam valley during 1826. Administration at hills of Assam was introduced after the enactment of Eastern Bengal Frontier Regulation of 1873. At the moment, Assam faces issue of overlapping territorial claims within itself. Assam also faces borderland issues with its neighboring states. Ongoing demand to bifurcate its geographical territory is an everyday threat to Assam. Assam faces ongoing demands for separate ethnic homelands - Bodoland, Dimasaland, Kukiland and Gorkhaland, existential threats to break up Assam. 1963, Nagaland was formed by carving out erstwhile Naga hills of Assam. 1971 Northeast States Reorganization Act reduced Assam's geographical size to half of its previous size. Erstwhile administrative divisions of British Assam namely, Tripura, Meghalaya and Manipur became separate states, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh evolved as union territories during 1972. Assam is not going to shed even an inch of its geographical space. Assam adopts historical documents, colonial papers, 1933 redrawn Inner line and 1971 Northeast States Reorganization Act to maintain its border and territories.

Ongoing border skirmishes between Assam and neighboring states often questions the historicity of colonial map making. It is often seen as an extension of colonial cartography in post independent India. This paper disseminates the following themes and following questions. Why perennial issues of territorial claims and

counterclaims at the borderlands? What are the knowledge, information and requirements adopted by colonial masters in map making? What are the colonial continuities on managing territories in postcolonial India? What went wrong with 1971 Northeast States Reorganization Act? Why Inner lines were redrawn during 1875-1933, for four more times? What were the reasons colonial authorities gave when Inner lines were redrawn? Why overlapping of administrative territories at the borderlands? Why states have failed to resolve borderland issues?

Ethnographic fieldwork<sup>1</sup> at disputed borderland unpacks the nature of everyday tensions and skirmishes. The following sections analyze Mizoram Border Committee Reports and series of border negotiations during the last four decades. These are the themes this paper focuses. Findings from the field, case studies of families affected by border dispute<sup>2</sup>, archival documents, academic writings on border, borderland, map making, and post colonial displacements are systematically roped in, in the following pages.

### **Border, Borderlands, Colonialism and Map making**

Border appears as lines on a map. Borders are never a perfect line on the map and on actual ground. The lines create tensions. Borderlands are often sites of conflict and spatial contestations (Pachhuau & Schendel, 2011). Border and borderland are also the sites for exchange of goods and contact between cultural differences. Borderlands are contact zones (Pratt, 1991). Borderland is not just a spatial category, but also a site for interaction where differences and marginality are often unfolded. Borderland is a geographical region in its own rights, received people and culture.

Application of colonial cartography and extensive surveying of territories in Northeast India started during 1824 (Zou & Kumar, 2011). Prior to 1824, Bengal presidency released an accurate 'Bengal Presidency Map' by British Geographer James Rennell during 1779; the map shows the plains and hills of erstwhile Assam. To govern territories, one must know the territory, culture and continuity (Scott, 1999). Colonial cartography creates categories of hills, plains, native homeland and consolidation of modern state making to the natives. Pemberton report of 1835 prioritized geographical information as the highest priority for British India.<sup>3</sup> 1883 military report 'The Northeast Frontier of India' by Captain St. John Mitchell consolidated map making exercise in Bengal Northeast Frontier.<sup>4</sup> Winichakul (1994: 18) mentioned geo-body of a nation is an effect of geographical discoveries whose prime technology is a map. Colonial map making objectified geo-body of natives in Northeast India into spatial categories for colonial administrative divisions. The role of modern maps created spatial nationhood, the geo-body of a nation or even regional identities (Winichakul, 1994). State entities need definite boundaries that correspond to differences of language, culture and the need for territorial sovereignty (Leach, 1960). Map making and surveying topographies were essentially the initial steps to govern natural and social landscapes through systematic and official investigation (Cohn, 1996). During 1875, British India introduced Inner lines as boundaries for administration divisions, so as to consolidate Northeast frontier as part of colonial administration. Maps were drawn with a combination of knowledge and survey information and the motive was to govern. It created Frontiers and Inner Lines. Frontiers were the entry points for any state making projects and modernization of state building projects (Scott, 1999). Reinventing fuzzy spaces, cultural spaces and representing these spaces as administrative territories were part of colonial cartography. This rationalization of natives' habitats, Bernard Cohn described it as colonial objectification of fuzzy spaces (Cohn, 1987).

Colonial power was built around knowledge, information producing institutions such as military expedition reports and information from missionaries (Bayly, 1999). Missionary and Jesuits represented the other side of colonialism. They were committed to manage and brought changes in hygiene, disease, modern education and evangelization of the natives. Modernity and its machineries came like a package, a combination of roles of Colonial Administration, Missionaries and Jesuits. This combination enabled sedimentation of

colonial power and conquests in different formats, conquest over mental, rational laws, revenue collection, administrative machineries and introducing modernity to the natives.

Before colonialism, there were native's boundaries. Its boundaries were based on consensus, extent of territories, right to hunt, *jhumming*, foraging and native's cosmography. Colonial cartography altered previous consensus of native's boundaries. Colonial administration neglected contingency of ethnic and cultural spaces. They enforced modern notions of border and borderland to the native. They divided native's homeland into different administrative divisions. The reason for enforcing border was for effective implementation of power and consolidation of colonial administration for their subjects. British cartographic skills diluted tribal homelands and their cosmographic understanding of their land (Zou & Kumar, 2011). In hill societies, cartography changes local power structures, whose base shifted from kin ordered to territorial authority (Schendel, 1992). These colonial trends of cartography continue till today in postcolonial India, in letter and spirit. That is the reason why post independent India and the ongoing borderland counterclaims had its roots on imperial's obsession for territoriality. During the erstwhile Lushai hills (Mizoram), tribal chiefdoms ruled over people bound by kin and patrimonial loyalties.

### **Postcolonial Displacement**

Postcolonial displacement discourse appeals for close reading of colonial documents, literatures, counter claims between identities, poetics, literary critic and novellas of postcolonial social systems. Divided cultural space and divided belongings are popular themes in displacement discourse (Shah et. al, 2015). It connects past and present by examining the lived experiences (Ashcroft et. al, 1989). Belongings and memory, locating the lost and narratives on contemporary opened up discourse on divided homelands (Prakash, 1995). Such engagement expands the discourse on border issues, border making, divided borderlands and themes on humanity for communities divided by border. Lived experience at the borderland and its effects on sense of belonging are the main themes for postcolonial displacement writings.

Colonial documents and lived experiences help in understanding ongoing issues of postcolonial societies. Memories, narratives, lived experience, contested zone and displacement are the pertinent themes on the discourse of postcolonial displacement. These themes are equally relevant in understanding today's border disputes. The ongoing border skirmishes and overlapping claims at the borderland are the cases in point. Various sources such as, documentary, literary works and biographies inform deeper on divided homelands. Fieldwork and case study on everyday activities at borderland enrich understandings on lived experience and outcomes at divided homelands.

### **Inner Line, Overlapping of 'Administrative Units', 'Administrative Conveyance' and Today's Border Skirmishes**

On 1875, British India introduced Inner line in the Eastern Bengal Frontier. Inner line was the first piece of British India's legislation to incept administration at the hills of Northeast India (Ellis, 1993 Reprint). 1875 line functioned as official map for colonial administrators. It demarcates administration limits and jurisdiction limits between hills and plains of Assam. Ever since its inception, natives' relationship to land, forest resources, hunting rights, *jhumming* and foraging were all altogether altered. Forest was part and partial of the natives. Borders were mapped to demarcate administration divisions and jurisdictional limits between native's habitats and plains. Prior to colonialism, boundaries of the native's homelands were the hill trenches, foothills, ridges, riverine, foothills, territorial space up to which they can hunt, forage and tribal cosmography. Colonial map making divided habitats of the natives and were reduced to administrative units. Colonial authorities drew boundaries for effective administration, also to minimize budget of administrative units (MacKenzie, 1995 Reprint). Archival documents showed borders were drawn to minimize costs and administrative conveyance due to unavailability of roads and transportation in the hills.<sup>5</sup>

Border disputes in today's Northeast India are basically due to adoption of erstwhile colonial administration practices without much change on both documents and at the actual ground.<sup>6</sup> One can argue, colonial policy of administrative conveyance for effective administration did not consider geographical entity; rather, it divided ethnic homelands and habitats. Such policy got inherited in post independent India. The 1971 Northeast State Reorganization Act is the case in point. The Act simply inherited lines and dots of the 1933

Inner line notification. There were no changes of lines and dots and no demarcation was done at the actual ground.

1875 Inner line was redrawn for four more times during 1904 - 1933.<sup>7</sup> It was last redrawn during 1933. Subsequent drawings of Inner line during 1904 - 1933 entrenched towards hills, not towards the plains, thereby native's territorial space decreased. Archival documents clarified that redrawing was designed to administer the hill effectively and for separation of power between the hills and plains of Assam.<sup>8</sup> Archival papers mentioned the purpose of redrawing was due to 'not coinciding'<sup>9</sup> as shown in the map and at the actual ground. Not coinciding on trenches, foothills, hill ridge, riverine and streams on paper and on actual ground.<sup>10</sup> Mismatch on the map and on actual ground, colonial administrator redrew series of Inner lines entrenching further inside the Lushai hills, Naga hills, Mikir hills and Khasi hills.

1933 redrawn Inner line was adopted as the official border between Assam and Northeast states in the 1971 Northeast States Reorganization Act. There were no changes on description of Inner lines, no consultation with inter-state officials, no proper survey, no discussion with borderland communities and no demarcation at the actual ground, when 1971 Act adopted 1933 Inner line as the official border between Assam and Northeast states. Assam claims 1933 redrawn Inner line should be the official border between Assam and Northeast states. This paper delves on the historicity and ongoing border issues at Mizoram – Assam borderlands. Mizoram state officials claimed that 1933 line is unacceptable, and official border should be the 1875 Inner line, not the 1933 Inner line. Due to non demarcated border, there are multiple zones of disputes at the Mizoram - Assam borderland. Cachar and Karimganj districts of Assam and Kolasib district of Mizoram are the dispute zones. Today's border skirmish can be rectified with historical, cultural and social implications. Borders can be resurveyed and rechecked based on previously available land records.

Another factor for today's border skirmish is the overlapping of 'Administrative limits' at the borderlands. Border dispute occurs mainly at the overlapping zones between administrative divisions of Assam and Mizoram. These overlapping zones were created due to subsequent redrawing of Inner line. Case study of a Mizo family in Hortoki village (Northern Mizoram, Kolasib district) clarified that during the harvesting season of 2021, border disputes occurred, district officials from Assam and Mizoram rushed to borderland with all kinds of map to sort out issues. They usually look for spots of border pillars arguing this bank of the river, that trench or that riverine or that foothill as administration limits between administrative divisions. Not sure and wild guesses were the signs. Overlapping zones are the sites of ongoing border skirmishes. In such zone, it is common to notice overlapping of territorial claims by Assam and Mizoram officials during border skirmishes.

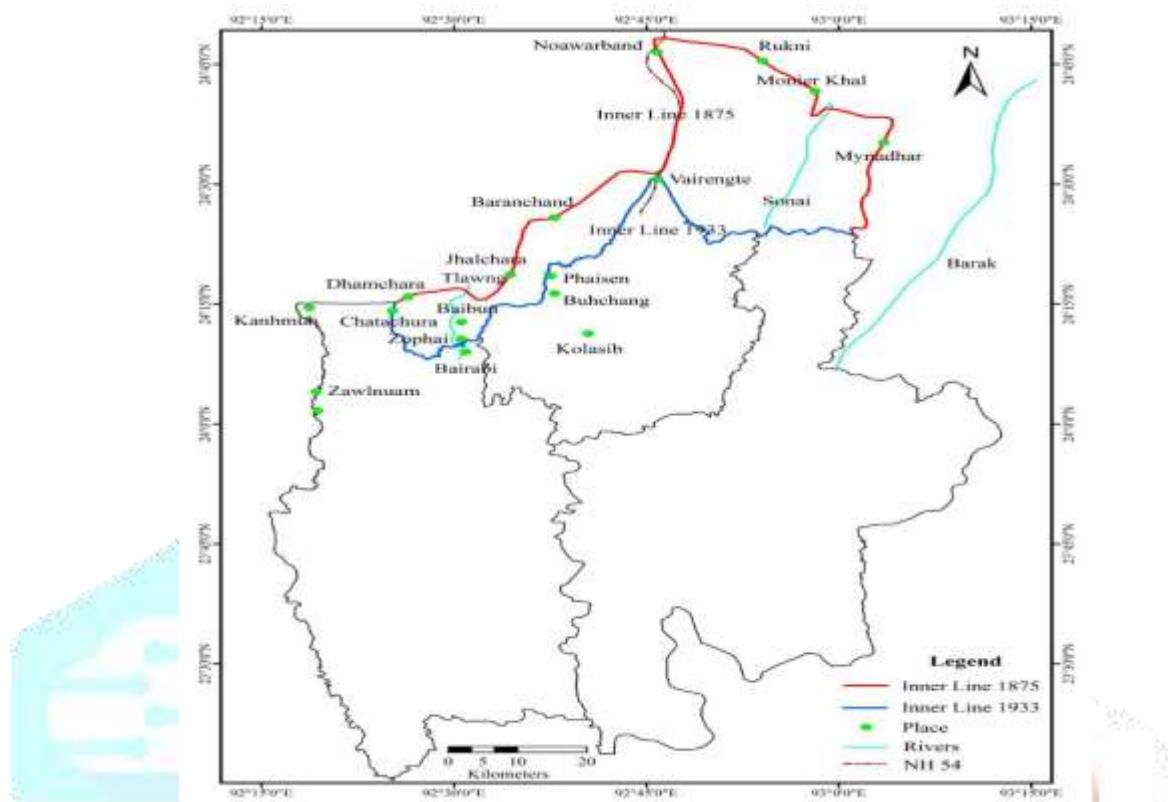
### **Northeastern States Reorganization Act 1971**

On 30 December 1971, inter state borders of northeast India adopted the 1933 Inner line as the official border between Assam and other Northeast states. There was no actual demarcation at the ground and no resurveys in the run up to 1971 Act. The Act officially adopted northeast state borders based on the 1933 redrawn Inner line.<sup>11</sup> Hurried exercise, copy paste manner, adoption of border drawn by colonial Assam and non demarcation are the roots of today's tensions. 1971 Act created newly formed northeastern states and union territories. It overlooked ethnic homelands and failed to unify ethnic habitats, cultivable land, resources and belongings at the borderlands. During fieldwork, families opined that 1971 Act is seen as a tool to separate belongings, land and resources. The Act came into force without proper survey and careful assessments of existing land revenue records.

The 1971 Act failed to answer on issues of overlapping territorial claims and overlapping administration. The Act is a classic case of the extension of colonial cartography in Northeast India. During fieldwork, questions that came lurking was, how could states be formed without actual demarcations on the ground? What kind of sovereignty exists with unsure territorial spaces? How can border and territory be formulated by simply adopting colonial papers? States borders and territories should be demarcated at actual ground.

Close reading of 1971 Act mentioned that border pillars of 1933 line were not altered nor repositioned. During fieldwork, elders from Mizo families and Assamese families informed that there was no proper checking of existing land settlement certificates by the state's revenue departments.

Figure - Map showing the re-drawings of Inner line from 1875 -1933. (Prepared by the author). North of red and blue line is Assam and south of red and blue line is Mizoram.



### Assam Mizoram Borderland

Mizoram shares 120 kilometers long border with Assam. Mizoram-Assam border is demarcated on map only, not at the actual ground. Border remains fuzzy. Border skirmishes increased multiple times (Interstate border disputes in the northeast, 2014). Even construction of waiting shed, public shed, household fencing and cutting bamboos ignite border tensions (Assam – Mizoram border disputes, 2012). On several counts, everyday livelihood activity became suspicious at the borderlands. The dispute is further deepened due to lack of facts, data and information to the villagers and Rural Block Officials. Available data are not sufficiently analyzed and communicated between states and Central government, contributing to further misinformation, mismanagement, alienation and periodic skirmishes. Border skirmishes undermine territorial and political sovereignty of Mizoram and Assam. It affects livelihood, belongings and inaccessibility of forest resources in comprehensive and explicable terms. On an annual basis, families often felt the sense of belonging and un-belonging of their land and resources. In this zone of dispute, communities have submitted to live, accustomed to such borderland disputes, and carry on with their everyday existence.

During fieldwork, it became clear that borderland communities rely heavily on land and forest resources available, for their livelihood and meeting their everyday needs. They are meager income earners, economically vulnerable and not well off. No alternative means, besides forest resources and cultivable land for income generation. Forest and land resources are their main sources of livelihood. Other sources of income, medium and large trade and business are rare at the villages of Assam-Mizoram borderlands.

### States' Initiatives, Outcomes and the Case of Double Land Certificates on the Same Plot of Land

Various official meetings between Mizoram and Assam officials were held during the last four decades. Despite the official meetings, states have failed to solve the ongoing border dispute. Officials of Home Department from Government of Mizoram informed that series of meetings were held during 1978 - 2018 at Aizawl, Guwahati and New Delhi. A National level meeting took place at New Delhi on 6 February 1994 convened by the Home Minister Government of India (GOI) attended by Chief Ministers of Assam and Mizoram. Recently on 8 August 2022, a ministerial level meeting between the states took place at Aizawl. Outcome was no amicable points of agreements to solve border issue once and for all. No agreement, hence

no solution. Because, Assam stood firm and maintains that 1933 line should be the official border, whereas Mizoram argues that 1875 line should be the official border. The common thread that connects inter state official meeting is states failed to redraw and demarcate the border. Lack of response by central government further aggravated the dispute. Till today, there has been no intervention from India's Prime Minister's office to the 2007 Memorandum submitted by Chief Minister of Mizoram.<sup>12</sup> The memorandum's objective was to resolve and demarcate borderlands.

During fieldwork, Officials from Revenue Department, Government of Mizoram opined that Mizoram does not accept the present boundary with Assam. Officials from Mizoram Census mentioned, prior to 1981 census, total area of Mizoram was 20,187 square kilometers. By 1981 census, it was reduced to 20,181 square kilometers. During 1981 Mizoram had lost 6 square kilometers.<sup>13</sup> Cultivable lands were lost during 1980s. During fieldwork, it became clear many Mizo families had lost their farmlands, even though they still have the land records. The main reason for loss of cultivable lands was due to the issuance of land registration certificates on the same plot of land by both the states to its domiciles.<sup>14</sup> It is a case of dual land ownerships with two certificates – one by Assam and one by Mizoram - for the same plot of cultivable land. Border dispute unveils such double standards. Even the higher court cannot serve justice when you have two land certificates for the same plot of land and where there are federal state high courts of each state. It is a case of dilution of states power. It sounds odd, issuing of land certificates by both Assam and Mizoram on the same plot of land. These are hard facts in this zone of border dispute. During case study, two Mizo families shown land certificates issued by Mizoram Revenue Department. Also, in that particular plot of land, Assamese families shown land certificates issued by Assamese Revenue Department. Administrative overlapping and multiple land certificates for a same plot of land across the two states are the reasons for reducing Mizoram's total area by 6 square kilometers during 1981.

Amidst the widespread sense of helplessness at borderlands, there is also an overwhelming desire to minimize borderland disputes due to the presence of armed police, the 1 Mizoram Reserve Battalion at Kawnpui (Kolasib district, Mizoram). It was incepted during 1981 by Mizoram to curb down border skirmishes, tensions and scuffles between borderland communities of Assam and Mizoram. Security force provides security and reduces the climate of dispute during harvesting, sowing of seeds and collecting timbers. Absence of security forces in this zone cripples' families on both sides of the borderlands.

### Officials Response on Official Border

During fieldwork, Mizoram Officials opined the present border was hurriedly carved out of Assam in Northeast States Reorganization Act, 1971 without paying much attention to ground realities. The boundaries in postcolonial Assam did not strictly conform to ethnic boundaries. There are sizeable populations of Mizo and Naga in the Cachar hills of Assam, making it imagination for both Mizoram and Nagaland to claim territories in Assam. Also, illegitimate land transfers took place. Mizoram officials opined that earlier these lands belonged to Mizoram, thus creating sources for potential tensions.<sup>15</sup>

Political parties and civil society organization in Mizoram were unanimous on the northern border that official border should be based on the 1875 Inner line. Mizo leaders opined it was a bitter day, when Mizo National Front (MNF) leader *Pu Laldenga* (leader of MNF) overlooked the issues of border disputes and demarcation of Mizoram borders during the Mizo Peace Accord signed on 30 June 1986. Mizo Peace Accord did not include the clause on resurveying and demarcation of border between Assam and Mizoram. During 2019, all party meeting of Mizoram came out with a resolution, to unanimously agree that the actual boundary between Assam and Mizoram should be the 1875 Inner line agreed between British officials and Mizo chiefs.

### Narratives on Inner Line

Terms like 'administrative conveyance' and 'effective maintenance of law and order in British India' were mentioned in Archival documents.<sup>16</sup> During fieldwork, Assam's revenue officials argued that tea economy had inspired colonial authorities to use Inner line as a strategic tool. As the tea gardens multiplied, Inner lines were redrawn too. This was the coincidence. During fieldwork, Mizo elders commented that Inner line regulation was not honest at all. It carved out cultivable land and forest areas with rich resources. It scooped out many lands from the Cachar administrative division during 1875-1933.

At present, Mizoram officials also claimed, two of the most fertile pockets of agricultural land in Northern borderlands were taken away by Cachar administration due to the imposition of 1933 line by Assam and Northeast States Reorganization Act 1971.<sup>17</sup> Close reading of notifications on Inner line revealed that without consulting Mizo chiefs, colonial administrators redrew Inner line of 1930 and issued the Notification No. 2106, dated 9 March 1933.<sup>18</sup> The Notification of 1933 modified the boundary between Mizo hill and British Cachar administration. It excluded Mizo inhabited villages such as Zion, Tlangnuam, Bhuban and pockets of cultivable lands along Vairengte border.<sup>19</sup> Ongoing border skirmishes occur in the peripheries of these Mizo villages.

Mizo elders argued northern border of Mizoram was created on a copy paste manner, by reproducing the exact lines and dots of 1933 Inner line modification. They opined that it was a bitter day, when MNF overlooked the issue of border dispute during Mizo Peace Accord signed on 30 June 1986.<sup>20</sup> Redrawing of Inner line created confusions among the hills. It altered traditional practice of controlling lands and cultivating practices. Until the line was imposed, there was no hard boundary for cultivating and hunting practices. Each village had consensual boundaries and limits up to which they can cultivate and collect timbers.

### Inner Line Reserve Forest, 1904

In the Mizo oral tradition, it was remembered Mizo had a huge forest area in northern part of Lushai hills bordering Cachar (Assam) and hymns mentioned chiefs and their families used to hunt in this forest area. Inner line reserve forest was created during 1904 (second redrawing of the Inner line). Official records mentioned the total size of the reserve forest area was 509 square kilometers.<sup>21</sup> Right now, Mizo claimed this reserve forest belongs to Mizoram. Where as, Assam claims it is part of Cachar magistrate. Border skirmishes between Assam and Mizoram occur at the peripheries of reserve forest area. Mizoram officials blamed erstwhile colonial administration for giving away their forefather's hunting ground and forest resources to Cachar forest division. Assamese forest officials claimed border skirmishes occur due to overlapping claims.

At present, taxes were levied for forest resources by forest divisions. To the Mizo, northern boundary with Cachar (Assam) was fixed arbitrarily. This reserve forest is now bifurcated. During British Assam, reserve forest acted as buffer zone between the Mizo hills administration and Cachar administration and revenues from the resources were shared between the Lushai hills administration and Cachar administration (Border Committee Report, Government of Mizoram, 1973).

### Mizoram Border Commissions Reports Not Ratified by Government of India

1973 Border Committee Report by Reverend Zairema and B Poonte mentioned Mizo society's dissatisfaction to Inner line of 1875.<sup>22</sup> During 2007, a memorandum<sup>23</sup> was submitted by then Chief Minister of Mizoram Zoramthanga to Prime Minister of India (Memorandum on Border Issues submitted to Prime Minister of India, 2007). The memorandum was a compilation of historical documents, letters and notifications on Inner line. It contains meeting minutes on border issues meetings between Assam and

Mizoram. Till date, Prime Minister's office has not taken any positive steps to solve border disputes. 2007 memorandum demanded constituting a Boundary Commission for the settlement, delimitation and demarcation of the boundary between Mizoram and Assam with Government of India as the main negotiator.

Mizoram Congress party formed a Border Study Committee on 2013.<sup>24</sup> The committee submitted the report on 1 July 2014. The report summarized letters of communication by colonial authorities and summaries of memorandums submitted to authorities for demarcation, proposals to delimit disputed boundaries and to return the reserve forest of 1904 to Mizoram from the Cachar (Assam) forest division. On 18 July 2014, Mizoram Chief Minister requested union Home Minister, Government of India to constitute a Boundary Commission to settle boundary disputes with Assam.<sup>25</sup> Till today meetings, border study reports and memorandums are ineffective and unable to reach consensus.

In northeast India, there are no hard and demarcated boundaries. There is overlapping of territories between state's administrations. Indigenous polity and sense of belonging, insider and outsider issues are often shaped by ongoing border issues. Boundary fixation on previously fluid realms is one of the main sources of today's confrontation between indigenous, native homeland and ethnic homelands. The worst is colonial cartographic culture is inherited into post independent India without much change. Such inheritance is the source of skirmishes at the borderlands between Assam and Northeast states. At present, the cartographic principles of independent India concealed much of the historical continuity and cross border ties.

### A Way Out

What can be done now to resolve border skirmishes? Assam and other northeast states have failed to create neutral zones at the borderlands. Resurvey the dispute zones with the help of previous land revenue records and available land settlement documents. Land records of both Mizoram and Assam of dispute zones certified post 1971 – till today, should be rechecked and verified. All land certificates from 1971 – till today needs to be re-examined. State officials ought to apply modern technologies, web applications to demarcate land. Compensation to families who had lost their ownership to cultivable land is an essential component to end border skirmishes.

GPS technologies and electronic mapping should monitor dispute zones. GPS technologies should be applied to monitor expansion of agricultural and encroachments. Farmlands, forest areas and settlements must be scanned and monitored. Apply modern technologies and electronic surveillances to monitor dispute zones. Inter-state Boundary Commission should be formed and Central government needs to step in and introduce new legislatures to solve overlapping claims. Demarcation of land on actual ground should be done, by creating neutral zones. Fences and walls will not solve the problem; rather it will aggravate. Family and livelihood centric approaches, giving due importance to income, land, resources and livelihood should be implemented, rather than claims based on colonial documents. Colonial papers should not be the basis for border demarcation. Borders should be drawn on certain reasonable grounds by considering historical, traditional and cultural belongings.

### NOTES

1. Fieldwork at on the borderland towns of Bairabi, Hortoki, Buhban and Vairengte under Kolasib district, Mizoram was done during March 2020 – December 2020. All the village council members were interviewed with open - ended questionnaires. Questionnaires covered themes on livelihood, *jhum* land, community land, income, and development policies. Church elders, women, policy beneficiaries, farm owners, and workers were also interviewed with different sets of open-ended questionnaires. Narratives and experiences were recorded. A field dairy was maintained. Also fieldwork at Karimganj district and Cachar district of Assam were conducted during January 2021 – June 2022. Open ended questionnaires and interview schedule covered themes on land, belonging, livelihood and farming activities. Also, district officials from land revenue department and civil society organisation leaders were interviewed.

2. Case studies were undertaken during January 2021 – March 2022. Case studies of twenty households from three towns – Bairabi, Hortoki, Vairengte and Buhban village were conducted. Cases were selected after fieldwork. Case study cases were selected based on their main source of livelihood from agricultural activities and owning farms at borderland. Their narratives helped in writing this paper.

3. National Archives India, Notification No. 27 of (1835) Dated 15 May 1835, Library Collections.

4. National Archives India, Notification No. 262 of (1908) Dated 27 August 1908, Library Collections.

5. Archival Documents from Mizoram States Archives. See Notification No. 1206, Dated 8 June 1904. *Mizoram State Archive*, Sl. No 657, CB-49. See Notification No. 1206, Dated 8 June 1912. *Mizoram State Archive*, Sl. No 874, CB-46. See Notification No. 1978, Dated 1 August 1930. *Mizoram State Archive*, Sl. No. 1064 CB-42.

6. Northeast State Reorganization Act 1971 adopted the 1933 Inner line (redrawn) as the official border between Assam and other states. The 1875 Inner line was the first official border, so called ‘Administrative limits’ for collecting revenues and taxes. For details, The Northeastern Areas Reorganization Act. 1971. [legislative.gov.in > actsofparliamentfromtheyear > north-eastern-areas-reorganisation act](http://legislative.gov.in/actsofparliamentfromtheyear/north-eastern-areas-reorganisation-act). (Accessed on 15 August 2022).

7. Inner Line Notification No. 1978, Dated 1 August 1930. *Mizoram State Archive*, Sl. No. 1064 CB-42).

8. Notification No. 1978 of (1930) Dated 1 August 1930, *Mizoram State Archive*, Sl. No. 1064 CB-42.

9. Inner Line Notification No. 2106, Dated 9 March 1933. *Mizoram State Archive*, Sl. No. 1098 CB-27. The Inner lines of 1875, 1904, 1912, 1930 and 1933 mentioned there were lapses on what was mentioned on previous notifications and on actual ground.

10. Notification No. 1978 of (1930) Dated 1 August 1930, *Mizoram State Archive*, Sl. No. 1064 CB-42.

11. For details, The Northeastern Areas Reorganisation Act. 1971. [legislative.gov.in > actsofparliamentfromtheyear > north-eastern-areas-reorganisation act](http://legislative.gov.in/actsofparliamentfromtheyear/north-eastern-areas-reorganisation-act). (Accessed on 15 August 2022).

12. Chief Minister of Mizoram. 2007. “Memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister of India: Constitution of Boundary Commission for settlement, delimitation and demarcation of the boundary between Mizoram and Assam with other neighboring states”, Aizawl: Government of Mizoram, 13-14.

13. Meeting with Home officials, Government of Mizoram, 13 May 2022, Aizawl. Census data were also accessed during the meeting.

14. During fieldwork at Bhuban hills - a Mizo village near Bairabi (close to Assam border), residents showed Land Settlement Certificate (LSC) issued before 1981 by Revenue Department, Mizoram. Residents informed that on the same lot of land, another resident from Assam produced a LSC issued by Assam Authorities. During 1980, many residents from the village started selling lands to Assam residents due to overlapping of land claims. They have complaint to authorities. Till today, authorities have not settled all such cases.

15. Meeting with officials of the Revenue Department, Government of Mizoram, 25 May 2022, Aizawl.

16. Alexander Mackenzie. 1995, Reprint. *The northeast frontier of India*, New Delhi: Mittal publication, p.317 mentioned that to reduce cost of colonial administrative, administrators follow the policy of easy connectivity for administering the hills. Also, see Robert Reid. 1997, Reprint. *History of the frontier areas bordering on Assam from 1883-1941*. Guwahati: Spectrum Publication, p. 13. Colonial administration borders as administrative limits and taxation limit up to which a superintendent can collect revenues.

17. Meeting with Home officials, Government of Mizoram, 13 May 2022, Aizawl. Also, Meeting with officials of the Revenue Department, Government of Mizoram, 25 May 2022, Aizawl.

18. The clarification given by the colonial administration was that trenches, riverine and ridges of the hills as pointed on the map and at the actual ground are not co-terminus. Based on survey, they redraw the line to make it accurate in the map as well as on the actual ground. The Inner line redrawing notifications are available in the Mizoram State Archive in the following files Mizoram State Archive, Sl. No 874, CB-27. Mizoram State Archive, Sl. No 1074, CB-42. Mizoram State Archive, Sl. No 1098, CB-46.

19. During field-work at the northern borderlands, several Tea Gardens in Cachar district of Assam have Mizo names. Mizo elders at the borderlands opined that those tea gardens were earlier part of Mizo hills administration. The Tea gardens names were registered with Mizo names, till now.

20. Meeting with Home officials, Government of Mizoram, 13 May 2022, Aizawl. Also, Meeting with officials of the Revenue Department, Government of Mizoram, 25 May 2022, Aizawl. During fieldwork, officials and civil society opined that Mizoram-Assam border demarcation and settlement were simply overlooked by the MNF leader *Pu Laldenga*.

21. Notification No. 1206, Dated 8 June 1904. *Mizoram State Archive*, Sl. No 657, CB-49. In this notification, it was mentioned Reserve Forest protection and administration will be under the Divisional Forest Office, Cachar division. Till 1952, there was no Division Forest Office in Lushai Hills. Also, in Annexure J, Chief Minister of Mizoram (2007), “Memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister of India: Constitution of Boundary Commission for settlement, delimitation and demarcation of the boundary between Mizoram and Assam with other neighboring states”, Aizawl: Government of Mizoram, it was mentioned during 1904 – 1952, revenues gathered from Reserve Forest were shared between Cachar division and Lushai hills Superintendent.

22. The first border Report Commissioned by Mizoram came out when it was a union territory. Concern on demarcating Mzoram – Assam border was first taken up by the First Chief Minister *Pu Ch Chhunga*. The report was submitted to the Governor, Government of Assam at Shillong. See Reverend Zairema and B Poonte. 1973. *Report of the Fact Finding Committee on the Northern Boundary of Mizoram*, Aizawl: Government of Mizoram, p.37.

23. Chief Minister of Mizoram. 2007. “Memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister of India: Constitution of Boundary Commission for settlement, delimitation and demarcation of the boundary between Mizoram and Assam with other neighboring states”, Aizawl: Government of Mizoram, p.18.

24. “Minutes of meeting held in the office of the divisional forest officer, Cachar division at Silchar, 12 August, 1978.” *Border Study Report*. Aizawl: Office of the Congress, Mizoram.

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