Border, Globalization and Identity

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Edited by

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Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

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INTRODUCTION

SUKANTA DAS

I

Contrary to some predictions, state borders have not disappeared or even lost their importance in the contemporary globalized world.[1] Yet the unprecedented development of information technology and communications has not only turned the world into a village, but also forced us to rethink traditional ways of affiliation and to re-engage with borders, both actual and metaphorical. The expansion of capitalism, the flourishing of the market economy, the erosion in importance of the nation-state, and easier modes of connectivity have facilitated the expansion of global culture. With the emergence of this global culture, and almost seamless connectivity across national borders, questions of identity and borders have come to occupy centre stage in recent theoretical discussion. Traditional notions of identity as fixed have been challenged in an age defined by global culture.

Globalization as a theoretical concept has permeated several disciplines and impacted the way people organize their lives today. It is one of the most hotly debated issues, and although there have been divergent views as to its impact and nature, it is difficult to deny its existence or its effect. Some scholars hold it to be a new phenomenon, generated by the expansion of capitalism, and not so different from imperialism in its operation. They hold that, like capitalism, globalization seeks to establish its influence over other regions of the world. This interpretation sees the expansion of global capitalism as an offshoot of Western market monopolization. While capital and the market economy are the foundations of globalizing forces, they are greatly facilitated by communications technology. Advances in communication and information technology contribute largely to the creation of a kind of homogenizing culture. Access to the Internet, and the rapid dissemination of information, serve to create and sustain a form of common culture. It has been

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[1] For an accessible introduction to globalization see Steger, Lechner and Boli.

suggested that globalization is simply a type of Americanization, or Coca-colonization.[2] In other words, globalization is seen as something that encourages cultural homogenization, helping to erode state borders. Scholars have pointed out that borders have become permeable in the contemporary world of rapid communications and incessant flow of people and goods. James Rosenau (1997), for example, argues that what distinguishes these globalizing processes is 'that they are not hindered or prevented by territorial or jurisdictional barriers' (p. 80). Therefore territorial borders lose much of their importance as barriers to communication and to the flow of people and goods across them.

Such changes pose many questions about globalization. Does it help people who live on the margins? Or is globalization a kind of hegemonic tool in the hands of capitalists? Does globalization help bring about desired changes making for a better world? The supporters of globalization hail it as paving the way for flourishing democratic ideals and values, and for generating economic opportunities for disempowered people. Undoubtedly greater connectivity, facilitated by information and communications technology, has ushered in new kind of culture shared by people across national, ethnic, religious, racial, and linguistic borders. This new culture, sponsored by globalization, affects people in multiple ways, and impacts how they conceive their own identity and that of others. Globalization is said to have minimized, if not obliterated, the power of states, rendering borders largely superfluous.

The idea of a borderless world, shrunk to a global village thanks to unprecedented advances in information technology and the expansion of capitalism, has been hotly debated in contemporary discourses about border.[3] In simple terms, border is primarily geographical –physical demarcation lines drawn to differentiate one space from another. The notion of border was employed historically by Europeans to perpetuate perceived territorial difference. Mechanisms such as barbed-wire fencing and strict patrols by the military are adopted to ensure the sanctity of border. The geographical aspects of border include the means employed to maintain the difference between people living on each side of it.

Globalization is held to have blurred borders as a result of greater connectivity and the flow of people across frontiers. Yet border still seems to pose a barrier or block. With the rise of nationalism, the importance of borders increases, since they are used to maintain and perpetuate

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[2] Scholars have pointed out that globalization and Americanization have become synonymous because of the pervasive influence of American culture and capital across the world. See Oldenziel.

[3] For an understanding of border see Diener and Hagen, Hagen.

difference, and consolidate the idea of the nation-state.[4] Since nationalism depends upon the supposed homogenization of culture within a territory, border becomes all the more important in defining the identity of a nation vis-à-vis other nations on the other side.

Early geographers considered boundaries to be of two kinds: good and bad. The natural boundaries formed by rivers and mountains were termed 'good', while boundaries artificially constructed by the state were called 'bad'. This distinction has been contested on the ground that there are no 'natural' boundaries, as all boundaries are constructed. Nick Vaughan-Williams says,

> None of these borders is in any sense given but (re)produced through modes of affirmation and contestation and is, above all, lived. In other words borders are not natural, neutral or static but historically contingent, politically charged, dynamic phenomena that first and foremost involve people and their everyday lives'(1).

Since the 1980s, scholars from disciplines other than geography, such as political science, social science, and cultural studies, have worked on different aspects of border. Although the physical existence of borders still matters greatly, scholars are also investigating the metaphorical significance of borders.

Borders mark out a particular geographical space from other space, demarcating one territory from other territories. Thus the idea of border is informed by identity and difference. Borders are important as giving shape to a territory, upholding and asserting identity by maintaining difference from others. Borders are intended to give homogeneous identity to the people inhabiting the space defined, and thus assume great significance in the discourse of nationalism. Nationalism emphasizes the attainment of a homogeneous culture within the territory of a nation-state that marks it out from others.

National borders function in multiple ways. First, they delimit the sphere of operation of the sovereign state, which does not have any claim on territory beyond its borders. They are demarcating lines, mutually agreed upon by neighbouring states. Borders define the sphere of absolute power of the state, and also point to the powerlessness of that state beyond them. Second, borders are guarded, monitored, and patrolled, with advanced military apparatus employed to safeguard them. Far from being mere lines of demarcation, borders are active, unstable, and the focus of

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[4] For an accessible introduction to nationalism see Grosby, Gellner, Anderson.

military activity. The state takes great care to protect its borders, because infiltration is regarded as an attack on the sovereignty of the state.

Borders are also the entry and exit points for people and goods. Those authorized for entry or exit are allowed to cross the border routinely with surveillance. The state has differently defined attitudes towards people who live within its borders and those outside them. People living within a particular state border enjoy citizenship, with its associated privileges and rights. If a citizen is denied the rights bestowed by the state, s/he can ask the judiciary for their restoration. People living on the other side of the border do not enjoy such privileges and rights, and if they attempt to cross the border without valid documents they are breaking that state's law. Borders operate on the basis of inclusion and exclusion. Borders define who is welcome within a territory and who is not. In the contemporary global world, borders are experienced not only at the margin, where actual fences or barbed wires exist, but also in the centres where immigration checks are carried out.

Borders also assume metaphorical meaning. Racial, ethnic, and religious minorities can experience a sense of exclusion even when they are located *within* a territory. This metaphorical dimension of borders has been investigated in postcolonial cultural studies by scholars, who describe such borders as 'contact zones' or 'liminal spaces'. A border marks not only the limit of a territory, beyond which the state has no authority or jurisdiction, but also the beginning of another space or territory. Borders also have an existence of their own, because they do not belong exclusively to one territory, but are sites of 'in-betweenness', a 'contact zone' where cultural exchange can take place. Borders occupy an ambiguous position, in a sense belonging to nowhere. This ambiguity – belonging to nowhere, or for that matter to everywhere –has been investigated by the Chicana scholar Gloria E. Anzaldúa. In the preface to her book *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) she makes a deceptively simple declaration: 'I am a border woman'. Identifying herself with border, she rejoices at its infinite possibility and limitless expansion. She is attempting to disrupt conventional thinking about border and the identity it entails, with a 'shift out of habitual formations: from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes' (101).

The notion of what constitutes identity in the contemporary globalized world has been explored in various discourses, including psychoanalysis, postcolonialism, and cultural studies. Essentially, identity has two dimensions

– personal and collective. The sense of who I am is what constitutes personal identity, while a human being living within a larger community (racial, ethnic, national, or religious) attains a collective identity from his/her membership of that community. Thus identity operates through an understanding of difference. A human being's understanding of his/her difference from his/her fellow human beings offers the solid ground upon which s/he constructs identity. Therefore the concept of identity cannot be separated from difference. As Stuart Hall argues, '...identities are constructed through, not outside, difference' (17). The formation of identity takes place with a simultaneous understanding or awareness of its 'other': ethnic or national identity, for example, is dependent upon what it is not.

However postmodern scholars contest the very basis of identity, suggesting there is no fixed vantage point from which one can look at oneself and others. The postmodern philosopher Deleuze interrogates traditional notions of identity and difference, where identity gets privileged. Deleuze holds that there is no stable, fixed identity, and even apparent identity – considered to be fixed and stable – is actually composed of a series of differences.

But identity as invoked in various discourses has been the prime force behind the mobilization of people against another ideology, or against people endorsing that ideology. People see identity as a strategic tool for achieving some political goal. For example, border gives a kind of fixed definition to a territory, and people inhabiting that land are aware of the homogeneity supposed to have been achieved by the discourse of nationalism. But the rapid development of information and communication technology has made borders virtually redundant, as cross-border communication and interaction take place in unprecedented ways. The large-scale migration of people for many different reasons[5] has problematized the unitary concept of identity as defined by the discourse of border.

Older assumptions about the single dimensionality of identity have been replaced by the concept of plural, or multiple, identities. Therefore the sense of who I am, which constitutes identity, is varied, different, unstable, and liable to reconstitution. Identity is essentially a context-

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[5] The migration of people to different lands has been analyzed from viewpoint of 'push' and 'pull' factors. Certain socio-economic opportunities, such as higher salary, higher standard of living, and relatively peaceful social life, act as 'pull' factors, luring people to lands promising such personal fulfilment. However 'push' factors, such as ethnic violence, riots, and racial clashes, compel people to leave their land of origin.

specific position, and an individual may choose to give priority to a particular marker of his/her identity (religion, ethnicity, gender, for example) in a particular socio-cultural context. This awareness, and the need to outgrow the stereotyping of identity, leads to a more nuanced understanding of identity.

Therefore identity is a position an individual takes after negotiating a number of options available to him/her. But failure to resolve the claims of different identity-markers creates a confusion that can lead to violence resulting from the assertion of a particular identity. Problems with identity can arise when a person asserts only one particular marker of identity as their recognition tag. Such binary thinking has been interrogated by postmodern scholars such as Edward Soja, who worked on Henry Lefebvre's notion of spatiality, and talked about the creation of 'Thirdspace'.[6] It is only by crossing the border, and thus entering into a kind of Thirdspace – a realm that melds the apparent contradictions – that we can make sense of our identity.

II

The present anthology is a collection of research papers from multiple perspectives on a variety of themes related to the issues of border, globalization, and identity. The individual chapters have been grouped into four parts, and deal with key issues of border, globalization, and identity, employing innovative theoretical frameworks to investigate the issues. Regional texts and emerging new literatures have also been taken up to explore the issues. Contemporary fictions, both in English and in regional languages, poetry, and cultural products such as film, have been analyzed to offer stimulating perspectives on identity and border.

In his contribution, Sukriti Ghosal offers an in-depth reading of some contemporary poems that explore the sense of bewilderment, helplessness, and unswerving zeal in response to border and in moments of exile. He surveys contemporary theory on different dimensions of space, border, and identity, and explores these issues in his reading of recent English poetry.

In an era of globalization, borders become porous and result in a multiplicity of identities. This is explored by Tara Prakash Tripathi, who investigates the emigration of tech-savvy, westernized youths. This process has set up a new kind of tension and conflict between a large

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[6] Starting from Lefebvre's concept of spatiality, Soja talks about 'Thirdspace', a space beyond the binary, deterministic space where opposites coalesce. For an elaborate discussion of the term, see Soja.

group of English-speaking, westernized, tech-savvy youths and local residents, who become frightened about the impact of foreign culture upon indigenous, tradition-nourished culture.

Jaydeep Rishi investigates Amitav Ghosh's *Ibis* trilogy, showing how the process of globalization took place in an earlier period, when traders, soldiers, and sailors were its agents. Encompassing a wide expanse of history, and traversing extensive geographical space, this paper tracks Ghosh's take on an earlier phase of globalization and the crossing of borders. Iman Ghosh revisits the conflicted terrain of Kashmir to argue that identity is slippery, particularly because of the confluence of various cultures and traditions. Ghosh explores the multi-dimensionality of 'Kashmiri' identity, with a critical study of poetry about Kashmir, and an analysis of popular culture, particularly Bollywood films set in this region.

Abu Siddik interrogates the discourses of globalization that herald the withering away of borders, and shows how modern-day borders still operate in numerous ways in all spheres. Critiquing contemporary discourses and recent events, particularly in India, Abu Siddik explores the trauma of people who are impacted by religious, linguistic, and cultural borders. In his paper, Tuhin Sanyal explores 'borders' in the ancient language and literature used and written by the Romani people. He reveals linguistic traces that the Romani people have left, traversing boundaries, and revisits Romani literature by transcreating some Romani songs and poems illustrating the issues of border.

In their paper, Tara Prakash Tripathi and Namrata Jain explore the issues of assimilation and crossing borders by analyzing Victor Séjour's work 'The Mulatto'. Through an in-depth reading, they bring out the problems of assimilating people of mixed race in a racialized society. Raja Basu takes up the issue of nationalism and the borders it creates against the back-drop of cross-border interaction in the Indian subcontinent. Critiquing the discourse of nationalism, Raja Basu shows how borderland cultural practices override the rigidity of borders.

Arnab K. Sinha charts the troubling terrain of the cartography of the Indian subcontinent, combining a study of Kamila Shamsie's novel *Kartography* with a historical account that nullifies the borders on the map. Aniket Chhetry historicizes the concept of border, drawing a distinction between modern-day borders and the pre-modern concept of boundaries or frontiers. He analyzes the nature of pre-modern boundaries in his exploration of the Brahmanic frontiers of Bengal in the medieval period.

The spread of global capital and dominance of a market economy forced nations to invite foreign investment in order to establish large-scale

industry and set up Special Economic Zones (SEZs). This led to the emergence of movements opposed to land-grabbing by industry, particularly in the Indian subcontinent. An anti-globalization movement arose to ensure the democratization of natural resources and the protection of the environment. In his paper, Avijit Sutradhar discusses the adverse impact of globalization on indigenous people and their culture. In his paper, Koushik Goswami traces the origin and subsequent development of various 'chitmahals' (enclaves) on the Indo-Bangladeshi border, investigates the problems faced by residents, and makes a socio-historical analysis of the birth of chitmahals that calls for dialogue and empathetic collaboration beyond the border.

Ashish Chhetri investigates the problems of exile, migration, and identity in his paper on Nissim Ezekiel's poetry. In her paper, Debjani Roychoudhury focuses on the popular consumption of cultural products associated with border. She investigates popular Bollywood films that are preoccupied with border, particularly those retelling the story of Partition. Using clips from television soaps, Roychoudhury explores how the popular imagination associated with nationalism and Partition has been exploited to make money at the box office.

Partition – one of the most traumatic events in the recent history of the Indian subcontinent – continues to attract the attention of writers. Hasina Wahida explores this subject by analyzing some novels in Bengali, revisiting the traditional concept of border by presenting the lived experience of victims of Partition.

In their paper, Paroma Chanda and Diptarka Chakraborty explore notions of identity and home by analyzing Amrita Pritam's novel *Pinjar*. Torn between home and identity, a woman is forced to leave her ancestral homefaces double marginalization. The paper critiques the provisional nature of identity, and examines the notions of 'home' and 'identity' as experienced by women.

Defenders of globalization hail it as ushering in prosperity, nourishing democratic values, and facilitating economic opportunities for people. But it does not always offer such bright prospects. In his paper, Nilanjan Chakraborty explores the feelings of alienation experienced by 'outsiders' in American society because of racial identity. He exposes flaws in the liberty discourse of globalization. In her paper, Ankita Chatterjee investigates 'border' in all its manifestations, and analyzes how Amitav Ghosh dismantles various borderlines. Chatterjee takes up Ghosh's notion of 'syncretic culture' to explore his novel *The Hungry Tide*, set in the volatile Sundarbans. Employing Ghosh's notion of borders as 'shadow

lines', the paper draws attention to the interpenetration of culture as portrayed by Ghosh.

Valentina Tamsang analyzes the problems of assimilation in an alien land, making an in-depth study of Manju Kapoor's novel *The Immigrant*. She looks upon 'affect' as the catalyst in transforming the lives of Nina and Ananda. Drawing parallels between Aboriginal writing in Australia and Dalit literature in India, Utpal Rakshit explores the sufferings of both peoples, investigating forms of resistance, ideological suppression, and construction of identity in the face of a dominant ideology. Rakshit compares the poetry of the Australian Aboriginal poet Oodgeroo Noonuccal and the Indian Dalit poet Manohar Mouli Biswas. In her paper, Namrata Chowdhury explores the problematic of identity and border by analyzing John Boyne's novel *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, set during the Holocaust. Employing psychoanalytic theories, Choudhury explores the transgressive nature of boundaries. Finally, Sarmila Paul explores the problematic of translation, and discusses the transformation of 'local identities' through an act of transcreation.

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PART I:

BEYOND THE BORDER

CHAPTER ONE

SPACE, BORDER, IDENTITY: THROUGH A POETIC LENS

SUKRITI GHOSAL

I

In an interview prior to his death, Michel Foucault, who theorized about heterotopia, said that 'Space is fundamental in any form of communal life, space is fundamental in any exercise of power' (qtd. in *Postmodern Geographies*, Edward W. Soja, 19). Now the space we live in is 'a heterogeneous space', à la Foucault: 'We do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another' (Foucault, 23). The Marxist theorist Henri Lefebvre (in *The Production of Space)* argues that space is a social construct. As sex is biological but gender is a social construct, so within the natural space inhabited by humanity there are multiple spaces based on relations and values that we recognize and endorse in day-to-day life. The second half of the twentieth century saw a semantic extension of this concept. The body, and all that it represents, is conceived spatially. As the body is related to reproduction, the question of miscegenation–the interbreeding of people considered to be of different racial types–has become pivotal in recent studies (for example, purity vs. hybridity). 'Mongrelization' has been envisaged as a strategy for combating interracial feud and terrorism. Understandably, such an approach interrogates the monolithic concept of identity, and points more towards the porousness of various borders, geographical or imaginary, drawn in various names.

Space may be demarcated by drawing a line on a map, fencing a territory, or raising imaginary boundaries of separation. The notion of imaginary boundaries makes the border metaphorical. Border thus not only signifies tangible boundaries, dividing a place and people occupying the space, but also becomes a psychological category. As a metaphor, it may

encompass a temporal boundary as well. For example, when we talk of a generation gap, we refer to the timeline that separates people living on either side of a generation line. Theory of border or boundary is a cognitive theory of 'social classification' (Zerubavel, 1991; 1996): work/family, East/West, black/white, Brahmin/Dalit, straight/queer and the like. It takes into account issues such as the nature of categorization, the need for integration or segmentation of domains or roles specific to each domain, and the mechanism – for instance flexibility or permeability – for achieving it. It also seeks to probe how people construct, maintain, negotiate, or cross boundaries or borders, the lines of demarcation. Boundary crossing and role transitions are central to border theory. Nippert-Eng mentions two such strategies: placement, which 'draws the line between realms'; and transcendence, which keeps the boundary 'in place by allowing us to jump back and forth over it' (p. 8).

Identity is a loaded term, with complex layers of meaning. Identity is the outcome of the recognition of what one is to oneself and to others. Identity is a differential experience, requiring a borderline that marks out an individual or group within the circumscribed domain from those outside that space, geographical or imagined; that is, the specific literal or metaphorical border. The Platonic division between *eidos* and *eicon*, form and its derivatives, proved useful in understanding the relation between identity and difference. *What I am* can be grasped only from knowledge of what *I am not*. The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, however, has shown the gap in this proposition, and maintains that if *eidos* can be distinguished from *eicon*, the latter can also be distinguished from the former. The reversal of order of occurrence in the binary redefines the status of privilege always enjoyed by the first member of any binary. This means there is only difference – no fixed, essentialist, stable identity. To quote Deleuze: 'If philosophy has a positive and direct relation to things, it is only insofar as philosophy claims to grasp the thing itself according to what it is, in its difference from everything it is not, in other words, in its *internal difference*' (32). In Deleuze's version, pure difference is non-spatio, temporal difference *per se*. For Deleuze there is no subject, there is only a differentiating process.

But as identity essentializes being, it presupposes the existence and necessity of a border. Thus a nation, a religious community, or a political party requires a border for the purity of its defined identity, but must cross it if it wants to re-define its identity. Border crossing, therefore, is looked upon as a transgressive act by the community that seeks to exercise power over a domain (cf. 'homogeneity necessary to the exercise of power', Kathleen Karr, 'Race, Nation, and Ethnicity' 377). Crossing the border

may be a homecoming for an exile, or an infiltration to the people on the other side of the inhabited domain if one is unwelcome there. Any intercultural encounter punctures a stable form of identity, thereby necessitating the creation of what Soja calls 'Thirdspace'. The advantage of this so-called transgression/infiltration is that it expands the horizon of our experience, re-moulding the familiar identity. Here a plurality of perspective – accessible by overleaping the border, that is, by negotiating with the Other – is a precondition of the assertion of identity. Two forces – centripetal (aligning oneself with a homogeneous community) and centrifugal (liberating oneself from set boundaries) – are simultaneously operative in human nature. This is comparable to the four forces in physics – gravitation and strong (inter and intra-particle attraction/bond), and electromagnetic and weak (radiation and dispersal). In-betweenness occurs when one recognizes the necessity of fusion, but refuses to commit oneself to either sensibility. Lack of commitment may be due to fear of contamination, that is, loss of the existing pure grain of identity. Moreover, since membership of a group is by nature exclusive, memory and a sense of attachment hold the person concerned back from integrating with the new community. But since the first half of the twentieth century opinion has changed greatly due to changes in attitude towards hybridity. If Modernists stressed the importance of fusion, 'post-modern hybridity emphasizes not fusion but multiple and mobile positionings created by performative transgressions of national grand narrative' (Kerr 379).

The need for re-interrogating the question of space and border, and how identity is related to these, has been felt since humanity stepped into a globalized borderless space. The revolution in information and communication technology has rendered geographical borders almost redundant, causing deterritorialization, to borrow the pet phrase of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (in *Anti-Oedipus*), especially of netizens. Yet identity politics succeeds in thriving in one essential area. In the last two decades the world has experienced traumatic violence and terror due to the stereotyping of identity-markers, or racial profiling: for example, black=inferior, Brahmin=superior, mulatto=criminal, Muslim=terrorist. While this prejudice has a political design and hence relates to power, it points to a mindset that is prone to maintain difference by securing the border, rather than crossing the border in search of the 'commonality which cuts across situated differences**'**. Soja has rightly advocated the creation of a 'Thirdspace' to escape the determinism inherent in physical or metaphorical spaces determined by a boundary:

> I define Thirdspace as an-Other way of understanding and acting to change
> the spatiality of human life, a distinct mode of critical spatial awareness

that is appropriate to the new scope and significance being brought about in the rebalanced trialectices of spatiality-historicality-sociality' (Soja 1996, 57).

By encouraging us to jump the border, the Thirdspace, a heterotopos (Foucault draws our attention to the mirror image which is simultaneously physical, because the mirror is an object, and virtual, because the image is unreal) may catalyze de-separation.

The next section of this paper will attempt an examination of how these various aspects of space, border, and identity have been articulated in contemporary English poetry. I have chosen poetry for two reasons. First, border studies are principally focused on stories and fiction. Articulation of border-sensibility in poetry is somewhat less explored. Second, poetry – the most condensed form of literature – demands the utmost concentration in reading. While reading poetry, we cross the border of our own self most successfully and rewardingly. What is theorized may impress us as a felt experience. This idea has been touched upon by Mary Buchinger, in an interview in the journal *Border Crossing*:

> I think poetry presents an opportunity to go both inside and outside oneself. The invitation to see something in a very different way – to enter into a sensibility utterly unlike your own – is an inherent invitation to experience your own reality differently. The self is challenged in encounters with others – *poetry has the power to disturb default understandings of the self and others*' (emphasis added) (Buchinger).

II

David Wojahn, who received the Yale Series of Younger Poets award in 1981 for his collection *Icehouse Lights*, captures the borders of memory and desire in his poem 'Border Crossings'. The narrator presents a character who, trapped in a country with which he cannot identify himself, sets out to leave that country with his fiancée. He recognizes the border separating his colourful past from the panicky present, as he feels compelled to ignore the aesthetic tokens of his past life for the expedient escape from a cul-de-sac. But crossing the border is a woeful experience. It is:

… passing four

locked doors to reach her, as if each
were some frontier checkpoint
to a country even farther

distant than the one he's trapped
in now (Wojahn)

Li-Young Lee is an Indonesian-born American poet, whose father
escaped from Indonesia because of rabid anti-Chinese sentiment and
finally settled in the USA when Lee was still a child. In 'Immigrant Blues'
Li-Young reveals the dilemma of immigrants, for whom acquisition of a
new language is a survival strategy, yet who cannot bridge the insider-
outsider divide for several generations. In the poem we hear the voice of
an immigrant whose father advised him long ago to pick up the language
of the country where they have settled. Ironically, to be an 'insider' he
must bid farewell to his mother tongue. But border-crossing under
compulsion –described in the poem as 'Loss of the Homeplace and the
Defilement of the Beloved' – is actually a betrayal of one's self. The
eventual bewilderment of the speaker is powerfully articulated in terms of
sexual penetration:

If you don't believe you're inside me, you're not,
she answered, at peace with the body's greed,
at peace with the heart's bewilderment. (Lee)

In nature no space is owned, it is only inhabited; humanity is eager to
draw a line to assert the extent of its authority in the name of sovereignty.
So a fence is erected, a border is drawn, a boundary is raised to restrict
access, to *exclude*. Carl Sandburg, the twentieth-century American poet
and three-times winner of the Pulitzer Prize, describes the spatial reality of
a border in his poem, 'A Fence'. The fence is hard and strong and any
attempt to surmount it entails disaster:

The palings are made of iron bars with steel points that
 can stab the life out of any man who falls on them. (Sandburg)

One may refer here to Tenzin Tsundue, a Tibetan poet born in India,
who in his poem 'Crossing the Border' recreates the ordeal of fleeing
Tibet to settle in India. Over vast snowy terrains, the refugees travel for
several nights in order to avoid being spotted in daylight by patrolling
planes. Without food, with only ice to quench their thirst, their limbs
exhausted, and with children shrieking in fear and adults praying to
'Yishin Norbu' (the reincarnation of an accomplished lama), they manage
to crawl along the snowfields without stopping, for the alternative is death.
The poet movingly recounts the trauma of a mother who has lost her frost-
bitten daughter in this fearful attempt to negotiate the border:

Then, one night, my daughter
complained about a burning foot.
She stumbled and rose again on her frost-bitten leg.
    Peeled and slashed with deep bloody cuts,
She reeled and writhed in pain.
By the next day both her legs were severed.
Gripped by death all around,
I was a helpless mother. (Tsundue)

Although the border is a line proclaiming thus-far-and-no-farther, it has to be negotiated if we are to emerge from the narrow cocoon of our individual selves.

As any border, cartographic or metaphorical, creates two territories under the control of different individuals/groups/entities (for example, past and present), without crossing the border one cannot succeed in joining the two hemispheres to make a globe. The border-side territories are therefore to be looked upon as complementary aspects of a fragmented whole. Crossing the border is imperative not only for existence, as in the case of refugees, but also for a fuller experience of our being, as a cultural by-product lowering tension in the world. The problem with any border is that, in the name of creating a homogeneous group, it creates a duality of identity – calling for commitment to one means being hostile to the other, if one fails to create an imagined Thirdspace, where contraries cease to exist. This duality is the theme of another poem of Tenzin Tsundue, entitled 'My Tibetanness'. The persona of the poem notes that even after 'thirty-nine years' of exile (following the Dalai Lama's escape to India in 1959), the lives of over one lakh (100,000) Tibetan 'refugees' in India, continue to be grim. They are 'People of a lost country, /Citizen to no nation':

    At every check-post and office
I am an 'Indian-Tibetan'.
My Registration Certificate,
I renew every year, with a *salaam*
A foreigner born in India.

    I am more of an Indian.
Except for my chinky Tibetan face.
    'Nepali?' 'Thai?' 'Japanese?'
    'Chinese?' 'Naga?' 'Manipuri?'
but never the question – 'Tibetan?'

    I am a Tibetan.
But I am not from Tibet.

Never been there.
Yet I dream
of dying there. (Tsundue)

The tone of the poem sensitizes us to the tragedy of being excluded, to being spatially *othered*. In his poem 'Night', significantly included in his book *Songs of Innocence*, the eighteenth-century English poet William Blake envisioned a heaven where the antitheses of Innocence and Experience, the Tyger and the Lamb are resolved:

And there the lion's ruddy eyes
Shall flow with tears of gold:
And pitying the tender cries,
And walking round the fold:
Saying …
'And now beside thee, bleating lamb,
I can lie down and sleep…' (Blake)

But can what Blake calls this 'fearful symmetry' be achieved on earth? That calls for the rational dismantling of 'mind-forged manacles', crossing a thousand borders towards a healthier de-separation.

Border crossing can be a frustrating experience if the spatial line is crossed, but the temporal line stands frozen in history. In other words, if one crosses the border with an expectation of retreating to the space of a golden past, the time-space symbiosis is disturbed. The space of the past, the space one knew and treasured in one's memory, must have changed meanwhile. If we ignore this fact, and look for what was left before separation/migration – whether voluntary or under duress – we will be disappointed. This aspect of the border crossing experience is the focus of 'You Crossed the Border'. Written by Reza Mohammadi, a promising young Persian poet, it was inspired by the return of one of his friends to Afghanistan after an interval of many years:

Oh poet! You have come to the kingdom of misery,
to a land with no sky,
a land where poets trade in humanity,
where the mouths of prophets are stopped,
where dogs are ministers and donkeys are imams.
No calls to prayer issue from its mosques free of bribes. (Mohammadi)
(first translated by Hamid Kabir)

Another aspect of the disillusionment of the 'homecoming' of the displaced is expressed by Choman Hardi in her poem 'At the Border,

1979'. Hardi, a Kurdish poet also writing in English, has explored her childhood memory of her family's return to Iraq in 1979, after five years' exile in Iran. The poem presents two parallel points of view: that of the adults, who are enthusiastic about homecoming, and that of the observing child, who is critical. At the last checkpoint, where the land under their feet 'is divided by thick iron chain', they are elated and expectant, and 'soon everything would taste different'. The poet's sister in playful mood puts one leg on each side of the chain, and stands literally in two countries. Her mother is excited because soon they will have 'cleaner' roads, a 'more beautiful' landscape, and 'much kinder' people. But as they are given entry into Iraq, the poet has a different feeling. She was promised something better, carefully evoked by the use of the comparative– 'cleaner' roads, 'more beautiful' landscape, 'much kinder' people. What she finds instead is:

> The autumn soil continued on the other side
> with the same colour, the same texture.
> It rained on both sides of the chain.
>
> We waited while our papers were checked,
> our faces thoroughly inspected.
> Then the chain was removed to let us through.
> A man bent down and kissed his muddy homeland.
> The same chain of mountains encompassed all of us. (Hardi)

This helps us recognize another important aspect of border – its arbitrariness. Spatially, border creates a barrier, a break in what is continuous. Border is arbitrary for two reasons. First, it clashes with the notion of freedom; ignoring the authority-configured border, be it the code of conduct dictated by patriarchy to women, or laws legislated by the powers that be, may invite disciplinary action. Second, it ruptures continuity, as signified by the repetition of 'same': '*same* colour, the *same* texture'. The idea of continuity is also foregrounded by the image of rain falling 'on *both* sides of the chain' and the '*same* chain of mountains encompassed all of us'. That the boundary is arbitrary, that the *other* is no other but the same, can be discovered only by one who has crossed the border. In 'Mending Wall' the twentieth-century American poet Robert Frost was hesitant to build a wall that might exclude what is to be included:

> Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
> What I was walling in or walling out,
> And to whom I was like to give offence.

> Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
> That wants it down!' (Frost)

Given that the wall is already there, why not cross it to enrich our experience?

The existential crisis of people living in the borderlands has been brilliantly voiced by Gloria E. Anzaldúa, a Chicano poet-cum-social activist well-known for her book *Borderlands/*La Frontera*: The New Mestiza*. In her poem 'To Live in the Borderlands' she presents the precarious state of someone inhabiting a borderland. Such a person is likely to be the victim of nationalist/racist crossfire:

> caught in the crossfire between camps
> while carrying all five races on your back
> not knowing which side to turn to, run from…(Anzaldúa)

As one's identity is likely to get hazy amidst these conflicting allegiances, the people living in the borderland feel the inadequacy of traditional identity-markers, but cannot always brush them aside:

> To live in the Borderlands means knowing
> that the *india* in you, betrayed for 500 years,
> is no longer speaking to you,
> that *mexicanas* call you *rajetas*,
> that denying the Anglo inside you
> is as bad as having denied the Indian or Black;
> *Cuando vives en la frontera*
> people walk through you, the wind steals your voice,
> you're a *burra*, *buey*, scapegoat,
> forerunner of a new race,
> half and half– both woman and man, neither –
> a new gender… (Anzaldúa)

In the borderlands an individual is 'the battleground / where the enemies are kin to each other':

> To live in the Borderlands means
> the mill with the razor white teeth wants to shred off
> your olive-red skin, crush out the kernel, your heart
> pound you pinch you roll you out
> smelling like white bread but dead; (Anzaldúa)

So one must devise a survival strategy. One such is sitting on the fence: