

Synopsis :

THE WALL AND THE FEAR

India – Bangladesh

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Whatever term you use for it – walls, barriers, fences – a state constructing a physical separation from a neighbouring country is a demonstration of the failure of diplomacy and conciliation, leaving only radicalisation to prevail. Never, since the Middle Ages, have so many walls, barriers and fences been constructed on the borders between two countries.

These walls stir up underlying tensions, aggravate precarious situations, and accentuate cultural and religious divides between peoples, without resolving the problems that impel people to emigrate.

Since 1993, India has embarked upon the construction of a three thousand two hundred kilometre dividing wall along the entirety of its land border with Bangladesh. Built of bricks in some border towns and of double-height barbed wire fence in the countryside and villages, it is the longest wall in the world.

The Indian authorities justify its construction on the grounds of protection from the infiltration of islamist terrorists operating in certain Indian regions seeking independence, Bangladeshi economic migration and the fight against illegal goods trafficking.

Drawn by the British in 1947 (the fall of the Empire of British India), there is little geographical and or ethnic logic to the border. The population on both sides share cultural, linguistic, religious, economic, and, crucially, kinship ties. The border area is a densely populated, occupied primarily by farmers and landless peasants. But a growing population, poor irrigation, flooding, and continuous river erosion, are undermining the ability of farmers to make a living.

The decolonization process has divided the greater region of Bengal with dramatic human consequences.

This border, strictly guarded by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) and the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), is also the most dangerous; according to official figures, one person has been killed every five days in the course of the last ten years. The BSF is accused of violent arrests, acts of torture and rape. Virtually all of the victims are Bangladeshis who, for reasons of economics, family, health, environment, etc., are trying to cross the border. Who can blame them, given the country's troubles: extreme poverty, massive overpopulation, frequent political tensions, recurrent natural disasters, etc.

Despite the complaints of the victim's families, the crimes perpetrated by the BSF remain mostly unpunished. The Bangladeshi authorities, to maintain their crucial friendship with the big Indian neighbor, tolerate the existence of this wall and cover up the events in the border areas.

The dream of a better life outweighs the risk. The wall that bars their way becomes the symbol of everything they want to escape.

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